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FIRST-YEAR WRITING UNGRADED STUDY AT EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

BY

KAITLYNN MOODY

THESIS APPROVED:



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Chair, Advisory Committee



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Member, Advisory Committee



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Member, Advisory Committee



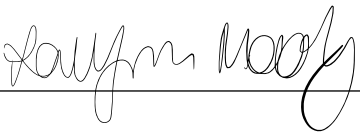
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FIRST-YEAR WRITING UNGRADED STUDY AT EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

BY

KAITLYNN MOODY

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Eastern Kentucky University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

2023

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## DEDICATION

I am dedicating this research to my previous graduate advisor from University of Louisville, Christina Raymer-Noe. Christina has helped motivate me to continue my education and has had a huge impact on my life within our short time together at the University of Louisville. I also want to dedicate this research to my grandmother, Cynthia Willard, who reminds me to never stop learning, growing, and trying new things.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge my committee head, Dominic Ashby, my committee members Erin Presley, Jill Parrot and my previous committee advisor, Travis Martin. These individuals have included me in multiple avenues of research and support, allowing me to really grow as a writer, researcher, and individual. I want to acknowledge their support and patience with me through my education and through the process of this thesis because they have always helped me brainstorm and experiment with different ideas. Dr. Ashby has been a major influence on my thesis because he helped introduce, experiment and utilize Ungrading in my graduate career. He has truly changed my views on the way classrooms can be strengthened to help support every student and want to note his continuous support.

Travis Martin helped open doors for me that I previously wouldn't have been able to walk through. Martin's commitment to keeping me involved in the Professional Learning Committee and giving me space on his 2022 Pedagogicon Proceedings, "Ungrading General Education: Preliminary Results from a Pilot Study" have helped me establish my research and gain new insights I wouldn't have had without him. Stacey Korson, Eric Meiners, Matthew Howell, Alison Buck, Matthew Winslow, Travis Martin, Anne Fleischer, and myself all worked on this proceeding in 2023. Dr. Ashby's and Dr. Martin's support during this process and owe both of them a thank you for helping me get to where I am today.

## ABSTRACT

Ungrading helps defocus the need for a grade within a classroom by helping students focus more on the feedback they receive within their First-Year Writing program. Ungrading uses self-assessments, grade rubrics, contracts, minimal grading, and portfolios to help give students feedback without the need for a grade on an assignment. By having instructors use Ungrading students can better accept feedback and strengthen their writing without the fear of failing the course. The study conducted at Eastern Kentucky University, which uses a Google questionnaire and interviews of students and instructors, has highlighted how beneficial Ungrading is to students and instructors. Teachers can create an environment where students have more agency, and motivation, and can focus on information more than a traditional graded classroom. Instructors have also identified how successful Ungrading has been in their course and give recommendations to other instructors who wish to utilize this method in the classroom.



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## Introduction

In traditional classrooms, students are assessed through grades, which force students to focus on the percentage they receive rather than the constructive feedback that is needed to help strengthen their writing. By transitioning into an Ungraded method, professors can ease the pressure students have from receiving an assignment back with a low or failing grade and help them focus more on the feedback they need to make the necessary changes to their writing. Ungrading has been gaining popularity among students and instructors like Jesse Stommel, Peter Elbow, Becky Supiano, and many, many more. Ungrading has also been shown to help students become more motivated for the course, give them clear expectations, and have more authority over their assignments and grades. Ungrading can be understood as using a form of assessment that removes a grade percentage from assignments to help students focus more on feedback and assessments and is replaced by self-reflections, grade rubrics, or other assessments. The effects of this shift help students take more risks in their writing and develop their writing skills. By understanding that the center of Ungrading is feedback from instructors and peers, communication with instructors in one-on-one meetings, and student agency, we can understand why students have so much writing growth in an Ungraded course versus a traditional graded class.

This pedagogical approach of Ungrading can be utilized in many different assessments, like peer and self-assessments, student-made rubrics, grade contracts, minimal grading, portfolios, or process letters. The study approved by the institutional review board (IRB\* approval #4853) that I conducted at Eastern Kentucky University for First-Year Writing students in classes using grade contracts, rubrics, or portfolios to show

the benefits of Ungrading. Students at ECU take English 101 and 102 classes within their first year that cover reading, writing, rhetoric, research, and rhetoric support like multimedia. These courses help students develop reading, research, documentation, and writing skills for composition. The overall goal of Ungrading is to help students better assess their writing, take the pressure away from students on the letter grade, cultivate a mentor-mentee relationship between instructors and students, and give students the feedback they need to hone their skills as writers. All of these goals are reviewed in the publication, *What We Know About Grading: What Works, What Doesn't, and What's Next*; "focusing on the important feedback function of grades, limiting the number of grade categories, and providing multiple grades that reflect product, process, and progress criteria enhance the meaning and accuracy of that communication...reflecting more meaningful information about students learning" (Guskey & Brookhart, 2019, p. 223). All of these strategies emphasize the goals of Ungrading and demonstrate when there is a focus on the feedback, students receive a more meaningful interaction with assignments and school. My study done at Eastern Kentucky University reinforces the effects of the Ungraded research because the students interviewed identified all of these goals that helped them in their course and expressed their enjoyment with this method. My study has also been able to include a mix of rural and urban students since Eastern Kentucky University is a southerner public university that is able to connect with many different students, even from the Appalachian region. When instructors provide students with feedback without a grade, students can take that feedback to strengthen their writing because they are not worrying about whether this grade will cause them to fail the course. Instead, they are allowed to focus more on the instructor's recommendations to their

papers and use that feedback to make necessary changes. The support for Ungrading has been shown through student responses, scholarly journals, publications, interviews from the IRB study, and teacher-scholar feedback from people like Jesse Stommel, Susan Blum, and Becky Supiano who all have advocated for this method.

