

(Your Class Name Here) Learning Commitments. (Template by Carla Hung)

I'm sharing my contract/consultative grading schematic as a template in connection with the Teaching Tools piece on "Collectivizing the Syllabus: Three Abolitionist Tools to Transform your Pedagogy" as part of the Abolitionist Pedagogies series in the journal Cultural Anthropology. Retool/repurpose/adjust to fit your own classroom dynamic.

Grades are, at the end of the day, a form of assessment. The following are some tools we can collectively lean on in order to check in about about what it is we are learning about together. As a way to work toward embodying more of the tenants of abolitionist praxis in our collective work, I've brought together some resources around alternative modes of assessment. My hope is that this will enable us to focus more on qualitative assessment. The intention here is to open up space for you to work and digest the material in an organic way. I do want to acknowledge that a learning method that works for one person might not work for someone else. In order to better accommodate the varying learning dispositions and goals that we have in the mix, I've created the following assessment tracks for us.

The first is contract grading using the structure that I've set up for the class to encourage active participation in our class discussions, a synthesis of the reading material in the forum posts, and the ability to really dive deep into a specific aspect of the course in a final paper/project with the associated benchmarks to keep you on track. Over the course of the semester I'll be sending out Google Form Check-Ins. If you are on the Contract Track, this will happen during Midterms and again at the end of the semester.

The second is consultative grading where those who choose this form of self-assessment will take a more active role in modifying, remixing and/or repurposing the instructions/assignments. Over the course of the semester I'll be sending out Google Form Check-Ins. If you are on the Consultative Track, this will happen once a month.

There is room for cross pollination - i.e. to focus mostly on contract grading with a few remixes and modifications along the way; as well as sticking to the structure that I laid out when it serves you in your consultations over assessment with yourself and with me. At the end of the semester I'll send along a self-assessment encouraging you to reflect on what you've put into the semester, what you've gained, and what grade best reflects the learning goals you were able to accomplish in this course. I reserve the right to adjust that grade, in consultation with you, in order to address egregious forms of internalized bias that may be overly informing your self-assessment and I commit to being conservative around invoking this right. The intention with all this, is that you will assess your own learning and work in this class, in dialogue with me, as mentor rather than judge.

Please choose your own adventure and submit this form by _____

Track 1: Grade Contracts

If you would like more structure, go with Contract Grading. In the end, you will grade yourself based on whether you met the standard you set for yourself in this beginning of the semester contract. We will have a mid-semester check in about your progress in meeting these goals and resources that have been, or may be, helpful in addressing set-backs and feedback. Working in this way should ideally make for a more equitable classroom where everyone is graded not based on what skills and knowledge they show up with at the beginning of the semester, but how much you are improving and learning as we go, and you are ultimately the best judge of that. Contract grading are for folx who mostly want to keep the structure of learning goals that I've outlined on the syllabus. First things first, think about what your life

is going to look like this semester, be reasonable and kind to yourself and keep in mind the importance of self care. What, realistically is your bandwidth for this class? How much do you want to and are able to push yourself to engage with the materials? What would be enough? Based on these answers, look over the following guidelines about what amount of labor it should take to achieve an A, B, or C grade. Choose wisely.

To fulfill any grade contract you must do the following, which will nonetheless be specified in the contract submitted for approval. In our Google Form Mid-semester Self-Assessment Check-In, you'll be asked to describe how you have met these requirements in addition to the grade-specific requirements:

1. Come to in person classes prepared to discuss any assigned readings, videos, or other media. Participate actively in class activities and discussions, making observations and asking questions that help the class think together.
2. Actively participate in weekly class forums.
3. Take time to think through and work on your final projects during the second half of the semester.
4. Respond to the Mid-semester Google Form check-in.
5. Revise contractual assignments as necessary until both you and I consider them "Satisfactory."
6. Complete a final self-assessment demonstrating that your work has met the agreed requirements.

