

Global Musics in Minnesota

a.k.a. “World Music” (Music 237) ~ Fall 2020

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Our Grading Contract

This course uses a form of grading called **labor-based contract grading**. **There are no points or letter grades in this course, aside from the final letter grade you earn at the end.** The premise of contract grading is that if you do the work/labor required to earn a B, you will see *enormous* gains in your learning. Traditional grading systems encourage you to work for “points,” as if learning were a game whose goal was to get a certain grade. Contract grading redirects your focus on the **process of learning**. Contract grading provides you with the reassurance that if you complete all of the assigned work (the labor), you will earn a B. This can free you up to take risks, and to focus on your learning, not your grade.

Please begin by reading the following preamble, which I’ve adapted from Professor Asao B. Inoue (2019), that outlines why contracted grades lead to a more equitable classroom:

Imagine that this wasn’t an official course for credit at St. Olaf College, but instead that you had seen my advertisement in the newspaper or on the Internet, and were freely coming to my home studio for a class in cooking or yoga. We would have classes, workshops, or lessons, but there would be no official grading of omelets or yoga poses, since letters and numbers would be meaningless in those scenarios. But we all would learn, and perhaps in an encouraging, fun, and creative environment. In considering this course and that home studio scenario, we might ask ourselves three questions: Why are grades meaningless in that home studio setup? How do grades affect learning in classrooms? What social dynamics does the presence of grades create? In both situations, instructors provide students or participants with evaluative feedback from time to time, pointing out where, say, you’ve done well and where I, as the instructor, could suggest improvement. In the home studio situation, many of you would help each other, even rely on each other during and outside of our scheduled meetings. In fact, you’d likely get more feedback from your peers on your work and practices than in a conventional classroom where only the teacher is expected to evaluate and grade.

Consider two issues around grades. First, using conventional classroom grading of essays and other work to compute course grades often leads students to think more about acquiring grades than about their writing or learning; to worry more about pleasing a teacher or fooling one than about figuring out what they really want to learn, or how they want to communicate something to someone for some purpose. Lots of research in education, writing studies, and psychology over the last 30 or so years have shown overwhelmingly how the presence of grades in classrooms negatively affect the learning and motivation of students. [Alfie Kohn \(2011\)](#), a well-known education researcher and teacher of teachers, makes this argument succinctly. To put it another way, if learning is what we are here for, then grades just get in the way since they are the wrong goals to strive for. An “A” doesn’t build a good bridge for an engineer, nor does it help a reporter write a good story, or a urban planner make good decisions for her city. It’s the learning that their grades in school allegedly represent that provides the knowledge to do all that they need to. And so, how do we make sure that our goals aren’t about grades in this class, but about learning to write?

Second, conventional grading may cause you to be reluctant to take risks with your writing or ideas. It doesn’t allow you to fail at writing, which many suggest is a primary way in which people learn from their practices. Sometimes grades even lead to the feeling that you are working against your teacher, or that you cannot make a mistake, or that you have to hide part of yourself from your teacher and peers. The bottom line is, failure at writing is vital to learning how to write better. And we have to embrace our failures, because they show us the places we can improve, learn, get better—and these are the reasons we are in college! Grades on our work and writing do not allow us to productively fail. They create conditions that mostly punish failure, not reward it for the learning opportunity it can and should be.

As you might already notice, what I’m arguing for here is a different kind of classroom, and even education. [Sir Ken Robinson \(2010\)](#), a well-known education researcher, makes the argument in a TED talk that typical schooling, with grades and particular standards, is an old and mostly harmful system that we’ve inherited, but now needs to change. One harmful aspect of this old system is that it assumes everyone is the same, that every student develops at the same pace and in the same ways, that variation in skills and literacies in a classroom is bad. It is clear the opposites of these things are more true. For all these reasons, I am incorporating a labor-based grading contract to calculate course grades in our class.

