
Evaluating Children's Writing

*A Handbook
of Grading Choices
for Classroom Teachers*

Second Edition

Evaluating Children's Writing

A Handbook of Grading Choices for Classroom Teachers

Second Edition

SUZANNE BRATCHER

With

LINDA RYAN



2004

LAWRENCE ERLBAUM ASSOCIATES, PUBLISHERS
MAHWAH, NEW JERSEY LONDON

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2008.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

Copyright © 2004 by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by photostat, microform, retrieval system, or any other means, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers
10 Industrial Avenue
Mahwah, New Jersey 07430

Cover design by Kathryn Houghtaling Lacey

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brachter, Suzanne.

Evaluating children’s writing : a handbook of grading choices for classroom teachers / Suzanne Brachter with Linda Ryan. —2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8058-4454-6 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. English language—Composition and exercises—Ability testing.

2. Children—Writing. I. Ryan, Linda, 1952– . II. Title.

LB1576.B594 2003

372.62’3—dc21

20020192789

CIP

ISBN 1-4106-0906-5 Master e-book ISBN

Dedicated to
the teachers of
the Northern Arizona Writing Project,
who kept asking until I answered.

CONTENTS

Preface xi

PART I *The Objectives of Evaluation* **1**

CHAPTER 1 **In the Background: *How We Feel about Grading*** **3**

Chapter Summary 6

EXERCISES 6

References 6

CHAPTER 2 **Specific Situations: *Putting Evaluation into a Context*** **9**

Student Audience Considerations 10

Instructional Purposes of Grading 12

Teacher Stance toward Grading 15

Chapter Summary 17

EXERCISES 17

References 18

CHAPTER 3 **The Pieces of the Grading Puzzle** **19**

Context 20

Definition 20

Grade-level Applications and Examples 21

Content 21

Definition 21

Grade-level Applications and Examples 23

Structure 24

Definition 24

Grade-level Applications and Examples 26

Mechanics 26

Definition 26

Grade-level Applications and Examples 27

Process 28

Definition 28

Applications and Examples 29

Chapter Summary	37
EXERCISES	37
References	37

PART II *Evaluation Options*

39
CHAPTER 4 Approaches to Grading 43

Analytic Approaches	43
<i>Criterion-referenced Evaluation</i>	44
<i>Assignment-generated Evaluation</i>	44
Blended Approaches	52
<i>Primary-trait Evaluation</i>	52
<i>Questions for Grading</i>	61
Holistic Approaches	63
<i>Cluster Grading</i>	66
<i>Anchor Evaluation</i>	67
<i>Impressionistic Grading</i>	70
Chapter Summary	71
EXERCISES	71
References	74

CHAPTER 5 Response Strategies 75

Oral Responses	75
<i>Writing Conferences</i>	75
<i>Tape-recorded Responses</i>	79
Written Responses	80
<i>Using the Computer</i>	80
<i>Handwritten Notes</i>	80
<i>Grading Sheets</i>	80
Grades without Comments	81
Chapter Summary	81
EXERCISES	82
References	82

CHAPTER 6 Management Systems 83

Grade Averaging	83
<i>Common Value Systems</i>	83
<i>Variations of Grade Averaging</i>	84
Cumulative Records	85
<i>Checklists</i>	86
<i>Anecdotal Records</i>	89
<i>Cumulative Writing Folders</i>	89

Contracts	90
Portfolios	92
Chapter Summary	96
EXERCISES	96
References	97

CHAPTER 7 **Evaluation Styles** **99**

Teacher-centered Evaluation	99
Self-evaluation	100
Peer-centered Evaluation	101
Teacher/Student Partnerships	101
Outside the Classroom	102
Chapter Summary	103
EXERCISES	103

CHAPTER 8 **State Standards and Assessments** **105**

State Writing Standards	105
State Writing Assessment	106
Teaching with State Standards and Assessments	106
Grading with State Scoring Guides	107
Designing Writing Prompts based on State Scoring Guides	108
Weighting the Traits	115
Sharing the Language of State Standards and Scoring Guides with Students	115
Thinking about State Standards and Assessments	116
Chapter Summary	117
EXERCISES	118
References	118

PART III ***Using Grading as a Teaching Tool*** **119**

CHAPTER 9 **Tools of the Trade: *Choosing Evaluation Options in a Communication Setting*** **121**

Using the Communication Triangle	121
<i>Scenario #1</i>	122
<i>Scenario #2</i>	123
<i>Scenario #3</i>	124
Tools of the Trade	126
Chapter Summary	127
EXERCISES	128