To be clear, Ungrading is a method that can benefit students and instructors in many ways. Blum, Stommel, and Elbow are just a few teacher-scholars who demonstrate the advantages of Ungrading in their classes and how their students have responded positively to this method through the observations they have made. The survey responses, a total of nine-teen, from Eastern Kentucky University First-Year Writing courses, one interview with a student, two adjuncts, and an instructor from ECU detail the beneficial effects of Ungrading. Instructors and students have identified what previous scholars have said about Ungrading and how it is helpful to students in terms of agency, motivation, and expectations. Students have felt more motivated by an Ungraded class, more at ease, and have been able to focus on the feedback from their instructors to strengthen their writing. The findings from this study help support what previous teacher-scholars have found while also giving more student insight through an anonymous questionnaire where they could share their thoughts and opinions. Between the interviews and anonymous survey answers, we can gain more student insight into what works with this method and how it helps them. These interviews described how a student felt about an Ungraded class and gave space for students to compare an Ungraded one to a graded one. If a student did not meet for an interview, they still were given the opportunity to answer within the Google questionnaire. These questionnaires provided students with an anonymous space to explain how they felt about Ungrading without the pressure of being

interviewed. More often than not, students gave an open response to the questions they answered, identifying and explaining more in depth some of the strengths and weaknesses of Ungrading. These responses can help strengthen and support the Ungraded method while also letting students identify what did or didn't work for them, giving us insight on what could be strengthened with Ungrading. Students are the ones who are most affected by Ungrading and we need to take their thoughts and opinions into consideration and by having their direct responses we as instructors can work towards fine-tuning and using this approach to help our students grow and succeed.

### Background Information

There are a number of assessment methods that can help support Ungrading and the use of these methods encourages students to focus more on the feedback they received from instructors. This feedback is essential to a student's writing development because it gives them the space to receive constructive feedback and grow as writers by receiving comments on what went well while also giving them a space to respond to that feedback. The methods that help support Ungrading are self-assessments or evaluations, student-made rubrics, grade contracts, peer-assessments, process letters, minimal grading like low-stakes assignments, and portfolios. All of these methods help students focus more on strengthening their writing rather than worrying about the pressures that typically come with a graded class. Pressures that are typically in a traditional graded course include the stress of getting a good grade on assignments, trying to determine a teacher's unclear expectations, and trying to figure out what the final grade will be (Elbow and Danielwicz 2008 p. 3-10; Stommel 2018; Blum 2017). Self-assessments,

process letters, evaluations, or reflections can be explained as asking the student to detail how they are doing in the class and getting their thoughts and suggestions on what could be improved. When getting a student's thoughts, instructors can ask questions like, “What thing you’ve learned are you most excited about? What challenges have you encountered?” (Stommel, 2020, Can You Share Specific Examples of the Kinds of Prompts You Use for the Self-reflections You Have Students Do? Section). These questions invite students to give their honest thoughts and opinions on the class while providing the instructor insight into how the student is doing.

Grade contracts are another assessment method to Ungrading and these contracts are papers that students sign, acknowledging what is expected to get a grade of A, B, C, or D. These contracts lay out clear expectations for students and have them acknowledge what is expected for their desired grade. Peter Elbow explains that his contracts,

aptly [describe] the type of written document that [spell] out as explicitly as possible the rights and obligations of all the parties—a document that tries to eliminate ambiguity rather than relying on “good faith” and what’s implicitly understood. In addition, we want to give students written evidence that we contract ourselves to keep this unusual promise to award a B for doing things rather than for writing quality. (Elbow and Danielewicz, 2008, p. 3)

These contracts lay out, very clearly, what the expectations are to receive the grade that students are aiming for in the class. These contracts are related to Ungrading because they still take the pressure of needing to receive a perfect score on every assignment and instead help students focus on the advice they received and give them clear guidelines on

how to obtain the grade they want. If students participate in class discussions, turn assignments in and on time, and are present and on time to classes, they are guaranteed a grade shown on the contract.

Similarly, grade rubrics can have the same effect as grade contracts because they set clear expectations for students. These rubrics show students what they can do to receive the grade they want without having to worry about what grade they received for each assignment. While rubrics can be used in a traditionally graded course, when paired with Ungrading assessments like self reflections, they can help create clearer expectations and motivate students to work for the grade they want. As Inoue explains as a replacement for grade contracts his rubrics can look like,

A project rubric explaining what they will demonstrate in proficient projects, a writers rubric explaining what they will do in order to produce those projects...rubrics articulate each student's expectations for activities related to the project in four areas: researching and reading, using rhetoric, laboring and showing effort, and receiving feedback. (Inoue, 2014, p. 79)

These rubrics give the same expectations and clear ways to achieve the grade students want, like contracts, minus the signing of an agreement from students. There are times, when an instructor allows it, where students can create rubrics that help facilitate the agency that Ungrading tries to promote. With an Ungraded method like self-reflections in conjunction with rubrics, instructors can show students the clear expectations for the course while also giving them a space to respond and connect with their instructors. For example Sean Morris explains on his rubrics he

offered one criterion for success: for the duration of that semester, I asked that students *be* writers....It's a very open criterion, making for a pretty simple rubric. The rubric was open to interpretation, clearly, as all rubrics are, but what made this rubric interesting was that it was going to be more up to the students to interpret it, to measure themselves against the course's sole criterion. And they would do this through self-reflective exercises which I called writers letters.

(Morris, 2021, para. 26)

A rubric can give students clear expectations (or for Morris, can interpret what the expectations were) for the course while also having the space to write reflections on how they were doing in the course. By combining rubrics with self-reflections, instructors can promote an Ungraded course by setting clear expectations (or expectations to be interpreted as Morris demonstrated) and removing the pressure of receiving a bad grade.

Minimal grading or having low-stakes assignments allow students to take risks with their writing and try something new that could introduce them to new perspectives within their writing. Minimal grading, or low stakes assignments, can be explained as not grading, or using very low percentages for an assignment. For students, this can look like a 1-point assignment and when completed and submitted, they can receive that 1 point that can contribute to a larger, final grade at the end of the semester. This minimal grading is going to be able to help students have a clear idea of what their grades are and can take the pressure away from trying to get a perfect score. As Elbow explains about minimal grading, "If we only have two or three graded assignments and they are graded on only two or three levels then we have no basis for calculating the final grade for the course. But if we have lots of minimal grades - which is easy and natural with lots of low



stake assignments - then it is no problem to derive a conventional final grade” (Elbow, 1997, p. 132). These minimal grades help students try new things while also giving students less pressure on getting the assignment “right.”

