

Cornell University Grading System

(Adopted by the University Faculty, May 19 and 27, 1965)

Grades

S/U	Letter	Grade Point Value	Description	
S	Passing	A+	Excellent to very good: comprehensive knowledge and understanding of subject matter; marked perception and/or originality.	
		A		
		A-		
		Passing	B+	Good: moderately broad knowledge and understanding of subject matter; noticeable perception and/or originality.
			B	
			B-	
Passing	C+	Satisfactory: reasonable knowledge and understanding of subject matter; some perception and/or originality.		
	C			
	C-			
U	Fail	D+	Marginal: minimum of knowledge and understanding of subject matter; limited perception and/or originality.	
		D		
		D-		
	Fail	F	Failing: unacceptably low level of knowledge and understanding of subject matter; severely limited perception and/or originality.	

Symbols Used in Lieu of Grades

INC	Incomplete: (1) Student has substantial equity in course and (2) is unable to complete course requirements because of circumstances beyond his/her control. INC is not a student option.
V	Summer school and extramural students may officially register as visitors (auditors) in courses and have this entered on their permanent record if their attendance is reported as satisfactory. Graduate students may register for courses as auditors, but this will not be entered on their permanent record. Undergraduates may not register for courses as auditors.
R	Registered in year course approved by the college as not requiring a grade at the end of the first (current) term.
NMG	No midterm grade (midterm only): Student enrolled and attending, but not practical to give grade.
NA	Not attending: Student is officially enrolled but has not attended or participated in class work (for use at midterm only; not accepted at end of term or entered on student transcripts).
W	Withdrew from course (with college permission) beyond eighth week of a normal term or beyond three-fifths of the duration of shorter sessions or courses.

Privacy of Records

According to federal law, grades are restricted information and may be released only to the student or at the student's written request. Posting of grades by name or a personally identifiable number is prohibited under the terms of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). However, a student waiver authorizing disclosure of educational records by means of a personally identifiable number (e.g., a student ID number) is acceptable provided that such consent is in writing and dated and signed by the student. (Note: A name or Social Security number must never be used for this purpose.) If instructors use this method, the waiver must be for a specific course; must be for a specified period of time (semester, academic year, etc.); must specify the records to be disclosed; and must be retained by the instructor of the course for a period of one year after its expiration. Students should not be coerced into signing a waiver, as the law requires that it be given voluntarily. Instructors may post grades for students who do not want their student ID number used by establishing a unique identifier known only to that student and the instructor. Although there is no federal or state legislation that pertains to the manner in which graded work is to be returned to students, the returning of such materials should be handled in a manner that preserves the student's privacy.

Incomplete

The grade of “incomplete” is appropriate only when two (2) basic conditions are met:

1. The student has a substantial equity at a passing level in the course with respect to work completed.
2. The student has been prevented by circumstances beyond the student’s control, such as illness or family emergency, from completing all the course requirements on time.

A grade of “incomplete” may not be given merely because a student fails to complete all course requirements on time. The “incomplete” privilege is open to abuse; by deferring completion of some major course requirement, a student can gain advantage over his or her classmates by obtaining additional time to do a superior job. This is not an option that can be elected at the student’s own discretion.

While it is the student’s responsibility to initiate a request for an “incomplete,” reasons for requesting an “incomplete” must be acceptable to the instructor, who establishes specific make-up requirements. An “incomplete” allows a specified amount of time, determined by the student’s college of registry, for completing course work. The instructor has the option of setting a shorter time limit than that allowed by the student’s college. Several colleges require that a statement signed by the instructor be on file indicating the reason for the “incomplete” and the restriction, if any.

The consequence of failure to complete all course work within the time permitted will depend on the policy of the student’s college of registry. Some colleges convert “incompletes” to a grade of F; others let the grade of “incomplete” stand on the student’s transcript. In either case, the option to make up the work is lost.

It is the responsibility of the student to see that all “incompletes” are made up within the deadline and that the grade change has been properly recorded with the student’s college registrar.

Faculty under no circumstances should give an “incomplete” because of pressure to meet the deadline for reporting grades. The symbol INC becomes a permanent part of the student’s transcript, even when a grade is later submitted.

Late Grades

Late grades should be avoided. They often result in unwarranted academic actions or even in students not being able to graduate on time. Furthermore, late grades must be posted by hand at considerable expense, and they do not appear on grade slips and may prevent students from receiving recognition for academic achievement.

Changes in Grade

Each semester’s work is an entity, and grades are to be assigned for work completed during the normal period of the semester. Subsequent changes in grade may be made only in the event that the instructor made an error in the assignment of the original grade. As a matter of equity, grades must not be changed after the end of a semester because a student may subsequently have done additional work.