<u>CHAPTER 10</u>	Transcending the Red Ink or Making Grading Serve Teaching	129
	Making Grading Serve Teaching	129
	<i>Working with Revisions</i>	130
	<i>Adding Criteria over Time</i>	130
	<i>Progressive Weighting of Grades</i>	131
	Beyond Evaluation: Alternative Purposes of Grading	131
	Questions of Power	132
	A World without Grades	133
	Chapter Summary	134
	EXERCISES	134
	Reference	134
<u>CHAPTER 11</u>	Teach Yourself to Grade or the Grading Process in Action	135
	Learning the Grading Process	135
	Ways of Beginning	138
	<i>Scenario #1</i>	139
	<i>Scenario #2</i>	139
	<i>Scenario #3</i>	139
	Creating a Personal Grading System	140
	Chapter Summary	141
	EXERCISES	141
	References	141
APPENDIX A	Sample Papers	143
APPENDIX B	Annotated Bibliography	187
APPENDIX C	State Scoring Guides	201
Author Index		213
Subject Index		215

PREFACE

What This Book Is

When the subject of evaluating children's writing comes up, teachers sometimes bristle, and when the word "grading" is introduced, some simply leave the room. *Evaluating Children's Writing* addresses this threatening—even painful—topic. It is about judging children's progress in writing, and it is about arriving at numbers or letters, checks and minuses, or smiling and frowning faces, whatever icons teachers use to communicate degrees of success (or failure) to students. *Evaluating Children's Writing* introduces and explains a wide range of evaluation strategies used by classroom teachers to arrive at grades. Samples of student writing accompany the instructions to illustrate the techniques. An appendix of additional student writing is provided for readers who wish to practice particular evaluation strategies.

But *Evaluating Children's Writing* is more than just a catalog of grading options; it is a handbook with a point of view. At the same time that it offers recipes for grading techniques, it also offers a philosophy of evaluating student writing that encourages teachers to put grading into a communication context and to analyze their own individual communication situations. It suggests making choices among the many options for evaluation by determining the instructional purpose of the assignment and considering the advantages and disadvantages of the particular strategy.

Who This Book Is For

This book is for teachers interested in exploring options for evaluating writing. It is for teachers who know how to grade one way but want to experiment with other methods. It is for teachers who are uncomfortable with the way they currently grade writing and for student teachers just learning to grade. It is for teachers who want to add writing to their repertoire of teaching tools but have been hesitant because they have wondered how to evaluate their

students' work. While this handbook is primarily aimed at elementary teachers, the principles it lays out are appropriate to the evaluation of writing at any level; therefore, some secondary teachers may find it helpful as well.

The Purpose of This Book

This book is about evaluation—the process which individual teachers use to arrive at marks for their students. It is not about school-wide assessment of writing or about state or national writing assessment. While most elementary teachers are charged with teaching writing, very few teacher education programs include explicit instruction in grading writing. But evaluation is an important skill. Most schools require teachers to give grades, and society emphasizes fairness in grades. Instinctively, teachers know that writing is a complex process, a process that requires mastery of context, content, form, and language. However, evaluation is not instinctive.

Like most teachers of writing, I agree with Stephen and Susan Tchudi (1991), “In our ideal world, student writing and other composing would always be ‘graded’ pass/fail, successful/unsuccessful, or credit/no credit” (p. 155). Unfortunately, however, most of us do not inhabit “ideal world” schools. However much we might wish to evaluate our students' writing as “successful/unsuccessful,” we are literally forced to grade writing. Without explicit instruction in how to evaluate, most of us have taught ourselves to grade, haphazardly, often simply duplicating the way we were graded as students. As with many self-taught skills, learned by necessity rather than by design, evaluation is often a frustrating process for both teachers and students.

The purpose of this book is to offer specific grading strategies and explicit instructions for using them, to offer options so that we may be intentional about our grading rather than haphazard. *Evaluating Children's Writing* is meant to be used with a group—in an in-service or in a class—but it can also be used as a self-help, self-teaching handbook. It is meant to be used as a reference for step-by-step procedures of grading techniques that can be used at different times during the year. *Evaluating Children's Writing* offers suggestions about the craft of evaluation—guidelines for instructional objectives, for student audience analysis, and for teacher self-analysis that help define communication contexts. It also offers a catalog of techniques, options appropriate for a variety of classroom environments. The art of grading—the ability to address the nuances of particular situations by designing innovative hybrids—remains for the individual teacher to master with years of experience.