Lastly, portfolios help demonstrate to students the work that they produced throughout the entire course and help show the growth that they’ve made. Some portfolios give students the chance to grade themselves through the entire course, rather than on each assignment. These portfolios give students the chance to see where they started and how much they’ve worked through the class to try new things and grow as writers. It’s hard for an instructor to decide how each assignment should be graded, and as Elbow explains, “to decide whether an individual piece of writing is a B or B- is, in my view, to produce a worthless decision. To decide whether a portfolio of writing is a B or B- is more justifiable: with fuller and richer data” (Elbow, 1997, p. 132). By looking at an entire semester through portfolio grading, instructors and students can identify the development through their classwork and have better evaluations and evidence for the final grade. Another instance of using a portfolio through an Ungraded course, as Elbow continues, is minimal grading portfolios. A minimal grading portfolio helps students look through their collected assignments from the semester and identify, on a low-stakes assignment, the language or writing style they chose to use. This helps open the conversation between students and instructors because they can identify what they did well on that assignment and communicate with their instructor about why they like that piece of work. These students can also combine it with the final portfolio to show their progress through the semester and with a low-stakes assignment, they may have had more creativity because they weren't worried about the grade associated with the material.

As writing instructors, we need to give our students the space to improve their writing and portfolios allow students to do this while also giving students proof of how far they've come since the beginning of the course: "It's important to assess the entire portfolio because a semester is a nice, long, luxurious time for a lot of activities, reflection, conversation, and wondering. In the end, we can assess the entire experience rather than students worrying about how an early misstep is going to mean a lack of success" (Blum, 2017, Emphasize the Entire Portfolio Section). While portfolios can be used in a traditional graded class, using an Ungrading method like minimal grading in conjunction with portfolios can help students gain awareness of how much their work has developed and be able to help them grade themselves more appropriately. Lastly, portfolios can sometimes take away the surprise factor of a final grade, "course grades are linked to the final portfolio of their work, assigning a grade occurs after students have the entire course to learn...neither students nor I are surprised by the final course grade" (Thomas, 2020, para. 18). Portfolios used with Ungraded methods help take away the pressure from instructors on having to grade each assignment as a specific percentage. Portfolios also give students proof of their progress and help them have a clear idea of where they stand in terms of grades throughout the entire course.

Scholarly journals, journal articles, and published books have shown that by shifting the focus from traditional grades like A, B, C, or D, students have been able to pivot from focusing on the product (grade) to being able to focus more on the subject matter, or the process. This is better defined as Process movement because it is transitioning the focus from the product of a grade to the process of writing. Process movement is better achieved with Ungrading because it helps alleviate any stress the

student would have when receiving a graded assignment back. This process allows students to focus more on the feedback of the paper rather than the grade. When a paper is passed back, the first thing students do is look at their grades because that is what will determine what work they'll need to put in to pass the rest of the class. We need to remove the grade because "Typically, when there is feedback given at the same time as the grade the feedback will not be reviewed by the student, and the feedback goes virtually unnoticed" (Sorenson-Unruh, 2020, Why Ungrade? Section). By removing the grade students are instead able to focus on the feedback and take their instructors constructive criticism into consideration. In a traditional graded classroom, students lose interest in the material and focus on the grades because, ultimately, the grades are such an important aspect of their educational careers. When we help students shift their focus to the process, they can gain new insights into their writing and spend more time on what is or is not working in their composition.

When grades are at the center of a student's learning instead of the importance of the information, this causes them to define themselves through their grade. Students either see a low grade as something they are (I failed, I must be a failure), or a high grade as not being able to do anything more. We need to give students the chance to know that they can improve and, "A grade of A causes students to believe they couldn't do better" (Toor, 2021, para. 14). By showing students there always is a way to improve their work, they're not settling for an A grade and can constantly strengthen their papers through feedback instead of letter grades. As instructors, we need our students' writing to always be growing through drafts, peer reviews, and any other means. We need to remove the grade from the assignments so we can help students focus more on the content and not on

the grade. When students receive a paper back with no grade and feedback, they are more likely to read the feedback and make adjustments to their writing because there isn't a big letter grade pulling their attention away from the teacher's comments. Peter Elbow emphasizes this when he explains how “we find ourselves freer to give negative feedback or criticism because it doesn't betoken a low grade.... We know that they know that no matter how much we criticize or even hate their paper, it won't hurt their grade. This shared understanding helps students react to our evaluation in a more sophisticated way” (Elbow and Danielewicz, 2008, p. 11). When students have more chances to evaluate feedback without the fear of failing, they are going to be more open to this feedback and make the necessary changes within their writing.

Students have been taught that they need to get good grades throughout their entire educational career because that is what will affect many other opportunities they could get. There are so many things that the presence of grades impacts within a student's education such as the ability to “get into college, qualify for scholarships and lessen student debt, land a higher-paying job that will lead to a better quality of life, and accelerate social mobility” (Sung, 2021, para. 1). The presence of grades can also have an impact on a student's confidence causing them to constantly think about how they can get a good grade. When grades are at the center of education, that is all the students will worry about, whether or not they failed or passed the assignment. Instructors need to put more emphasis on the feedback because when grades are the focus of the learning process, “students are less likely to feel like they have the ability to improve their grades, and poor grades are believed to affect a student's feelings of self-worth” (Guskey, Brookhart, 2019, p. 148). When receiving a bad grade on an assignment, students don't

look at that as an opportunity to build and try harder on the next assignment. Instead, it lowers a student's self-esteem, making them feel as though the grade they received is what defines them. For example, they failed the assignment and that must mean that they are a failure. When students have to center around a specific grade or percentage they will be less likely to take risks within their writing. By playing it safe students are protecting their grades and GPA which causes them to never try anything new to grow their writing skills.

When grades are such an important aspect of a student's education, they'll go to any means necessary to get the grade that will help them pass the course. Grades make students feel as though they are a representation of themselves, making the “Grades tempt students to cut corners, including cheating. They position professors as adversaries. They make it harder for students to think for themselves” (Supiano 2019, A Different Approach Section). When grades are the thing students are working for instead of learning the information, they will do anything to receive that good grade. With the current grading method, students are focusing more on receiving a good grade in the class, than the material. When we change how we evaluate student work, we change what is important for the student like learning and developing their writing skills. ‘High stakes’ assignments create, “significant pressure on students because there is so much riding on it and any little mistakes can greatly affect their grade...if the task is high-stakes and they must succeed at it anyway, they might try cheating instead of studying” (Carnegie Mellon University, 2023, My Students Cheat on Assignments and Exams Section). As Carnegie Mellon University Eberly’s center noticed, when instructors emphasize grades, students focus more on small mistakes or will try to cheat to get a good grade. The Eberly center

is a collaborative center for students, faculty and graduates. Students can feel the pressure of needing to pass a class and will try to take shortcuts, like cheating, because a bad grade can determine so much in a student's educational career. When instructors evaluate work through Ungrading, we take the pressure away from receiving a bad, or even a good grade. Students can instead focus on the feedback that is needed to develop their writing.

