

## Grading Dialectical Journals

You have come to the most difficult place in teaching. That is, how to reward good, quality thought and work without setting specific guidelines that divert attention to quantity or inhibit thought.

You, of course, can recognize a log entry that is thoughtful and insightful as opposed to one which was hastily completed during lunch. You—and all of us—want the thoughtful and insightful entry to get an ‘A’ and the hastily completed one to get a much lower grade. But how to describe what a thoughtful and insightful entry is like? This cannot be done by creating specific guidelines, since guidelines must always be written with some sort of quantifiers and are by nature restrictive. The more specific, the more inhibitive.

So, here is my solution. Require whatever number of entries you think good. Then, be bold and confident and give only a check, check plus or check minus rather than number grades or letter grades. If there is an outstanding entry, give a check double-plus. If there is a really slack entry, give a check double-minus. When the students ask, “What does a check mean?” Just say, “It means you did the required number of entries.” A check plus then means “You did them better, had some good insights” and a check double-plus means “You did careful reading, had some excellent insights and original thoughts.” You can read examples, anonymously, to the class or you could project some, anonymously, and point out what you mean by ‘excellent.’ It will, of course, never include any of the check or check minus or check double minus entries. Those students will get the point.

You can record the check, check minus, and check-plus in your gradebook, and over time you can see which students get the same marks over and over and where improvement occurs. There you can find your ‘A’s, ‘B’s, ‘C’s and ‘D’s for the reader’s log portion of your course grades. It will come out fair, and it might help some students.

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