The Design of the Book

Evaluating Children's Writing is divided into three parts:

- I. The Objectives of Evaluation
- II. Evaluation Options
- III. Using Evaluation as a Teaching Tool

Part I is designed to help teachers identify teaching objectives for the writing assignments they make. Part II enumerates evaluation options (approaches to grading, response strategies, management systems, evaluation styles) and provides specific instructions for implementing these options. Part III puts evaluation into a context larger than a single writing assignment. It raises questions about choosing from among the options and about using evaluation as a teaching tool. It suggests methods by which teachers may teach themselves to grade. Exercises throughout the book offer opportunities for practicing the different techniques, and the appendix provides samples of real student writing that may be used for practice.

Where This Book Came From

For many years I directed a site of the National Writing Project at my university. During the school year I worked with student teachers in a class we called “Writing to Learn.” During the summers I worked with public school teachers who came to campus for a five-week Summer Institute. Both groups of teachers were enthusiastic about teaching writing, but at the end of our time together, they invariably said, “O.K. Now—how do I grade my students’ writing?”

The first edition of this handbook resulted from my work to answer that question. I discovered that there are many answers, and that each answer depends (as does writing itself) on the context. In revising the book for the second edition, I enlisted the help of Linda Ryan, a third-grade teacher I have worked with for many years. Linda is known nationally for her workshops sponsored by the Bureau of Education and Research and is currently Curriculum and Testing Coordinator for the Prescott Unified School District in Prescott, Arizona. Her help in bringing the text up-to-date, particularly the new chapter on state standards and assessments, was invaluable.

What’s New in This Edition

Many of the issues we face when we evaluate student writing are constant from year to year, as are many of the principles on which we design our practice. So, much of what I wrote about grading student papers ten years ago is still applicable. However, the larger context in which we work to teach writing has changed substantially with the advent of state standards and assessments. In addition, my own thinking has continued to evolve as I have received input from teachers and students who have used this book. And, of course, much has been written in the last ten years about evaluating student writing. If you have used this book in the past, you will discover new material in the second edition:

- A new chapter on state standards and assessments
- Updated references throughout the text

- A reorganization of the chapter on approaches to grading
- Additions to the chapter on management systems
- Additions to the chapter on teaching yourself to grade
- Additions to the annotated bibliography

The Stance of This Book

I have taught writing at many levels (sixth grade through graduate school), in many contexts for over thirty years; for fifteen or so of those years I was uncomfortable with grading. So every time a new “answer” to evaluation came down the pike, I jumped on the bandwagon, searching for the perfect grading technique. Like Stephen Tchudi and the NCTE Committee on Alternatives to Grading Student Writing (1997), I never found the perfect grading system, but the search has taught me a lot about writing, about evaluating writing, about my students, and about myself.

I believe that each of the evaluation methods included in this book has a place in teaching writing: they are all different; they all work; none of them is perfect. What we need as teachers of writing is intentionality in grading: we need a smorgasbord of grading strategies from which to choose. We need the ability to match grading techniques to teaching purposes. Grading is communication, and the “proper” grading strategy depends not on fads in the profession, but on the particular teaching purpose of the lesson or the unit or the course itself. Successful grading resides not in the particular grading strategy, but in the teacher’s decision making, not in the requirements of the grading form, but in teaching purpose.

While I now teach writing from a strong process bias, I began teaching in 1971—before the paradigm shift occurred that Hairston described in 1982. Therefore, I retain a certain tolerance for a product bias. I believe that neither a process orientation nor a product orientation is sufficient by itself. Balance is required. (Indeed, the profession is leaning this way: “process toward product” is what we now hear.) Throughout this book, I refer to the “writing process,” assuming that the reader knows this almost-jargon term. But in case this orientation toward writing is unfamiliar to some, let me explain what I mean by it. Very briefly, I mean the method that writers use to go from a blank sheet of paper to a finished written product. The writing process is recursive and messy, but when we pull out the themes that run through it for most writers, we find *prewriting* (gathering ideas, thinking, organizing), *drafting* (putting words into sentences and sentences into paragraphs), *revising* (rethinking ideas, adding, deleting), *editing* (correcting mechanics), and *publishing* (sharing the finished work with others).