"A" Contract

In addition to the items in "All Contracts" above, to contract for an "A" in this course you agree to:

1. Miss no more than one class.
2. Take no more than one information overload day* during the semester.
3. Miss no more than two forum posts.
4. Complete an exemplary final paper/project, meeting all specified benchmarks, and presenting your project in the final week of the semester.

"B" Contract

In addition to the items in "All Contracts" above, to contract for an "B" in this course you agree to:

1. Miss no more than two classes.
2. Take no more than two information overload days* during the semester.
3. Miss no more than three forum posts.
4. Complete a good final paper/project, missing no more than one specified benchmark, and presenting your project in the final week of the semester.

"C" Contract

In addition to the items in "All Contracts" above, to contract for an "C" in this course, you agree to:

1. Miss no more than three classes.
2. Take no more than three information overload days* during the semester.
3. Miss no more than four forum posts.
4. Complete a satisfactory final paper/project, missing no more than two specified benchmark, and presenting your project in the final week of the semester.

"D" and "F" Grades

Things can come up during this semester that might lead you to fully check out. My preference is to work with you on incomplete assignments. If you find that you don't have the bandwidth for that then a "D" grade demonstrates some minimal fulfilling of the contract outlined above and a "F" would indicate that there was an absence of enough satisfactory work to warrant passing this course. Shit happens and learning comes in all kinds of forms.

*An information overload day is a day where you show up but you're not as prepared as you usually are perhaps because you've taken some time to disconnect from screens and reconnect with yourself and your community. Please let me know when you are taking an IO day so that I can be considerate about

how and if it makes sense to call you into our discussion to shed insight on the materials we are discussing that day.

What About Exceptional (or Mediocre) Work?

I think it will be helpful motivation for me to reserve the right to reward exceptional work throughout the semester using the full range of our grading scale. If you contract for a "B," for instance, and submit particularly strong pieces to fulfill that contract, I may elect to raise your contracted grade to a "B+." Likewise, if you consistently submit mediocre work in fulfillment of your contract, I would be inclined to adjust your grade one half-step down (e.g. from "A" to "A-") or even, in extreme cases, a full step.

Contract Adjustments

Periodically during the semester I will ask you to evaluate your work thus far and compare it against what you agreed to in your grade contract. In these moments you can also take the opportunity to request an adjustment to your contract in either direction. If you find that you will be unable to meet the obligations of your contract, you may request to move to the next lowest grade and its requirements. Contrariwise, if you find that you've been performing above the obligations of your contract, you may request to fulfill the requirements for the next higher grade. Important Note: In order to effectively evaluate your own progress, you must keep track of your work, including days missed, IO days taken, forum posts completed, final paper/project benchmark's met and so forth.

AI: Do Not use any form of AI text generation in this class. In this class your work must be fully your own, even if you may be using ChatGPT and other machine learning/large language learning/generative AI programs to help you in other classes where other professors have approved of this, keep in mind that this class has a strict no AI/text generation tool policy. You can use generative AI to come up with a fun new recipe using certain ingredients, or to create a workout plan for yourself but the only person who should be writing your papers and your forum posts for this class is you. It is important to build your writing skills and the only way to do that is by writing. Think about why you might turn to AI. Do you come from an identity group that is marginalized or underrepresented at this university? Are you dealing with some version of imposter syndrome? Remind yourself that you belong here and that your unique voice matters. All kinds of writing styles and voices are welcome in this class. We will not uphold the 'Kings English' as supreme or superior. Bring your AAVE, your southern drawls, your immigrant inflected and accented way of speaking and writing. It is all very welcome as long as it is authentic to you. In this class it will not serve you to have a computer do your work for you and I have no interest in knowing what a computer thinks about what we are learning. Remember we use equitable grading mechanisms in this class so as long as you are submitting something authentic to you, you will do well and receive full credit even if it might take a resubmission or two.