As instructors, we need to promote student freedom and agency within the classroom so students will feel more in control over their final grades, have more motivation to learn the information, and be more open to the feedback they receive; “We need to give students as many options as you can or let them create options themselves. Students know what they need and how they learn best” (Jester, 2021, para. 6). As Jester explains, students should be allowed to find what works for them in terms of feedback or assignments. They should be allowed to communicate with their instructor to better explain why this assignment or feedback style (communicating through video, document sharing, etc) is helpful to them. By having multiple different Ungrading methods like grade contracts, self-assessments, and peer review, students can spark a conversation with instructors and can work together with their classmates to better succeed. Grades need to be removed from this conversation so students can have a more in-depth conversation and receive better feedback. Students will feel like they have better control in the classroom because they will be given the agency to make their own decisions. Students would also be more willing to read the teacher's comments on the assignment when there isn't a big letter grade on the first page determining if they passed or failed the task.

What students realize on the first day of primary school to college is that the teachers are in charge of their grades. This causes the student to use trial and error to

figure out what each professor is expecting out of them to receive their desired grade in that class. Every instructor has different expectations; no two First-Year Writing courses are the same. By using Ungrading, we can create an environment where students see their instructors as mentors because when “Engaging in Ungrading disrupts the approach to learning that so much of traditional assessment has enabled: a situation where instructors have all the power, where students view their education as a commodity, and where learning is an assigned chore” (Rapchak, et. Al, 2023, p. 91). Students are constantly having to figure out what their instructor's expectations are and what they need to do with that specific teacher to get the grade they want. What Ungrading subtracts is the transactional aspect of grades and assignments, and it helps students focus more on the learning process.

As stated before, there are different approaches to Ungrading. While the research done at Eastern Kentucky University’s First-Year Writing classes primarily focuses on grade contracts or rubrics, other Ungraded methods will be noted to help identify other approaches to Ungrading. One example is having students communicate through self-reflection, “Some instructors have noted that they have students write self-reflections 2-3 times throughout the term...my goal is to help students develop their ability to do this kind of metacognitive work” (Stommel, 2018, How I Dont Grade Section) By having their students write self-reflections they can participate in metacognitive work and self-evaluation to better determine their assessment for the assignment while also keeping an open line of communication with their professor. Metacognitive work is the understanding of one's thought process and as a student does reflections, they can think about the way they write and identify their judgments on what is working and what is not.

Saundra McGuire explains metacognition as “thinking about one’s own thinking...When I explain metacognition to students, I tell them, It’s like you have a big brain outside of your brain, analyzing what your brain is doing. It’s asking your brain questions to see if you really understand something or if you’ve just memorized it last night because the test is today” (McGuire, 2021, p. 69). When students participate in this metacognitive reflection, they can find what works for them and make their own decisions. Self-reflection helps students give their honest feedback on the course and where they could strengthen their writing because they are asked to explain their thinking, helping them gain more understanding of the way they process information. These self-reflections help students identify, early, where their strengths and weaknesses lie and have an open discussion with their instructors in what ways they could improve. Stommel explains that he uses this method to respond to his students and that can help students have that direct line of communication with their instructor. By doing this, Stommel is helping them assess their processing and learning while helping them communicate his thoughts and allowing them to explain their own thinking. This helps students strengthen their writing while still receiving the feedback they need to make changes to their papers.

Other methods of Ungrading include peer assessments, where students can have conversations with their peers and have multiple different viewpoints on their work rather than what they and the instructor see. This opens the door for students to receive constructive feedback that isn't from an authoritative source like a professor. Some students may even still feel uneasy about approaching their instructor even with Ungraded methods. By opening the door and having conversations with their peers, they can receive more feedback, hear different opinions, and still be able to ask each other



questions or for clarification on an assignment. We typically already have some form of peer assessments within English courses in graded classrooms because, at least once, students will have the opportunity to have a round table discussion with their peers to discuss their papers. Assessments can open a larger door in an Ungraded course to hear other forms of constructive feedback on what assignments students are interested in completing, what material students would like to spend more time on (editing a thesis, how to cite research, etc.), and how they feel they did in the classroom when determining their grade for the class. Moments that open the floor for students or instructors in an Ungraded class create a space where students can understand what works in their writing without the fear of failing the assignment, making them more open to the feedback they receive.

There are many problems that exist in a graded classroom, like hidden biases that teachers may have with their students. These biases can affect a student's grade, and Jesse Stommel explains that one of the many problems with grades is that,

Students are increasingly conditioned to work within a system that emphasizes objective measures of performance, ranking and quantitative marks. It's important to acknowledge that these systems have been (in some cases intentionally) crafted to privilege certain kinds of students...students who are female, black, brown, indigenous, disabled, neurodivergence, queer, etc. face overt and systematic oppression whether expectations are explicit or implicit. (Stommel, 2018, How I Dont Grade Section)

Students are already having to determine unclear expectations with their instructors, and when those same instructors are the sole holders of whether or not they passed the class or not, that can bring a lot of pressure on the student to act, look, and complete assignments in a certain way. While instructors need to have clear expectations, they also should identify their hidden biases, and one way to alleviate this problem would be to go gradeless in some capacity.

What an institution can do to promote Ungrading to their faculty is create a committee where instructors can get together to talk about how Ungrading works and how to implement it in the classroom. At Eastern Kentucky University, a professional learning committee orchestrated by Matthew Winslow and Travis Martin helped get instructors at ECU to discuss different teaching methods and Ungrading. These instructors spanned more than First-Year Writing courses to teachers from every core class like English 101, Math 101, and even one from the nursing program. By getting multiple different programs to come together and talk about Ungrading, we were able to expand this idea from just English courses to every program. The professional learning committee revolved around the book *What We Know About Grading* by Thomas R. Gunskey and Susan M. Brookhart. This self-selected group of instructors discussed how within this reading the communication with professors and appropriate feedback helps students have space to ask questions and have clear learning goals.

This group also gave space to brainstorm different methods of Ungrading, like progress reports or live check-ins. These check-ins could be as simple as working through Google Docs and seeing an instructor's comments live to ask questions or to clarify. Other approaches could introduce group work, peer feedback, or feedback worksheets

where students can explain how they feel and instructors can respond individually or as a class. As Guskey and Brookhart (2019) explain, “Students do need regular and specific feedback on their learning process to improve” (p. 217). When students have constant feedback like Guskey and Brookhart have pointed out, they can use constructive criticism to enhance their work and take the opinions of their instructors. By introducing progress reports or any other idea in the PLC meetings as noted above, instructors help emphasize Guskey and Brookhart's comments on students needing progress instead of a final, fixed grade. The start of introducing this Ungraded method to other institutions and courses could be as easy as creating a professional learning committee to give instructors the space to ask questions and to be able to better use Ungrading in the classroom.

