

Advice for KTH teachers introducing grading criteria

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Pitfalls

- If you do not connect the assessment with the grading criteria, the grading criteria become just words, unrelated to what is required in reality to get a specific grade.
- Too many grades might lead to a too high A-level and a too low E-level.
Tips: Do not use more grades than what is realistic to describe and assess. All Ladok components do not need to use the entire grade range A-F.
- Avoid having too detailed or too general grading criteria. Too detailed criteria can be difficult to assess and might be hard to understand since they easily get too complicated. Too general criteria do not provide sufficient guidance in the design of the assessment and might be hard to understand since it easily gets too unclear.
- Do not presume that the assessment should be done using points. The assessment should be based on criteria, and to use points to show how well the criteria are fulfilled is often an unnecessary detour.
- If you use a grade combination method where some grades do not affect the final grade, it can reduce the incentive to make an effort to reach that grade.
- Do not use compensatory grades. **Every student passing the course should meet all the intended learning outcomes** (ILOs). It should not be possible to pass the course by reaching some ILOs better and others not at all.
- Do not forget to communicate the grading criteria to the students!

Where should the grading criteria be placed?

The grading criteria shall be available at the start of the course in the course memo (kurs-PM) and be communicated to the students at the first lecture. There is an official area in the KTH course catalog where the course memos shall be put, and there is a course memo generation tool.

Bonus Points

Bonus points can be consistent with outcome-based grading criteria. Bonus points may be given when course assignments related to the learning outcomes are completed before a specific date. It is not the in-time itself which motivates the bonus point, but the fact that the student demonstrated a knowledge or a skill related to an ILO.

It is perfectly legitimate to give bonus points for knowledge demonstrated before a specific date, as long as it is possible for the student to at a later point in time, and probably in another way, demonstrate the same knowledge to show that the student has met the ILO. The bonus points may also be used to compensate for shortcomings in the exam, as long as the bonus was given for the corresponding grading criteria.

Crediting of non-mandatory assignments

Crediting of non-mandatory assignments to a concluding exam can be consistent with outcome-based grading criteria. What is needed is that the points from the assignment are transferred to a specific part of the exam, assessing the same ILO as the non-mandatory assignment. If an assignment is assessing more than one ILO, it is appropriate to separate the student's result between the ILOs and transfer them to the corresponding part of the concluding exam.

Fx complementary assessment

Outcome-based grading criteria will facilitate and clarify what the student will have to do to reach a desired grade. When not receiving the desired grade, it is clear that the student has not shown enough skills or knowledge in one or more of the ILOs. Complementary assessment should then give the student the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in that or those ILOs, and when it is done, so is the complementary assessment.

Are criteria needed for Fx?

The President has decided that all components of the course that use A-F grades should be possible to complement for the student. For P/F grades, complementary assessment may be used if the examiner finds it appropriate.

The student may meet different criteria for different ILOs in an examination where several ILOs are assessed. Fx is therefore not necessarily a knowledge and skill level in the same way as the other grading criteria. It is rather a measure of how far the distance to the E level can be for it to be possible (practical and educational) to complete the grade. If the complement regards a criteria which has only one level, the complementary assessment may lead to a higher grade than E.

A description of what is possible to complete (i.e. what the student has to achieve to reach Fx at the exam) is needed, but it can be expressed as operational criteria rather than knowledge criteria.

Example 1 (mastery test): The student who made a minor error at the E-level assignment, which still remains after the oral interview, can complete this until the following working day.

Example 2 (essay): Complementary assessment may be done by those who qualify for E in all aspects except one of the following: spelling and grammar, style level, headlines, and summary.

Are criteria for F needed?

No. F criteria may actually reduce clarity. It is better to define F as not meeting the criteria for the lowest passing level.

Are criteria needed for all passing grades A-E?

No. Only use as many levels as you find appropriate within each area of assessment. You do not even need to use the letters A-F to denote the levels. You may instead use for example numbers 1-3 or U/G/VG. However, every course component in Ladok has to use the same grading scale as registered in Ladok (A-F or P/F). It is possible to change course components in Ladok (including the size in points and the grading scale), but this has to be done well in advance of the start of the course.

If the grades A-F are used for the levels, you should use F for Fail, E for the pass level, and previous letters in the alphabet for the higher levels. You can, for example, have criteria for the A, C and E levels, and use F for students who do not reach the E criterion.

How is the study strategy affected by the combination of grades?

In a course which is assessed through many course components, it is important to think about what effects the assessment design will have on the students' study strategy. For example, if there is no way the student can reach a higher grade through the final exam, the student may strategically choose to only do what is necessary in the final exam. This can happen regardless of how the grades are combined, but it is most obvious when the final grade is decided by the lowest of the individual grades. One solution is to offer a second chance of assessment at the end of the course, for example in the form of an oral exam.

How should the grades be distributed?

The distribution of grades is by definition determined by how well students reach the grading criteria. But what is a reasonable grade distribution? How strict should the grading criteria be? There are no rules for this. It is reasonable that essentially everyone who fulfills the pre-requirements for the course, and puts in so much work as the course has credits (40 hours per 1.5 credits), should pass the course, at least at the E level. It is also fair to the most talented students in the course, if they are able to get the grade A without having to spend considerably more time than the course credits equivalent.

One can also argue that similar courses (e.g. similar courses for different programmes) should have similar levels of criteria. There is no rule saying that all grades in the grading scale should be obtainable as the final grade, but this is usually the case.

If gradings criteria are introduced into an existing course, it is a rule of thumb that about the same performance should be required to get an A with the grading criteria as in the former system.