Track 2: Consultative Grading

The intention behind this form of grading is to create more space for experimentation with how you digest the materials in the course. There are few things that we need to come together on. Specifically, showing up and participating in our collective discussion by doing the readings that the class as a whole has agreed to do. Opportunities to remix and deviate away from the syllabus are available but there should be some collective consensus around these changes in order to better facilitate our class discussions. You are definitely welcome to do extra readings/research and present your findings to the rest of us as you may be called to do at times. If you choose this consultative grading track, you will be taking on a more active role in articulating what assignments will best facilitate your learning in this course. Feel free to lean on the structure I've detailed whenever it serves you. Feel free to remix, modify and repurpose these assignments as you see fit. There will be Google Form Check-Ins every month for us to stay in communication about where you've been, where you're at, and where you're going. Ideally, this robust form of self-assessment will motivate you to do more ambitious work from the get go that will mobilize this course to support your greater learning commitments.

My Commitments

In order to foster your progress this semester, I commit myself to:

1. Providing substantive and timely commentary on your assignments aimed at cultivating your research skills, analytical abilities, and scholarly voice if and when you book a writing clinic with me.
2. Making myself available for in-person consultation and practical help during office hours and at other scheduled times.
3. Assuming no technical expertise from students going into our meetings. We will begin at the beginning, so that no one feels left behind. In order to ensure this happens, I will listen carefully to students if they feel lost and adjust the pace of our discussions as necessary to keep everyone together.
4. Allowing students with expertise in particular fields to challenge themselves and craft their own learning experiences beyond our work in class.
5. Working with you to understand your goals and methods when you take intellectual risks in assignments, even if the final product does not turn out as expected.
6. Respecting your identity, perspectives, and intellectual commitments in class discussions and assignments. I may push you to consider other perspectives, but I will not dismiss your thoughts or take them lightly. If you feel I am doing either of those things, I will listen and adjust my responses as necessary.

Your Commitments

1. Holding yourself to the highest standards. You should work to the best of your abilities throughout the semester in your reading, class-room conversation, and assignments.
2. Taking intellectual risks when possible, pushing yourself to think, write, and create in new modes and grown as a scholar and teacher. This may prompt unease, which you can work through by doing and with my help (see above).
3. Experimenting with developing your critical thinking, reading analysis and writing skills with enthusiasm and an open mind.
4. Assisting your colleagues when you have prior expertise, or if you pick up on an idea quickly.
5. Clearly articulating your goals and methods when you take intellectual risks in assignments so that I can understand what you are seeking to do, even if the final product does not turn out as expected.
6. Respecting your colleagues' identity, perspectives, and intellectual commitments in class discussions and assignments. You may push them to consider other perspectives, but you should not dismiss their thoughts or take them lightly. If someone feels you are doing either of those things, you should listen and adjust your responses as necessary.
7. Engaging with the Google Form Check-Ins in order to assess how you are meeting expectations (my own and yours) for work in the class.

* Indicates required question

1. Email *

2. Contract Grading or Consultative Grading? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Contract Grading! *Skip to question 3*
- ☐ Consultative Grading! *Skip to question 19*

Ok! Contract Grading

3. What grade are you contracting for? *

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ A Skip to question 4
- ☐ B Skip to question 9
- ☐ C Skip to question 14

Contracting for an A

To fulfill any grade contract you must do the following, which will nonetheless be specified in the contract submitted for approval. In our Google Form Mid-semester Self-Assessment Check-In, you'll be asked to describe how you have met these requirements in addition to the grade-specific requirements:

1. Come to in person classes prepared to discuss any assigned readings, videos, or other media. Participate actively in class activities and discussions, making observations and asking questions that help the class think together.
2. Actively participate in weekly class forums.
3. Take time to think through and work on your final projects during the second half of the semester.
4. Respond to the Mid-semester Google Form check-in.
5. Revise contractual assignments as necessary until both you and I consider them "Satisfactory."
6. Complete a final self-assessment demonstrating that your work has met the agreed requirements.