I offer this first draft of a contract that focuses on the responsibilities we’ll assume, not the things to which someone else (usually the teacher) will hold you accountable. The pedagogical shift I’m suggesting is in part a cultural one. Therefore, we will try to *approximate* the evaluative conditions of a home studio course. That is, we will try to create a culture of support, or rather a *community of compassion*, a group of people who genuinely care about the wellbeing of each other—and part of that caring, that compassion, is doing things for each other. It turns out, this also helps you learn. The best way to learn is to teach others, to help, to serve. So we will function as collaborators,

allies, as fellow-travelers with various skills, abilities, experiences, and talents that we offer the group, rather than adversaries working against each other for grades or a teacher's approval.

Do not worry. You will get plenty of assessments on your writing and other work during the semester from your colleagues and me. Use these assessments (written and verbal) to rethink ideas and improve your writing and practices, to take risks, in short to fail and learn from that failing. Always know that I will read your submissions and shape our classroom assessment activities and discussions around your work, but you will not receive grades from me. Sometimes, I will not even comment directly on your work, except in class when we use it or discuss it. I want you not only to rely on your colleagues and yourself for assessment and revision advice, but to build strategies of self-assessment that function apart from a teacher's approval.

Therefore the default grade for the course is a "B". In a nutshell, if you do all that is asked of you in the manner and spirit it is asked, if you work through the processes we establish and the work we assign ourselves in the labor instructions during the quarter, if you do all the labor asked of you, then you'll get a "B" course grade. It will not matter what I or your colleagues think of your writing, only that you are listening to our feedback compassionately. We may disagree or misunderstand your writing, but if you put in the labor, you are guaranteed a B course grade. If you do not participate fully, turn in assignments late, forget to do assignments, or do not follow the labor instructions precisely, you will get a lower course grade (see the final breakdown grade table on the last page of this contract).

Contract for a "B" Grade

You are guaranteed a course grade of "B" if you meet all of the following conditions.

- **Participation.** You agree to fully participate in our scheduled class sessions and their activities and assignments, which means you will need to be present in class as often as you can, as most activities cannot be done before or after class and require your colleagues to complete. If you are absent, you have notified the Professor beforehand (when possible) and worked out a plan for continuation (required).
- **Lateness.** You agree to come on time or early to our Virtual Zoom Class Discussion at 11:15am CDT (Section B) or 2:30pm CDT (Section A). "Walking" into class late 1-2 times in a quarter is understandable, but even in a digital space, it is highly disruptive.
- **Sharing and Collaboration.** You agree to work cooperatively and collegially in groups when asked. Give thoughtful peer feedback through the virtual forum spaces on Moodle, and work faithfully with your group/partner on other collaborative tasks.

- **Late/Incomplete Work.** You agree to turn in properly and on time all work and assignments expected of you in the spirit they are assigned, which means you'll complete all of the labor instructions for each assignment. During the semester, you may, however, turn in a few assignments late. The exact number of those late assignments is stipulated in the table on the last section of this contract.

Late work is defined as any work or document due that is turned in AFTER the due date/time BUT within 48 hours of the deadline. For example, if some work (say a Moodle forum post) was due on Friday, September 4 at 10:00am, that post must be turned in by Sunday the 6th at 10:00am to be considered late.

- **Missed Work.** If you turn in late work **AFTER the 48 hours** stipulated in Late/Incomplete Work, then it will be considered "missed work," which is a more serious mark against your grading contract. This is due to the fact that all assignments are used in class soon after they are due, so turning in something beyond 48 hours after it is due means it is assured to be less useful, and its absence has the potential to hurt your colleagues in class (since they depended on you to turn in your work).
- **Ignored Work.** You agree not to ignore *any* work expected of you. Ignored work is any work unaccounted for in the semester—that is, I have no record of you doing it or turning it in. My sense is that ignoring the work so crucial to one's development as a learner in our community is unacceptable, so accumulating any "ignored work" will keep you from meeting our contract expectations. (see table in Final Assessment Breakdown Section).

