

Suggestions for Developing a Grammar Grading Philosophy

Philosophy	Basics	Pros	Cons
The Developmental Approach	In this philosophy, the instructor looks for patterns in a student’s grammar and encourages the student to work on those recurring issues. In general, few marks are taken off unless there is a barrier to comprehension.	Students get to work closely on key trends that are adversely affecting their writing and experiment with sentence structure without worrying about being marked down.	Prioritizing a few issues might lead students to leave out other important issues from their revision. Moreover, they are more likely to think of grammar as trivial because they are not marked down on it.
The Standard-based Approach	The instructor determines a specific number of grammatical errors for which the paper will be marked down. Once the student reaches a number of errors, the instructor might also stop reading the draft.	With the looming threat of lower marks over their heads, students will pay more attention to their writing at the sentence level.	Students are more likely to oversimplify their writing in order to avoid getting marked down for grammatical errors.
The Separatist Approach	The instructor provides two grades for the paper, one for content and one for grammar.	Students can determine whether their paper was flawed conceptually or linguistically.	Students will not see the connection between good thinking habits and good writing habits.

Combining approaches

Something you might consider as you determine your approach is the extent to which the kind of commentary you provide will be determined by the kind of errors you encounter. For example, you might try a standard-based approach for errors that are clear violations of grammar rules (a missing comma, a dangling modifier, a fragment, etc.). For errors relating to style (varying sentence structure, wordiness, vague constructions, etc), you might instead try a developmentalist approach.

For more tools to comment on grammar, see our section titled “Teaching Students to Edit for Grammar and Style,” where you will find a chart detailing common errors, examples of misuse, and relevant pages of the Diana Hacker Style Guide, as well as a review of common style errors accompanied by explanations and references to Strunk & White’s *Elements of Style*.