"A" Contract

In addition to the items in "All Contracts" above, to contract for an "A" in this course you agree to:

1. Miss no more than one class.
2. Take no more than one information overload day* during the semester.
3. Miss no more than two forum posts.
4. Complete a satisfactory final paper/project, missing no more than two specified benchmark, and presenting your project in the final week of the semester.

4. Repeat after me: "I, NAME HERE, contract to earn an A in ' _____ ' (yes this is * an illocutionary performative speech act!) So be it, see to it!

5. I'm aware that this means completing the equivalent of the following and I am committing myself to doing so by blocking out time each week to complete these assignments: (Please check off all boxes).

*

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Come to in person classes prepared to discuss any assigned readings, videos, or other media. Participate actively in class activities and discussions, making observations and asking questions that help the class think together.
- ☐ Actively participate in weekly class forums.
- ☐ Take time to think through and work on your final papers/projects during the second half of the semester.
- ☐ Respond to the mid-semester Google Form check-in
- ☐ Revise contractual assignments as necessary until both you and I consider them "Satisfactory."
- ☐ Complete a final self-assessment demonstrating that your work has met the agreed requirements, submitting it by May 15th, 2023.
- ☐ Miss no more than one synchronous class.
- ☐ Take no more than one information overload day during the semester.
- ☐ Miss no more than two forum posts.
- ☐ Complete a satisfactory final paper/project, missing no more than two specified benchmark, and presenting your project in the final week of the semester.

6. Anticipated Remixes/Modifications/Repurposing of Assignments?

7. Feel free to use this space to articulate to yourself and to me the strategies that have been helpful in the past to keep you organized and motivated.

8. Feel free to take this space to articulate to yourself and me the resources that have been helpful in the past to get you back on track if you've wavered and wandered into territory that is irrelevant to your learning goals in this course.

Skip to question 26

Contracting for a B

To fulfill any grade contract you must do the following, which will nonetheless be specified in the contract submitted for approval. In our Google Form Mid-semester Self-Assessment Check-In, you'll be asked to describe how you have met these requirements in addition to the grade-specific requirements:

1. Come to in person classes prepared to discuss any assigned readings, videos, or other media. Participate actively in class activities and discussions, making observations and asking questions that help the class think together.
2. Actively participate in weekly class forums.
3. Take time to think through and work on your final projects during the second half of the semester.
4. Respond to the Mid-semester Google Form check-in.
5. Revise contractual assignments as necessary until both you and I consider them "Satisfactory."
6. Complete a final self-assessment demonstrating that your work has met the agreed requirements.

"B" Contract

In addition to the items in "All Contracts" above, to contract for an "B" in this course you agree to:

1. Miss no more than two classes.
2. Take no more than two information overload days* during the semester.
3. Miss no more than three forum posts.
4. Complete a satisfactory final paper/project, missing no more than two specified benchmark, and presenting your project in the final week of the semester.

9. Repeat after me: "I, NAME HERE, contract to earn a B in '_____' (yes * this is an illocutionary performative speech act!) So be it, see to it!"

10. I'm aware that this means completing the equivalent of the following and I am committing myself to doing so by blocking out time each week to complete these assignments: (Please check off all boxes). *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Come to in person classes prepared to discuss any assigned readings, videos, or other media. Participate actively in class activities and discussions, making observations and asking questions that help the class think together.
- ☐ Actively participate in weekly class forums.
- ☐ Take time to think through and work on your final projects during the second half of the semester.
- ☐ Respond to the mid-semester Google Form check-in
- ☐ Revise contractual assignments as necessary until both you and I consider them "Satisfactory."
- ☐ Complete a final self-assessment demonstrating that your work has met the agreed requirements, submitting it by May 15th 2021.
- ☐ Miss no more than one synchronous class.
- ☐ Take no more than two information overload day during the semester.
- ☐ Miss no more than three forum posts.
- ☐ Complete a satisfactory final paper/project, missing no more than two specified benchmark, and presenting your project in the final week of the semester.