All Work/Labor and writing needs to meet the following conditions:

- **Complete and On Time.** You agree to turn in on time and in the appropriate manner complete essays, writing, or other labor assigned that meet all of our agreed upon expectations. (See Late/ Incomplete Work for details on late assignments). This means you'll be honest about completing labor that asks particular time commitments of you (for example, "write for 10 minutes," etc.).
- **Revisions.** When the job is to revise your thinking and work, you will reshape, extend, complicate, or substantially clarify your ideas—or relate your ideas to new things. You won't just correct or touch up. Revisions must somehow respond to or consider seriously your colleagues' or the professor's assessments in order to be revisions.
- **Copy Editing.** When the job is for the submission of an essay, your work must be well copy edited—that is, you must spend adequate time in your labor process to look just at spelling and grammar. It's fine to get help in copy editing.

Knowing where you Stand

This system is better than regular grading for giving you a clear idea of what your final grade looks like at any moment. If you are doing everything as directed and turning things in on time, you're getting a B. I have adapted the Moodle gradebook to reflect a labor-based assessment model, and I will do my best to update it as often as I can when your labor is incomplete, late, missed, or ignored, so you should be able to check your standing at any time during the semester. Please reach out to me with any questions.

Earning Higher than a "B" Grade

The grade of B depends primarily on *behavior* and *labor*. Have you shown responsible effort and consistency in our class? Have you done what was asked of you in the spirit it was asked? Higher grades of B+, A-, and A, however, require more labor that helps or supports the class in its mutual discussions and examinations of musical traditions, concepts, and contexts. **You will earn higher than a B in the class if you do all of what is required for a B and put in extra labor that benefits you and the whole class.** You may complete as many of the following items of extra labor as you like. Each item completed fully and in the appropriate manner will raise your final course grade $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade. So completing one will raise your B to a B+; completing two will raise your B to an A-, and completing three will raise your B to an A.

The same logic applies to those who are contracting for a C or below. Say, for example, you have submitted 4 late assignments (within 48 hours of the deadline) and 2 missed assignments (after 48 hours), which means you meet the contractual agreement for a C grade. Finishing one of the extra assignments listed below will bring you up $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade (e.g. C to a C+). You may even do more than three items and continue to raise your grade by $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade per item.

You can read the longer **individual prompts and requirements in the Grading Contract Addendum, which will be posted on Moodle soon**, but here is a snapshot of the options:

1. **Craft a "Critical Album Reflection" essay (2 pages).** Select one recorded album (a CD, or a digital album) which appears to be marketed as "world music" and features music that is unfamiliar to you. The album must have liner notes (in paper or digital form). Discuss the album as a product marketed to a particular audience, making reference to the content of the liner notes, and situating the music in a wider cultural frame by citing at least two scholarly sources. Make sure to connect with the professor to discuss your album choice before moving ahead. The point of this is to think critically about "world music" as a concept and a marketing category. What is the producer of this product trying to communicate about the performers and cultural tradition represented musically in your chosen album?
2. **Create an ethnographic project plan (2 pages).** May be related to or distinct from your independent performance research project. Using what you've learned about ethnography during our course so far, plan an ethnographic project and submit your proposal. Although you won't actually carry out the project, you'll think deeply about what you would do, and what you would keep in mind.

Craft this plan as if it were something real with actual, living people. Demonstrate that you've done background research by referencing at least two scholarly sources on the topic you've selected. How would you reach out to potential research consultants/performers? What evidence can you find of their musicking online (provide links to video/audio recordings)? What questions would you ask? What preparations would you make? How would you ensure ethical engagement?

