

Late Work and Late Adds

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Abstract

This chapter examines the choice of course policies concerning the acceptance of late student work. It is not intended to be a comprehensive discussion of the topic; the number of different policies concerning late work is likely as numerous as there are instructors. However, it is meant to introduce new faculty to different policies and philosophies and give faculty some things to consider when crafting their course policies.

Purpose of a Late Work Policy

Like much of what you do when constructing courses and curricula, the choice of a late work policy requires balancing several criteria.

- How to deliver course material
- How to consider student needs and circumstances
- How to prepare students for future education and careers
- How to assign grades to accurately reflect mastery
- How to value time spent on grading and assessment

When choosing a policy, you should consider each of these criteria and strive for a policy that takes them into consideration. The chosen balance among these priorities will likely change given the circumstances of each course. What works for large, introductory lecture courses may not work for a small, upper-division seminar and vice versa. Furthermore, even within a particular course the policy may vary with the type of assignment; for example, a brief, low-stakes assignment in class or for homework may not be accepted late whereas a major term paper may be treated with more flexibility. It is likely you will have different late policies for different situations and we encourage you to think carefully about how policies fit into the context of each particular course and the purpose of each assignment.

One consideration to keep in mind is that a liberal education involves teaching student's skills and habits beyond those specific to individual disciplines. Policies on late work serve the purpose of teaching students about time management and understanding how to meet deadlines, two skills that are critical to a successful career in any field. However, consideration

should be made that the flexibility of deadlines differs across professions or careers and course policies that are too strict or too lenient may not be reflective of a student's future.

General Recommendations

Whatever policy you choose should reflect the general pedagogy of your course. Your policy should be fairly applicable to everyone in the course and should take into consideration typical student situations. You should strive to ensure fairness in how policies are applied, and you should keep in mind that when you make policy exceptions for one student those exceptions may need to be extended to all students.

On occasion you may have students in your classes who have accommodations from the Disability Services Office on campus requiring specific learning conditions. These conditions range from being absent from class to requiring extra time for assignments. They might also allow students to turn in assignments outside of your standard course policy. In these situations consult the Office of Disability Services about the student's particular accommodation to determine what is required of you and how their accommodation affects course policy.

No matter what your course policy on late work is all students should have access to the assignments. Access to the assignment and/or answers even if the student is not allowed to turn in the assignment for credit is an important opportunity for learning. If students are being punished for their lack of preparation by not being given credit for the assignment denying them access to the assignment equates to a second form of punishment, one that conflicts with our educational mission.

It is important that faculty communicate their policies on late work early in the semester. This is frequently done on the first day of the course during a discussion of the

syllabus and general course policies. The first day of the semester is a hectic day particularly for first semester freshman. Students are acclimating to new classes and new faculty and potentially new living conditions. They are being bombarded with new information in the span of a few days and it is not unreasonable to think they will not absorb all of the unique policy details from each of their courses. Because of this, it is advisable for faculty to repeat their late policies immediately before the first assignment. In addition to communicating the details of the course's late policy, you should make an effort to explain why the course has the particular policy you have chosen. Students are much more likely to accept a policy if they understand the reasons behind the policy and if they can see how it fits within the context of the course. Without this explanation students are likely to view the refusal to accept late work as capricious or an attempt by the instructor to do less work.

Range of Late Work Policies

Instructors should not feel bound to using one particular policy in all their courses. In fact, instructors are encouraged to tailor late policies to the individual circumstances of each course. Below you will find different examples of policies and why each might be used.

Draconian

This policy prohibits students from turning in any late work. The decision not to accept any late work is often employed in larger courses to control the extra work placed on you and to prevent students from turning in copied work. If you choose this policy it is imperative to communicate the reasons for this policy to students early in the semester before assignments are due. Students frequently see the inability to turn in work late as an overly strict policy, and

unless students understand the purpose of such a policy they may come to resent the restriction.

Valid Excuses

Similar to the draconian, this policy allows you to accept late work only with a valid excuse and under unusual circumstances. What constitutes as a valid excuse varies among instructors but some of the most common accepted excuses range from a significant illness to a family emergency. It is common to require documentation of the excuse, such as a doctor's note, before accepting it.

