



Engaging Students in the Grading Process

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Developing good patternmaking habits is important for any apparel design student. In a traditional flat patternmaking class, this is achieved through many class activities following instructor's directions, followed by multiple assignments designed to reinforce what is covered in class. Most assignments require analyzing a design sketch, making patterns, and sewing a muslin proof. Other assignments might be about creating an original apparel design. Regardless of the type of assignment the common thread is making the patterns that produce a given original design. It is important to create the patterns that communicate the concept clearly and correctly. Therefore, it is crucial that not only the correct flat patternmaking principles are applied in developing patterns, but also the trueing is complete with appropriate markings and labeling is clear.

The traditional method usually follows the sequence of assigning, collecting, grading with comments and returning the assignment with a form of grade sheet. For many years, I posted detailed assignments on the course webpage and later, in class, explained the objectives of the assignments and the expected format. Enough time was allocated for the students to read the whole assignment thoroughly and receive clarifications if any part of the verbiage or sketches were confusing or vague.

For each assignment, a detailed rubric was created that addressed all the specific objectives of the assignment along with credits given to accuracy, correct application of principles, neatness, completeness of information and the quality and depth of analysis/reflection. Part of the grade was for the overall quality of the muslin sample if any. This rubric was strictly followed when grading the corresponding assignment and a very focused critique and feedback were written by hand both on the patterns and the accompanying muslin sample, if required, were always provided.

My expectation was that the students read the comments, become aware of their mistakes, make an effort to correct them and never repeat the same mistakes on subsequent assignments. As they eliminate any earlier shortcomings, each new practice would receive feedback on different aspects of patternmaking; consequently, advancement could be achieved. Contrary to my expectations, most students, especially the ones who need substantial improvement, did not look at the feedback and comments. This behavior defeated the purpose of written feedback not only by not reaching the student but also by wasting the time of the grader and delaying the posting of assignment grade.

Explaining the importance of the comments and also suggesting that they should make an effort to see their mistakes made little difference. This recommended behavior had to be measurably beneficial to the students therefore should have a grade value. The new method had a few departures from the traditional: The assignments are graded as usual by the instructor; the rubric and the assigned grade (AG) was recorded. Patterns,

written portion of the assignment or the muslin sample contained detailed feedback and comments but no marks showing the amount of points taken off. Back in the classroom each student was handed the grading rubric along with their graded assignment. Explanation of the rubric, along with the description of partial credit that might be assigned under each rubric category was presented to the students. After all of their questions were answered, the students were then asked to open their material, study the comments, fill out the rubric as if they were grading this project, and determine the grade they should receive (estimated grade, EG). based on this information. Depending on the total available points for each assignment, if EG was within 2-5% of the AG, they would get a bonus 5% of the total available points added to the AG.

The study was assessed through instructor observations. Since the application of this method, there has been only one student who was disinterested; for the rest, it has been an interesting experience. For most students it started out as a guessing game and then they got better at self-grading following a rubric. Once they started receiving bonus points, the students not only paid more attention as I explained the importance of certain aspects of the assignments, but also repeat mistakes reduced considerably. Another interesting observation is that for the first two assignments, majority of students assigned lower grades (EG) than the instructor (AG) which in turn gave them a sense of confidence that they actually achieved better than they expected.

Generally, most students have the perception that assignments carry less weight than exams, consequently, if they make a passing grade on an assignment, they do not usually bother to find out where they lost points. As a teaching tool, this method proved to motivate students to look more closely to the comments and have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. The natural extension of this pilot study is to quantify the learning with more deliberate application of rubrics to select assignments in order to isolate the effect of self-grading and comparing.

With the increased understanding of the changed behavior of students in patternmaking classes, I could continue to develop similar methods for other styles of teaching apparel design such as lecture and online classes.