But no matter the teaching bias, in order to evaluate writing with any degree of satisfaction, first we have to ask ourselves, “What is my instructional purpose for this assignment?” And then we have to ask not only which activity will accomplish the purpose, but also which grading strategy will best accomplish the purpose. By putting grading into a communication context, we can

make it an extension of our teaching. After all, we came into this profession to be teachers, not to be graders.

Cautions to the Reader

Perhaps the biggest danger of writing a book about evaluation is that the very existence of the book will put too much emphasis on grading writing. John Harmon, in an article entitled “The Myth of Measurable Improvement,” advises teachers not to evaluate on day-to-day growth. He asserts that growth in writing is slow and that evaluation is meaningless unless sufficient time has elapsed to allow for growth. He compares young writers to young plants: if we check their growth every day, we will surely be discouraged! I agree with Harmon. I intend the strategies in this book to be used after enough time has passed to allow for growth and *only when grades are necessary*. Not every piece of writing needs to be graded. In fact, when writing is used as a learning tool, it should probably not be graded. And even when students write for the purpose of learning to write, I do not believe that their efforts should be graded on every characteristic presented here. For example, not every piece of writing will be taken through all the stages of the writing process; many will stop after a first draft or even after prewriting. So, not every piece of writing should be graded as if it were a finished product. Further, I believe very strongly that emergent writers should not be graded at all; instead they should be encouraged to write more, to take ever-increasing risks in an environment safe from grades. I hope this book will be a tool for teachers to use in situations in which they find grades either useful or necessary. I hope it will not be used to justify constant evaluation of children as they practice and learn the complex mode of communication we call “writing.”

Acknowledgments

A second edition, while not as ambitious a project as a brand new book, can still be a daunting task. As with the first edition, I could never have accomplished this task without the help and input of other people. In particular, I want to thank Naomi Silverman, my editor at Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, for her belief in this project and for making the second edition possible. I also want to thank her staff for the practical support they gave me. I also want to extend special thanks to the reviewers who helped me find the gaps and glitches in the first edition: Jená Burges, Longwood College, and Wendy Bishop, Florida State University. In addition I want to thank Mary Johnson, my friend and colleague, for sharing her students’ reactions to the book with me.

References

- Hairston, Maxine. “Thomas Kuhn and the Winds of Change.” *College Composition and Communication*, 33, (1982), pp. 76–88.
- Harmon, John. “The Myth of Measurable Improvement.” *English Journal*, 77:5 (September, 1988), pp. 78–80.

Tchudi, Stephen, ed. "Introduction: Degrees of Freedom in Assessment, Evaluation, and Grading" in *Alternatives to Grading Student Writing*. (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1997), p. ix.

Tchudi, Stephen and Susan Tchudi. *The English/Language Arts Handbook: Classroom Strategies for Teachers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991.

PART I

The Objectives of Evaluation

Part I explores grading as an act of communication between teacher and students. First, our feelings about grading set the stage for this instructional communication. Second, the many different instructional settings in which we find ourselves drive the decisions we make about how to teach our students. Third, the pieces of the grading puzzle (context, content, structure, mechanics, and process) provide a wide variety of purposes for the writing assignments we make. The theme of this part is that evaluation should serve instruction, not vice versa.

CHAPTER 1

In the Background: *How We Feel about Grading*

CHAPTER 2

Specific Situations: *Putting Evaluation into a Context*

Student Audience Considerations
Instructional Purposes of Grading
Teacher Stance toward Grading

CHAPTER 3

The Pieces of the Grading Puzzle

Context

Definition

Grade-level Applications and Examples

Content

Definition

Grade-level Applications and Examples

Structure

Definition

Grade-level Applications and Examples

Mechanics

*Definition**Grade-level Applications and Examples*

Process

*Definition**Applications and Examples*

In the Background *How We Feel about Grading*

Just after Christmas I was walking down the hall in a K–6 elementary school. On the stairway I encountered a friend, a fourth grade teacher.

I said, “Hi, Ellen [not her real name, of course]. How are you today?”

She groaned. “It’s almost report card time! Do you really need to ask?”

I shrugged with what I hoped was the appropriate amount of sympathy.

“You know,” she went on in an agonized voice, “I don’t know why I leave grading papers till the last minute.” She looked at me as if I might be able to enlighten her.

I shrugged sympathetically again.

“It’s just that I feel so guilty about grading,” she rushed on. “I know grades are important,” she added defensively. “I know parents and kids need to know how they’re doing, but. . . .” Her voice trailed off.

“Yes, . . .” I began.

