Policies

Isaac Wilhelm (iwilhelm@nus.edu.sg)

1 Quiz Policies

In courses featuring reading comprehension quizzes, only ten of your quiz grades will count; and depending on the overall number of quizzes in the course, your lowest quiz grade may be replaced. To illustrate: in courses with ten quizzes, your lowest quiz grade will be replaced with a 10 out of 10 (assuming that the total number of possible points for all quizzes combined is 100); in courses with eleven quizzes, your lowest quiz grade will be simply dropped; in courses with twelve quizzes, your lowest two quiz grades will be dropped; and so on. For several reasons, I will absolutely not drop any more quiz scores from the calculation of your final grade, regardless of the situation: for instance, regardless of any emergencies which might arise.

To illustrate, here is a situation—resulting from poor planning and bad luck—that you should learn how to avoid. Suppose you skip a quiz early in the semester, and so take a 0 on it. Then later in the semester, you have a serious emergency, and are absent one day – so you miss that day's quiz, and so you take a 0 on that quiz too. Only one of those two 0s will be dropped from your final grade. It does not matter that the second 0 was caused by an emergency out of your control: since your first 0 was already dropped, your second 0 will not be.

There are two main reasons for this policy. The first reason concerns fairness. It is fairer to have a blanket policy, to which all students must conform, than to pick-and-choose who gets exceptions and who does not. Such picking-and-choosing raises the probability of unfair biases affecting students' grades. The second reason concerns the fact that since bad luck is an ever-present feature of life, you need to learn how to deal with it now. This policy helps train you to plan for unlucky scenarios.

2 Make-Up Work Policy

I do not allow students to take make-up exams, submit make-up work, or do extra credit assignments, in order to improve their grade. Each student's grade is determined in the way described in the syllabus. So if you fail to complete an assignment, or if you are absent on the day of a quiz or exam, then I will not accept a replacement. And I will not create an extra credit assignment for you to do.

The reasons for this policy principally concern fairness; this policy levels the playing field. In general, students from more advantaged backgrounds—related to their socio-

economic status, their gender, their race, or whatever—tend to insist on being granted exceptions and make-up work at greater rates than students from less advantaged backgrounds. So ultimately, granting make-up work benefits those who are already pretty privileged. Instituting a blanket policy of generally providing no make-up work whatsoever helps minimize the phenomenon of the extra-privileged accruing ever more advantages.

If you have a legitimate excuse for missing an exam or failing to complete an assignment, however, then the above policy may not take effect. Legitimate excuses must be extremely serious—for instance, an emergency—and documented. Illegitimate excuses include: non-emergency illnesses, becoming overwhelmed by other work, skipping classes for much of the semester and wanting to make up for lost time, suddenly realizing that a low grade in this course may have negative consequences on something you care about, and so on.

Here are a few more details. Missed weekly quizzes are almost never excused – my policy of dropping each student's lowest quiz grade is designed to accommodate situations in which students must miss one of the weekly quizzes. Missed midterms are generally only excused for reasons related to—for example—your health, in which case, proof of medical treatment is required. Because it is a lot of work to design and hold a make-up midterm, I will decide whether to do that on a case-by-case basis; and again, the medical excuse must be legitimate and extremely serious. If I decide not to offer a make-up exam, then either I will reweight your quiz and final assessment grades—if that seems fair with respect to the other students, who took the actual midterm—or you will be given a zero on the midterm that you missed. Lastly, missed finals generally cannot be made up; except, again, in cases of emergencies. The main issue with allowing make-up finals is, again, fairness.

3 Late Submission Policy

If you do not submit your assignment by the due date and time, then your grade for that assignment will be reduced by 5%. Your grade will be reduced an additional 5% for every additional full 24-hour period that your assignment is late. So for example, if the assignment is due at 11:59pm on Oct 24, but you turn it in at 7am on Oct 27, then your grade for that assignment will be reduced by 15%: minus 5% for turning it in after 11:59pm on Oct 24, and minus 10% for turning it in two full 24 hour periods after that 11:59pm time.

If you have a legitimate excuse for submitting an assignment late, then the above penalty may not take effect. Legitimate excuses must be extremely serious—for instance, an emergency—and documented, and you must inform me as soon as the problem arises. Here are some examples of illegitimate excuses: failure to correctly upload the assignment to the website, failure of the uploaded assignment to open when I download it, forgetting about the assignment, having other assignments for other classes which are due at around the same time, becoming ill but not having a doctor's note, waiting until the fourth week of the course to start doing the work, and so on.

4 Grade Appeals Policy

I strongly encourage all students to come speak with me about their assignments, both before and after those assignments have been graded. If you are confused about why your assignment received the grade that it did, please do not hesitate to talk with me about it. I am more than happy to walk through the assignment with you, explaining why this part was good, that part could use improvement, and so on.

Sometimes, students feel that their assignment was graded incorrectly. If so, please feel free to come by my office hours—or arrange a time to meet—to discuss the issue. If I think that I misgraded your assignment, then I will happily correct the mistake. And if I do not think that the assignment was misgraded, then the grade will remain the same.

If you really believe your grade should have been higher, even after talking with me, then you may write a mini-paper—which must be 750–800 words in length—explaining why you should have earned a different grade. If your paper convinces me that I misgraded your assignment, then I will change your grade accordingly. If your paper does not convince me of that, then your grade will remain the same.

If you still believe that your grade should have been higher, however, you may request that I enact the following procedure for grade appeals (partially modeled on the basic ideas used to guide legal appeals). First, specify the amount by which, in your opinion, your grade should be increased. For instance, suppose you received an 80% on an assignment. And suppose you believe that you should have received a 90%. Then you would request that your grade be increased by 10%.

Second, I will hand your work—and my review of your work—to a third party. This third party will then determine whether or not they believe that your grade should be increased by the amount requested. If so, then your grade will be increased by that amount. But if not, then your grade will be *decreased* by that amount. For instance, suppose that after reviewing your assignment, a third party determines that your grade should not be increased by the 10% you requested. Perhaps they decide this because they think that a grade of 80% is fair. Then your grade for that assignment will be decreased by 10%: so your final grade would be 70%.

There are at least two reasons why this is a good policy. First, this policy keeps things fair. As explained earlier, haggling over grades often disproportionately benefits those who are already disproportionately benefited; this policy helps curb that. Second, this policy discourages grade appeals which are in bad faith. In general, only students who really believe they were graded inaccurately are willing to risk losing points.

Note that this policy only applies to grades for assignments and exams. It does not apply to your overall grade for the course. Course grades are final and non-negotiable.