3. **Produce an oral presentation** on a musical performance tradition you were unfamiliar with before this semester began which is currently being performed in Minnesota that can be shared with the class. You are responsible for submitting a video recording of your oral presentation in addition to a set of Google Slides, which should mention sources consulted. Presentations should be 7-10 minutes in length, excluding time spent playing brief clips of musical examples (in total, no longer than 15 minutes please).
4. **Design a detailed study guide** about a musical tradition we've already studied in class, complete with a well-designed one-page graphic handout that your peers can print and use for reference. You can design this handout digitally or by-hand (and scan it). This could prove useful (both for you and the class) in preparation for one of our three Moodle quizzes.
5. **Lead one of our 20-minute synchronous discussion sessions.** You will be responsible for developing questions for the class and leading us through a discussion incorporating the assigned daily labor activity. You will also be responsible for fielding questions (but the Professor will be there to help you in that area)! **If you want to pursue this, the Professor will need to know at least one week in advance.**
6. **Revise and expand one of your "required for a B grade" assignments.** A revision is not simply responding to professor/editorial feedback, but reworking ideas, reorganizing thoughts, and pushing yourself to take greater risks in your writing. If an assignment was originally two pages in length, an expansion doubles this to at least four solid pages.
7. **Create a digital mapping project in consultation with Sara Dale** that explores a subject *beyond* what we have covered as a course that can be provided as a research resource for our class. I would encourage you to explore technology like StoryMap JS with Sara's guidance, which is accessible to learn for first-time users. Your project will be shared with the rest of the class (and the world through the world-wide-web!)
8. **Do some other labor that benefits the class** and our mutual learning. Do you want to write about and report to us on a cultural event related to the class? Or maybe you would like to read an article for us and summarize some of its findings or ideas that you think will help us do our work in class? If you have an idea, meet with the Professor early on. We will plan it, while making sure the amount of labor is commensurate with the other items above.

In all cases, you should consult with the Professor if you want to pursue these options. Each option needs to be completed fully in order to count. You should review the individual prompt and requirements carefully, and clarify with the Professor if anything is unclear.

Final Assessment Breakdown and Contributing Factors

Below is a table that shows how late/incomplete/missing/or ignored work affects your successful fulfillment of our contract. In our course, we have 38 daily labor tasks (one for each class meeting), 76 required peer comments (two per class meeting), 1 short ethnography reflection essay, 3 Moodle quizzes, an Independent Performance Research Project with five brief components, and an Introductory and Final letter to the Professor. This means there are 125 items of various types that you will be expected to complete by the close of our course in the contract for a B.

Detailed explanations of what is meant by each letter grade range can be found at <http://www.stolaf.edu/catalog/1415/academicregs/grades.html>

	# of Late/Incomplete Assignments	# of Missed Assignments	# of Ignored Assignments
A	5	1	0
B	5	1	0
C	6	2	0
D	7	3	1
F	8	3	2

You will notice that the thresholds for an A and a B are identical and that all assignments *regardless of type* are weighted the same. That means a peer comment has the same weight as a short essay assignment. If you are aiming for a grade higher than a B, please consult the section “Earning Higher than a “B” Grade.”

Gimme/Plea. As the administrator of our contract, the Professor will decide in consultation with the student whether a gimme is warranted in any case.

The student must come to the Professor as soon as possible, usually before the student is unable to meet the contract (before breaching the contract), so that the student and I can make a fair and equitable arrangement.

You may use a gimme *for any reason*, but only once during the semester. Please keep in mind that the contract is a public, social contract, so my job is to make sure that whatever agreement we come to about a plea will not be unfair to others in class. A gimmie/plea does *not* allow you to ignore any work expected of everyone in the class. A plea is *not* an “out clause” for anyone who happens to not fulfill the contract in some way; it is for rare and unusual circumstances out of the control of the student.

Exemplary Labor. If by our last class, you have no late, missed, or ignored assignments, and do not use a gimme, then you will earn an extra $\frac{1}{3}$ of a letter grade (equal to one item in the Section “Earning Higher than a “B” Grade”) to your final course grade. This rule is meant to reward those students who engage in all the labor of the course in the fullest spirit asked of them and demonstrate themselves to be exemplary class citizens.

**By staying in this course and attending class, you accept this contract and agree to abide by it.
I (Rehanna Kheshgi) also agree to abide by the contract, and to administer it fairly and equitably.**