“It’s just that I work so hard to build a relationship of encouragement and trust with my children in their writing.” Her tone was plaintive, the grieving tone of an adult when a favorite dog has died. “And then suddenly I have to become judge and jury.” She looked off down the empty hall and spoke more to herself than to me. “Almost every one of my kids tries hard at writing. I just hate to discourage the late bloomers, the slow little turtles who will likely win the race one day.”

She turned and looked at me, as if suddenly remembering my presence. “You know what I mean?” she asked.

I nodded. “Yes, . . .” I said, ready to offer my heartfelt condolences. But she had turned down the hall toward her room.

I stood watching her go, her question echoing in my ears: “Why do I leave my grading to the last minute?” Why indeed?

As teachers of writing, we all know exactly how Ellen was feeling that day. We struggle with the dichotomy of teacher versus grader whenever we take up student writing, not just when report cards are due to go home. In fact, we often wind up feeling positively schizophrenic. As Ellen said, we work hard to earn our students’ trust as we try to help them improve their writing. We instinctively know the truth of Lynn Holaday’s (1997) assertion that writing students need coaches, not judges (p. 35).

But we must grade student writing.

A review of recent books on the subject of teaching writing emphasizes the schizophrenia we feel when we stare at a stack of papers, grade book open. Most of the literature rejects even the word “grading.” Instead writers use words like “assessing,” “evaluating,” “responding.” We read the books, and we agree. But most schools still demand grades. Stephen Tchudi (1997) summed up the conflict in an introduction to the report of the NCTE Committee on Alternatives to Grading Student Writing: “The committee is convinced by the research . . . that grading writing doesn’t contribute much to learning to write and is in conflict with the new paradigms for writing instruction. As a committee we would unanimously love to see grades disappear from education altogether so that teachers and students can focus on authentic assessment, but we realize in the current educational climate, that’s not likely to happen” (p. xii).

No wonder Ellen puts off grading her students’ writing. She enjoys reading what they have written. It’s easy to respond, to reply to what her students have said, even to make suggestions for future writing. It’s not so easy to put a grade on the paper, to reduce the comments she has made to a “B,” to a “+,” or to an “S.” She, like the NCTE Committee, would love to see grades disappear. She feels like Lucy Calkins’ (1994) colleague Shirley McPhillips, “. . . you stare at the report card and it looks so foreign and you think, ‘How can I convert all that we’re doing into those little squares?’ You try but you feel like a traitor, like you are betraying something . . . and the whole thing becomes so distasteful” (p. 312). Furthermore, when Ellen turns to educational theory for help, she finds a variety of terms used in discussions of evaluating children’s writing—*assessment*, *grading*, *evaluating*, *responding*. Sometimes the terms seem interchangeable; at other times they seem to mean something individual. In an attempt to clear up this confusion, Tchudi (1997) arranges these terms according to the amount of freedom each provides teachers. *Response* to student writing, he explains, offers teachers the most freedom because it grows directly out of the teacher’s reaction as a reader and is often based on an emotional reaction to the text. *Assessment* offers less freedom for the teacher because it focuses on practical concerns about how a piece of writing is succeeding (p. xiv). *Evaluation* is even more focused because it compares a piece of writing to some sort of benchmark or criterion. *Grading*, says Tchudi, provides teachers with very little freedom because it condenses so much information into a single symbol that communication about writing is virtually lost (p. xv).

So, we understand Ellen’s frustration. She wants more freedom to respond to her students’ writing. She wants to deemphasize grading. She talks to her students about writing as a process, a process of getting better. She has explained that the individual grade is not important; progress is the important thing. She has told parents the same things on Back-to-School Night. Still, she watches Billy wad up his paper angrily and throw it in the trash can after she returns it. She knows it’s the “C” he resents, possibly because his classmates have told him that a “C” is “terrible,” possibly because his father does not pay him for “Cs.” In any case, he is responding to the grade, not to her written comment—“I wish I could visit your grandma’s farm”—at the end of the paper. And she knows that Sally, a little girl who sits next to Billy, never takes her papers home at all. Ellen realizes that these students would respond differently if she’d put only the comments on the papers. Anna, the best writer in the class, the student who always

receives “As,” writes at the end of the year exactly like she did the first week of school. So Ellen finds herself putting off grading until the last minute. She reads her students’ writing eagerly and enjoys writing responses to what they’ve written, but she is reluctant to put grades on the papers. She enjoys telling Billy she likes his descriptions of his dog and wants to know more about the day he got it, but she finds herself avoiding the label of a grade. She wants to help Billy feel good about his writing; she doesn’t want to discourage him with a grade. Ellen’s distress over grading has become so severe that sometimes she takes her students’ papers home and leaves them there until she is forced to put grades on them—when she faces a stack of new papers to grade or a blank report card that must be filled in.