These professional meetings circled the same important ideas that Ungrading emphasizes for student success. Some of those points included meeting students where they are, continuing to grow as instructors, trusting our students while also growing to better help them in the class, and giving students ownership of their writing. Meeting students where they are means that, if a student is most comfortable having a Zoom meeting or having an email conversation to get their feedback, we need to be open to this and meet them where they are. Students already struggle with a multitude of things outside of the classroom and by having the opportunity to meet their instructor where they are comfortable (at a coffee shop, student cafe, or online) we can support the students more and help promote their progress. If the student is more comfortable meeting on Zoom and we meet them where they are, they are going to have a better chance of understanding the feedback they are receiving and making the necessary changes to their work.

What this professional learning committee did was help get instructors together to ask questions, learn what works with Ungrading, and give other instructors the chance to try Ungrading. It is noted that “Creating a collaborative school culture requires professional dialogue about student learning, teacher practice and school policy. Creating teacher-led PLCs within schools facilitates this ongoing dialogue. By training certain teachers to act as PLC coaches, these groups can collectively analyze professional literature, resolve specific challenges, and examine teacher and student work to structure reflective learning conversations in a timely manner” (Poekert, 2012, p. 108). These Professional Learning Communities help get instructors together to talk about grading methods, ask instructor-specific questions, and give instructors from an institution the chance to brainstorm solutions to common issues they may all be having. A round table discussion with other professors can help instructors express their anxieties about implementing the Ungraded method in the classroom and hear from others who have had success with it. Professor Winslow and Martin opened the floor up to instructors to give them new grading methods that they could try while also supporting student growth by having these monthly conversations, while also opening the floor for any other issues or struggles the faculty could be having at Eastern Kentucky University.

### Agency

When using Ungrading, we are helping introduce student agency, the ability to let students make decisions for themselves. Agency is an important piece of Ungrading because it helps students become advocates of their learning. They can communicate what is working for them, request new learning material like requesting a specific lesson plan or idea and identify the grade they believe they should receive for the course.

Agency helps the students feel as though they are in charge of the classroom instead of feeling as though the instructor is the sole provider of material and their grades. Students are already able to determine the effort and work they want to put in for a class, even when it is a traditional grading style. However, in an Ungraded course, they can gain more agency on their assignments and take control of their writing styles by requesting to write a paper on something they are interested in, or identifying what grade they believe they deserve for the class. There are a multitude of ways students can be given agency back in the classroom “such as allowing them to choose their seats, allowing them to discuss things they’d like to talk about, or allowing them to assess themselves” (Jester 2021, para. 5). To Ungrade is to give the power back to students, let them try new writing styles, and use language they are used to using rather than the institution’s expected language, all while advocating for their participation and less stress in the course.

In a writing course, a power dynamic exists between the instructor and students that can infringe on a student's learning. The professor holds all the power to judge a student's work and assess it for whether or not it passed or failed and this power dynamic can inflict pressure on a student's success, because they may not feel as though they deserved that grade or have any control on changing it. This power dynamic can also create the understanding that the instructor is in charge, and should be someone the students have to obey, causing them to feel like they can't approach the professor or have any agency in their learning. By using an Ungraded method like a rubric we are showing that “It may even be an on-going process that gives power to the students, which in turn provides indirect learning products” (Inoue, 2015, p. 291). When the educational environment gives the instructor the power, students are going to feel the pressure of

failing and trying to meet the professor's expectations. It's important to shift this power structure to put the students in charge, allowing them to feel in control in the classroom and this can be done through a mix of Ungraded methods with a combination of rubrics, or student-made rubrics. This is because students can have clear expectations, or create the expectations, and feel more in control of the grade they receive. One of the best comments on this power structure in a traditional graded class is that

Students need to feel from the very beginning that they make their education, that they are people who learn from others and with others by participating, by being active and critical, not by absorbing "cultural literacy" facts, not by drills, and not by taking standardized tests. At their levels, students should be working on appropriate critical problems. And this is my last point about a liberating or empowering curriculum - it should liberate students from the traditional syllabus and empower them for a critical, multicultural education, suitable for their age and situation. The standard syllabus is not only oriented towards teacher-talk, but it is also unbalanced in its presentation of Eurocentric information. (Shor, 1990, p. 364)

A traditional grading classroom echoes the same power structure we've incorporated in the classroom for the past century; we don't allow students to be who they are, and grow. Instead, we force them into boxes that were created way before they stepped into the institution. Instructors need to invite new dynamics into the class and allow students to be who they are without the constant fear of failing. To do this, we should invite an Ungraded method into the classroom because this helps students express themselves

without the fear of failing, empowers them, and motivates them to express their creative writing styles.

When students are given the option to grade themselves, or even choose an assignment they'd like to do, they are given more agency and can help foster this decision-making in the real world. “Students can instead, participate in the process either as a negotiation...or by simply permitting students to grade themselves” (Kohn, 2021, *Deleting — or at Least Diluting — Grades Section*). We need to allow our students to be active members in the grading process because they are going to feel more in control of their learning, or as Khon explains, participating in their learning. Traditionally, as Kohn continues, “creating a curriculum that will truly engage students rather than allow teachers to coerce them into doing whatever they’re told...grades function as a mechanism for controlling students.” When we allow our students to take control of their learning instead of expecting them to do their assignments in a certain way, they can transition into an environment where they can decide for themselves and determine how much they participate in the classroom. If we pressure them into feeling like they have to do a certain number of assignments and reply in a certain way, they won't be motivated to do the assignment.

Students may feel like they have to do a certain amount or respond in a certain manner to assignments due to the hidden biases instructors may have in a graded class; “We dehumanize students when we put them into spreadsheet rows...The relationship between students and teachers suffers when our systems and policies reinforce hierarchies and encoded biases” (Stommel, 2021, para. 10). When instructors are forced to put students in boxes of A-F, the students change into a number instead of a learner

trying to improve their skills. Graded classrooms force hidden biases because students are at the mercy of their instructor, and there are times when an instructor can lower a student's grade without even realizing it because of their hidden bias. We cannot force agency on our students; “like empowerment, agency is not something we can (or should) bestow on our students. At best, we can intentionally build optimal conditions for agency to emerge. Agency is strengthened by offering experiences that get students to notice they have the capacity to direct energies for themselves, in and beyond classrooms” (Geller, et al, 2017, p. 53). We need to let our students know that they have agency in the classroom while also letting them know they have the opportunity to take chances on assignments and identify their grades.