One excuse, which is often a point of contention between faculty and students, is when students miss class or deadlines due to work. Many faculty members feel students are responsible for managing academic and work schedules effectively and will not accept obligations to a job as a valid excuse for a late assignment. UNC Charlotte has a significant number of students who spend much of the week working, often 40 hours or more, in addition to attending school. For many of these students the ability to pay for and attend school depends upon the ability to work these long hours. We do not suggest you should determine late work or any course policies based upon the non-scholastic schedules of a portion of your students but we do believe you should keep these facts in mind when creating course policies.

Until Graded and Returned

This policy option serves to prevent cheating but is more flexible than many of the others described by allowing students to submit assignments after the due date until you have graded and returned the assignment to the other students in the class. In this way students submitting late work do not have access to graded material to finish the assignment but still

have the opportunity to submit work. This type of policy is well suited to a larger course where it is difficult to control copying of assignments due to the large number of assignments graded.

Points for Student Time

One common policy for late work cited by faculty involves deducting a certain number of points or a percentage of a grade from an assignment that is turned in late. This may be the most common policy among faculty because it allows students some flexibility but still imposes a punishment for late work. Some of the cited policies have a single deduction for any late work regardless of how late the work is, while others have a sliding scale of deductions based upon when the work is submitted. The most common scale involves a regular deduction (often one letter-grade) for each day that the assignment is late and a point in time at which no credit can be received for the assignment.

An alternative to a grade-based penalty is the denial of some other benefit the student might get for turning work on time. For example, you might accept a late paper and grade it without penalty but not provide any other feedback to the student about the work. Such a policy gives the student a grade that reflects mastery of the course but saves you some of the time the student has cost you. Perhaps more importantly, it helps the student to reflect on how valuable the instructor's feedback can be.

No Penalty

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the draconian policy falls this lenient policy to accept late work with no penalty and without any excuses or documentation for why the work is late. This type of policy may be most appropriate in upper division courses or courses with smaller enrollments. Faculty would be advised to think carefully about implementing this type

of policy in larger, lower division courses. An absence of penalties for late work may quickly cascade into numerous assignments submitted after the due date and significant extra work for you.

No Policy

Some instructors intentionally do not establish a policy for late work. The absence of a policy serves two purposes: (a) it sends the message that the instructor expects all work to be submitted on time and (b) provides the instructor with maximum flexibility for dealing with cases of lateness as they arise. Such non-policies are rare, especially among larger and introductory courses, and the instructor who uses them should be prepared to deal with a wide range of excuses that may be difficult to navigate with consistency and fairness.

Late Adds

A slightly different, but related, issue concerns work a student has missed due to adding into a course after classes have begun. Because UNC Charlotte's drop/add deadline comes during the second week of each semester, it is possible students may miss up to four classes at the beginning of the semester before enrolling in the course. This situation is difficult in courses with multiple graded assignments early in the semester, as we are strongly encouraged to employ by the administration. The undergraduate and graduate catalogs both state that "students are expected...to complete all of the course requirements." We interpret this to include the assignments that occurred after the semester began and before a student added into the course.

Late Financial Aid

Occasionally students will claim that their financial aid is late and they do not have the means to purchase books, software, or website accounts needed to complete graded assignments at the start of the semester. The University's Financial Aid Office does not provide formal guidance on this issue, but our sources in that office tell us that it is an exceptionally rare case that a student who completes the necessary paperwork on time does not receive the appropriate aid within the first few days of the semester. Furthermore, the Financial Aid Office offers short term loans to students while their aid is being processed.

Many publishers are willing to offer temporary access to ebooks, software, and websites for students who are shopping around for classes in the first few weeks or need a little more time to make their payments. You may find it helpful to make this point to students when discussing the syllabus on the first day of class. In short, delayed financial aid is most likely the result of a delay on the part of the student and can usually be dealt with through some fairly easy solutions.

Conclusion

Every instructor at the University must make decisions about whether or not to accept late work and whether to grade late work any differently than work that was submitted on time. You have a great degree of freedom to choose the policy that suits your circumstances best, but the key to success lies in communicating both the policies and the rationale behind such policies to your students. The better prepared you are to explain a late work policy and answer questions about students' particular situations the more confidence students will have in your ability to manage and direct a course.