Many of us feel as Ellen does. In the struggle to change teaching practices over the last twenty years, we have begun to see writing differently, to see our students differently. We have lived through and been part of the paradigm shift Maxine Hairston (1982) described. We no longer emphasize the products of writing to the exclusion of the process. We no longer assign writing in isolation.

We take students through prewriting activities to build background and to help them learn to think through what they know and what they need to find out in order to write thoughtful prose. We help them visualize different audiences and different purposes. We take our students through drafting to help them separate composing from editing, ideas from surface considerations. We walk students through revising to help them understand that writing is fluid, not fixed, that it can always be improved, that other people participate in writing with us. We work with students on editing to help them become proficient at the conventions of writing. We suggest strategies for helping each other with the surface correctness requirements of written language. We provide publishing opportunities. We celebrate the product of all the hard work that has gone before. We take up the papers. We read them and feel good about the writing our students have done.

And then we must grade those papers.

Parents, principals, school boards, school psychologists—all demand that we grade student writing. The grades we give communicate to these outside audiences in a wide assortment of contexts, some of which we never imagine until we’re faced with unexpected conflict. Parents, for example, sometimes interpret the grades we give our students in the context of the instruction they received as children, principals in the context of grading patterns that emerge from year to year, school psychologists in the context of an individual student’s accumulating record, school boards in the context of entire districts. . . . On and on it goes: different audiences with different purposes for the grades we are required to put on our students’ papers.

We sit, then, with the stack of papers in front of us, aware of this startling variety of audiences and purposes, but most keenly aware of our primary audience—our students—and our primary purpose—teaching.

Most of our students have taken us at our word. They have participated in prewriting, in drafting, in revising, in editing: they have followed the process. And yet there are differences in what they have been able to produce. As teachers we know that writing is not exact, that we are not striving for perfection either in our own writing or in our students’ writing. As graders “A+” represents

the perfect paper—the one that is error free. Teacher/grader schizophrenia settles upon us.

Because we know we must, we take pen in hand and grade, feeling like the student teacher who said to me one day, “I feel so bad putting all those red marks on my students’ hard work. It really does look like I bled all over their papers.” Trying to avoid this unfortunate metaphor, we have sometimes graded in blue, bleeding like an aristocrat, or in green, like a snake.

There is hope, however. Teacher/grader schizophrenia can be overcome. If we choose a grading option that matches our teaching purpose, we do not need to bleed at all. And neither do our students.

Chapter Summary

Most of us suffer from “teacher/grader schizophrenia.” On the one hand, we are committed to teaching writing as a process. We have read the research on learning to write and understand the rationale for being positive in our response to our students’ writing. On the other hand, we are locked into school situations that require us to translate our response to our students’ writing into letter grades or even numbers. But there is hope: teacher/grader schizophrenia can be overcome by choosing grading options that match our teaching purposes.

EXERCISES

1. Remember when you were an elementary student. Who was your favorite teacher? Why? How did he or she grade your work? Who was your least favorite teacher? How did he or she grade your work?
2. Write a brief “writing autobiography.” Write about when you first started to write and how you developed through school as a writer. What were your feelings about yourself as a writer at different stages in your “writing life”? Were these feelings related to the grades you got in school? Why or why not?
3. Plot yourself on the following “feelings about grading” continuum. Explain why you placed yourself where you did.

I think about quitting my job when I have to grade papers.

I have no feelings about grading—I don’t care one way or the other.

I look forward to grading.

References

Calkins, Lucy McCormick. *The Art of Teaching Writing*, new edition. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994.

- Hairston, Maxine. "Thomas Kuhn and the Winds of Change," *College Composition and Communication*, 33 (1982), pp. 76–88.
- Holaday, Lynn. "Writing Students Need Coaches, Not Judges" in *Alternatives to Grading Student Writing*, ed. Tchudi, Stephen. (Urbana, ILL: NCTE, 1997), p. 35.
- Tchudi, Stephen. "Introduction: Degrees of Freedom in Assessment, Evaluation, and Grading" in *Alternatives to Grading Student Writing*, ed. Tchudi, Stephen. (Urbana, ILL: NCTE, 1997), p. ix.