Instructors’ thoughts/feelings on Ungrading:

Instructors can feel a wave of different emotions when it comes to Ungrading, shown from teacher-scholars' published statements and through Eastern Kentucky’s research where instructors sat down in an interview with me and gave their thoughts on Ungrading. Those professors were recruited through an email where they were asked if they’d be willing to volunteer to be interviewed and cited in this study. Those instructors were contacted, and interviewed, and their responses were compiled and noted to describe the effects of Ungrading. Many professors can feel as though grades are their only option when assessing students' work because it has been widely accepted throughout history and most institutions require students to be placed on some grading scale for transcripts, or a pass or fail for the class, or to measure a student's learning. As Becky Supiano explains; “Why grade? To give student feedback, a professor might say. To measure learning. To motivate” (Supiano, 2019, A Different Approach Section). As



Supiano noted, most instructors feel like they must grade because that is the only way to motivate a student to complete the assignments, and, as we have seen, that is just not true. There are so many different grading standards for each institution because they must score students in some way, shape, or form and each one could designate a student as passing whereas another can see it as a fail.

When introducing Ungrading to a class, instructors can feel nervous or uncomfortable and may not know where to start. One way to ease this anxiety is to “follow the lead of their students, if they need conversation, individually or as a group, we have it. Sometimes they don't...I tweak my approach every time. And the approach has to emerge from conversations with students” (Stommel, 2021, Does Ungrading Make Students Anxious? Section). Instructors must allow their students to have conversations with them about their expectations of the course and how the students feel about this approach, and they should be given the ability to express their opinions on the grade or lack thereof. These conversations can help instructors identify what works with Ungrading and in what ways they can change it from class to class. When instructors and students have this conversation, they are giving students more agency in how they learn and in what ways they can succeed while also giving the instructor insight into the student's thoughts, opinions, and strengths/weaknesses. By opening up this conversation and giving students the ability to choose and tweak what works for them they are more likely to approach their teacher for feedback, information, or questions. These conversations can look like, “5 minute conferences in which I went over the entries in the gradebook one-on-one with each student. I ask if they knew what each mark meant if they understood where they stand in the class, and what they might want to do to

improve” (Molina, 2018, para 10). These conferences give the instructor the ability to communicate with their students and gain insight on their assignments.

The fact is that many students know what works for them, and by offering students options we can give them the power to make their voices heard on assignments or grades and we are promoting metacognitive work and agency. Sean Morris commented in an article that “to me, learning should never be a confined act, but a liberated one. We should be able to learn in all kinds of directions, following our curiosity rather than being restricted by the quantifiable path set for us by an expert in the field” (Morris, 2021, para. 18). Instructors should experiment with different approaches to grading, especially an opportunity to utilize Ungrading. However, with the addition that instructors have open conversations with their students, they would be able to try multiple different methods while also giving their students the power to assess themselves. Heather Rosenfeld details that “multiple pathways to success are built in: students can set their own priorities and self-assess based on them (and when writing their self-evaluations, as long as they offer a good reason for their assessment, it is acceptable). This gives students more agency over what is important to them” (Rosenfeld, 2023, Why: Advantages of Ungrading Section). Give a student options, let them find what they want to experiment with, and allow them to try things they may have not been given the ability to try in a classroom before. For example, if a student wants to use skills like painting or visuals to explain their assignment (with the addition of some form of writing), they should have the opportunity to experiment with this.

There are a couple of different ways we use Ungrading that can help an instructor feel better about introducing this method into the classroom. Teachers need to be open to

the Ungraded method and know that they are passing the grading responsibility to their students, and they need to trust them with this. Robert Talbert has stated that “for one, students need to be active agents in evaluating their own work...start with respect and trusting students...but don't do anything out of a belief that you somehow know better than your students” (Talbert, 2022, Unknown Unknowns Section). As Talbert explained, students need to be able to have control within the classroom, have more power, grow as writers, and have more opportunities to connect with their instructors and peers. As instructors, we need to trust our students and need to have the understanding that we are there to help them, not to be better than them. Through this they can decide to try something they typically wouldn't be able to in a graded curriculum. Talbert continues in another blog where he detailed how the assessment piece pivoted for him within an Ungraded course. He explains that “Just talking about their work, and what they are learning, and passing along help, coaching, whatever you want to call it that will help them improve. Instead, most forms of assessment in high ed are auditing, not assessing” (Talbert, 2021, I Was Reminded of the True Meaning of the Word "Assessment" Section). Talbert has shown that we need to trust our students, and move towards true assessment, and talk with our students. We need to have a conversation about what's working, what's not working, and how can we build on this.

Ungrading opens the chance for students to gain more independence and make decisions in their classrooms. What Ungrading does is help students feel more in control in their classes while traditional grading scales force students to believe that their instructor is the sole provider of their grade, always waiting to catch them failing at something. By integrating Ungrading into our classrooms we can better support students

and teachers. An instructor, Paul Thomas, details in an article how he, “recognized a pattern of fear and a need among teachers/professors to justify grades but also to guard against a hypothetical complaining student...I am convinced that grades, tests..detract significantly from effective teaching and create the problems many teachers seem inordinately worried about” (Thomas, 2020, para 7). With an Ungraded contract, self or group assessment, students can have the transparency to know where they made a mistake and in what ways they could do better on the next assignment. With traditional grading, students will always worry about not meeting the teacher's expectations because the student didn't read the assignment enough, or misunderstood something and created this moment where the professor can give out a bad grade that feels very similar to ‘gotcha!’ to a student. Ungrading eliminates this moment because students have clear expectations and know how to get the grade they desire from an Ungraded course due to the open communication between students and instructors, clear contracts, and open conversations with other students.

#### Examples of Ungrading:

An example of how instructors can implement Ungrading into the classroom can be done by simply putting the expectations on the syllabus. By doing this, students will be able to know how to receive each grade they want to receive and would have an idea of what to expect even before they make it to the first day of class. These expectations can be as simple as explaining in the grade contract section like Susan Blum demonstrates on her syllabus,

You determine your grade for this course by fulfilling a contract that spells out in advance the requirements as well as the penalties for not fulfilling the terms of

your contract...The advantage of contract grading is that you, the student, decide how much work you wish to do this semester. If you complete your work on time and satisfactorily, you will receive the grade for which you contracted. This means planning ahead, thinking about all of your obligations and responsibilities this semester, and also determining what grade you want or need in this course.