11. Anticipated Remixes/Modifications/Repurposing of Assignments?

12. Feel free to use this space to articulate to yourself and to me the strategies that have been helpful in the past to keep you organized and motivated.

13. Feel free to take this space to articulate to yourself and me the resources that have been helpful in the past to get you back on track if you've wavered and wandered into territory that is irrelevant to your learning goals in this course.

Skip to question 26

Contracting for an C

To fulfill any grade contract you must do the following, which will nonetheless be specified in the contract submitted for approval. In our Google Form Mid-semester Self-Assessment Check-In, you'll be asked to describe how you have met these requirements in addition to the grade-specific requirements:

1. Come to in person classes prepared to discuss any assigned readings, videos, or other media. Participate actively in class activities and discussions, making observations and asking questions that help the class think together.
2. Actively participate in weekly class forums.
3. Take time to think through and work on your final projects during the second half of the semester.
4. Respond to the Mid-semester Google Form check-in.
5. Revise contractual assignments as necessary until both you and I consider them "Satisfactory."
6. Complete a final self-assessment demonstrating that your work has met the agreed requirements.

"C" Contract

In addition to the items in "All Contracts" above, to contract for an "C" in this course, you agree to:

1. Miss no more than three classes.
2. Take no more than three information overload days* during the semester.
3. Miss no more than four forum posts.
4. Complete a satisfactory final paper/project, missing no more than two specified benchmark, and presenting your project in the final week of the semester.

14. Repeat after me: "I, NAME HERE, contract to earn an C in ' _____'" *
(yes this is an illocutionary performative speech act!) So be it, see to it!

15. I'm aware that this means completing the equivalent of the following and I am committing myself to doing so by blocking out time each week to complete these assignments: (Please check off all boxes). *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Come to in person classes prepared to discuss any assigned readings, videos, or other media. Participate actively in class activities and discussions, making observations and asking questions that help the class think together.
- ☐ Actively participate in weekly class forums.
- ☐ Take time to think through and work on your final projects during the second half of the semester.
- ☐ Respond to the mid-semester Google Form check-in
- ☐ Revise contractual assignments as necessary until both you and I consider them "Satisfactory."
- ☐ Complete a final self-assessment demonstrating that your work has met the agreed requirements, submitting it by May 15th 2021.
- ☐ Miss no more than two synchronous class.
- ☐ Take no more than two information overload day during the semester.
- ☐ Miss no more than four forum posts.
- ☐ Complete a satisfactory final paper/project, missing no more than two specified benchmark, and presenting your project in the final week of the semester.

16. Anticipated Remixes/Modifications/Repurposing of Assignments?

17. Feel free to use this space to articulate to yourself and to me the strategies that have been helpful in the past to keep you organized and motivated.

18. Feel free to take this space to articulate to yourself and me the resources that have been helpful in the past to get you back on track if you've wavered and wandered into territory that is irrelevant to your learning goals in this course.

Skip to question 26

Ok! Consultative Grading

19. Name? *

20. What aspects of the course are you the most invested in? What aspects are you most excited about learning? *

21. What are some challenges or potential roadblocks that may come up? What are some ways to address those challenges and bring resources to work through the roadblocks? *

22. Talk about the work that you plan on doing for the course. How will you participate in class discussions? How will you engage with and digest the reading? Are there other pathways or areas of further research and investigation that you want to commit to exploring? *

23. What are the assignments you commit to accomplishing in order to digest and synthesize the material for the next month? Try to be as specific as you can be on this one. *

24. Feel free to use this space to articulate to yourself and to me the strategies that have been helpful in the past to keep you organized and motivated.

25. Feel free to take this space to articulate to yourself and me the resources that have been helpful in the past to get you back on track if you've wavered and wandered into territory that is irrelevant to your learning goals in this course.

26. Anything else you want to remind yourself?

27. Anything else you want to communicate to me?

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