(Blum, 2020, p. 110)

By identifying what method an instructor plans on using at the beginning of the semester, students know what grade they want for the class and how to get that grade. Having a space where students can identify and understand the grading method, also provides a perfect opportunity for students to ask questions and to better understand this teaching method while holding them accountable to the grade they contracted.

Assessment and Ungrading support each other because they allow students to hear beneficial feedback on their assignments. Molina explains how important conferences are because they “got to know my students better and heard more about what was going on from their perspective. To my surprise, many students were able to share details they’d learned in each unit but hadn’t been able to demonstrate in classroom tests, due to anxiety. Other students revealed how they’d been using my class materials to make huge improvements in their study habits” (Molina, 2018, para. 19). By having these conferences instructors can have conversations with students on what works for them and identify in what ways students struggle, helping them tailor their instruction for every student. As instructors, we need to have open dialogue with students to find what is working for them and to find in what ways we as instructors can improve to better serve students. When students can have these conversations with their instructors, the

professors can see what is working for the student and better serve the students to help them with their portfolios and better grow as writers.

#### Research on Motivation:

There are two different types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic. The use of these motivations is going to determine if a student is enjoying the course material, or doing it because they have to. These motivations are known and explained as “Extrinsic motivation is commonly understood as a motivation driven by external means, rewards, or outcomes; intrinsic motivation is understood as a motivation driven by inherent interest and enjoyment in the activity” (Johnson, 2023, para. 3). The two different uses of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, can help explain how instructors try to motivate students with assignments through extrinsic measures, where they are doing the assignment because of the outcome. When students have the motivation to do their work, rather than the extrinsic fear of failing, they have the desire and want to learn the information they are being taught. One possible outcome that a traditional grading scale does to some students is engrain the fear of failing and make them regurgitate information instead of fully understanding it. Grades frustrate intrinsic motivation. “In an educational system that increasingly centers on grades and quantifiable outcomes, students work for the grades rather than doing work for the sake of learning. Students ask questions like, ‘What are you looking for,’ and ‘How many points is this worth?’ (Stommel, 2020, Why Don’t You Grade? Section). When students are asking about the outcome of an assignment, as Stommel explains, they are not focusing on the information or what the assignment wants them to learn, only on what grade they can get on it and what that would equate to their grade as a whole. Graded classes have the chance at

forcing some students to feel as though their teacher is in control of their grade, making some feel as though they have to jump through hoops to get the grade they need by sucking up to the instructor, cheating, or through trial and error to figure out what an instructor's expectations are.

When students have been taught to worry about the grades they receive they are forced to use extrinsic motivation to complete assignments, the motivation to get something done by getting a reward, or to avoid the misfortune of a bad grade. By making the transition into Ungraded assignments, students can use their intrinsic motivation to complete assignments meaning they complete them because they want to not because they will get the reward. When in combination with an Ungraded method like portfolios, students can not worry about their grades throughout the entire semester and be given the space to develop intrinsic motivation. Peter Elbow discusses how students should have an assortment of low-stakes and high-stakes assignments to help with the extrinsic motivation they are used to while also tapping into their intrinsic motivation; “What the low-stakes assignments do is they allow students to think, and get a chance to ask themselves ‘What am I looking for? What do I think? What are my standards?’ Minimal grading on low-stakes assignments, however, is a way to help students gradually develop a bit of intrinsic motivation - develop their curiosity and standards” (Elbow, 1997, p. 129). Elbow continues to work to prove the Ungraded approach should be more accepted and explains in another article that, “Contract grading can’t magically transform students’ values, but it can give all students a space that invites internal motivation, not just externally imposed motivation. Sometimes it’s the students who have been defeated by grades who start to show the ability to work under their own

steam— students who normally don't strive for excellence in a graded situation” (Elbow and Danielewicz, 2008 ,p. 13). Intrinsic motivation supports students doing the work and gives them the power to want to do the assignment because they enjoy it and there wouldn't be a hit to their self-confidence like traditional grades do.

Instructors can struggle between advocating for their students to use intrinsic motivation because they feel as though they need to instill extrinsic motivation for students to complete their work. For example, “If I don't grade it, the student won't do it” is a common phrase used by teachers to extrinsically motivate students to do their homework” (Sung 2021, para. 1). Sung has identified what a lot of instructors feel about Ungraded assignments, how will they get the students to complete them? But, as we’ve seen, Ungrading helps create an environment where students are motivated to learn the information rather than working for a grade. By using Peter Elbow’s advice on high-stakes and low-stakes assignments, instructors can help motivate and give students the space to motivate themselves. With a high-stakes assignment, instructors are fulfilling the space within themselves where they feel they have to hold extrinsic motivation to convince students to complete the work and low-stakes assignments to get students motivated for assignments through the students’ self.

### Research Study

A voluntary Google Questionnaire was sent to students in the hope of finding their thoughts and feelings on an Ungraded course at Eastern Kentucky University located in Richmond, Kentucky. The general education requirement for written communication is filled at ECU with their two First-Year Writing classes, ENG 101 and ENG 102. In the fall of 2022, ECU had a school size of 12,072 (U.S News, 2022). A total



of nineteen students gave their feedback on Ungrading, emphasizing that they prefer this teaching method, each with different reasons why. Within their responses, it should be noted that the majority of these students were utilizing grade contracts in their classrooms. While this is not a substantial amount of responses, it is at least a typical college class size at ECU full of students who were able to bring insight into their understanding of Ungrading. Interviews were also conducted to further understand student and instructor positions with Ungrading, and an instructor's syllabus was used to show how to introduce Ungrading to students. Instructor interviews were collected by sending an email out to First-Year Writing instructors asking if any of them would volunteer to be interviewed and cited in this study. One professor, Maggie Frozena, and two adjunct instructors, Rachel Hamilton and Lauren Bailey, all agreed to be a part of this study to give their insights on using the Ungraded method in a First-Year Writing class.

One instructor at Eastern Kentucky, Maggie Frozena, who has been teaching at ECU since 2007 provides a substantial amount of insight into teaching an Ungraded course and how she implemented it in her classroom and agreed to be cited within this research to help demonstrate how Ungrading can be implemented into the classroom. Frozena has worked on scholarly articles where she details the importance of Ungrading and received the “EngaGE Student Success Award” in 2023 that identifies how her use of Ungrading has helped get her students engaged, and one could argue motivated, for her courses while helping student advancement. Her syllabus helps show students what her expectations are and gives them a notice of what that would look like in her classroom.

Through her syllabus, Frozena can explain and express why she chose Ungrading within her First-Year Writing classes and give students the chance to understand, and use, this new grading method. She explains how “This section of ENG102 will use a grade contract to determine your grade for the course. Rather than assigning individual grades for each assignment the contract will assume a grade of B as your standard grade....Although I, your instructor, will not assign individual grades to your work, I will still read and provide feedback on your major projects using the First Year Writing rubric.” By letting her students know from the start of the course what to expect and how to get the grade they want, she can bring students' worries at ease, explain her decision to use an Ungraded method and concrete the idea that students won't have the pressure of receiving a grade on their papers. All of these things help the student become receptive to feedback, and not expect to see letter grades on their assignments, decreasing their stress levels. Professor Frozena continues to explain why she has chosen this route in her syllabus and states,

My reason for using a grade contract and portfolio, rather than assigning individual grades on each paper, is to encourage you to focus more on learning and writing throughout the semester... Instead of worrying about your grades, you can instead try out new ideas and ways of writing. Sometimes “failing” or messing up on something is what really helps us to learn--the grade contract and portfolio gives you the freedom to take risks with your work and makes room for these kinds of productive “failures.” You’ll have lots of time to write, revise, and grow as a writer throughout the course. (Frozena, 2022, Grading Contract and E-Portfolio Section).

What is remarkable about this openness is the reassurance she provides for her students; she lets them know that they should try things in their writing they aren't used to using. They are allowed to try new things in their writing without the fear of failing the course and can be put at ease for trying language that they don't typically use in educational environments all while getting the necessary feedback to grow as writers.

The fear of failing is seen most in writing classes because students are scared of getting that deadly red-inked paper passed back to their desks. With grades, we are proving to them that they need to respond in a specific manner, with specific language, and meet the instructor's expectations of what a good paper is. Anthony Lince noted that “We can try to tell our students that mistakes and failure are okay and a natural part of the writing process, a natural part of learning...but there was a contradiction in what I said I valued and what my assessment methods valued. My grading policy conflicted with an important message I was trying to send to my students about failure” (Lince, 2021, para 3). We need to tear away from this traditional grading scale to demonstrate to our students that they should take risks and they should try things in their writing they haven't done before, and Lince identifies this. *To Ungrade* proves that they can take the risk, they can get feedback from their instructors on what went well, what they as students thought, and adjust it for the final draft. We as people must fail to grow, meaning we have to allow our students to fail to grow, and we need to show that we accept this aspect of failure and that *Ungrading* allows a safe place to fail.

Students can feel more relieved by not expecting a grade on their assignments and be more open to the feedback they receive from their instructors because they don't have the fear of getting a bad score. Some students may not like this idea, as it has been

embedded in them to know what grade they have in the class and to know whether they are failing. Professor Frozena knows this could be an issue, and at the bottom of her syllabus, she notes that “Students can check their progress in class on Blackboard. I will use the Grade Center to track assignments and projects - but you will never find a letter or number grade there. Students are encouraged to schedule conference time with me to check in on their grade if they have questions or concerns” (Frozena, 2022, First-Year Writing Rubric Section). She knows that her students may still worry about a grade, as it has been ingrained in students since the first day of school, and she allows students the space to come to her to talk about their grades, how they did on an assignment, and even the space to receive deeper feedback. It's important to include a space on the syllabus where instructors explain Ungrading, and then their decision to use it to help students understand the expectations of the course on the first day, or even before they have their first class. Typically, the first day of classes is spent going over the syllabus, and having this space for the explanation of what Ungrading method an instructor is using and why they are using it, gives students the ability to ask questions and gather a better understanding of the class.

As mentioned before, a study I conducted at Eastern Kentucky University with First-Year Writing students allowed students to give feedback through Google Forms on their opinions and thoughts on Ungrading, specifically through grade contracts. These students were recruited by their First-Year English instructors who forwarded a voluntary Google questionnaire. A total of nineteen students gave feedback and highlighted some of the major benefits and disadvantages of Ungrading and noted how their instructors utilized grade contracts, what worked for them, and what could be tweaked. Instructors

and students who volunteered for interviews were able to give their experiences and opinions on Ungrading and were able to dive more in-depth into the teaching methods they've been introduced to before and what they thought of them.

#### Findings:

A voluntary Google Questionnaire was sent out by professors to their First-Year Writing students in hopes of finding how successful Ungrading was to them. A total of nineteen students gave their voluntary feedback on Ungrading detailing how they enjoyed this new grading method, some even explaining more in-depth what worked for them. These students were primarily using grade contracts in their courses, agreeing to the expectations of a specific grade and following those expectations and getting the grade they contracted for. These students brought insights to their responses on the questionnaire, alongside a couple of interviews explaining what worked for them.

The first question on the questionnaire was, 'What are your thoughts on Ungrading?' Students responded with, "I kind of liked it actually. It made me motivate myself and helped me know that if I did the work that I needed to do and put in my 110% effort that I could get a grade I deserved." This student's response helps echo Peter Elbow's examples of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. This student felt more motivated to complete their assignments when they knew they were working for the grade they deserved. Another student commented, "I think it gives students a fair opportunity to get the grade they work for." An Ungraded class helped this student stay motivated to complete their assignments and help them demonstrate the work and effort they are putting into the class.

When grades are the first thing students see on assignments, they tend to spend time focusing on how that grade defines them, rather than on the feedback. One student explained, “I like the thought of being able to focus mainly on coursework although grades are important too.” This student has helped identify one of the issues with graded classrooms that have been circling throughout this research—they can't fully focus on the coursework because they are focusing instead on the grade. Other students furthered this point with their comments of, “I enjoyed due to it really allowed me to focus on learning without worrying about grades” and “I got to learn more” along with, “It was nice to focus on learning and improving instead of being the best.” This last student's comment helps identify another big issue with grades; they force students to be pitted against each other and compete against each other to receive the best grade in the class, and even then, who did better on the assignment. All of these comments hit on one major issue with grades, students devote most of their attention to the grade rather than the coursework. From student experience, shifting this focus gives students the space to focus on what they are learning rather than what box their instructors place them in, in terms of grades.

Ungraded courses have helped students have clear expectations in the classroom and students solidified this in their responses to the questionnaire. A student commented that “I enjoyed having grade contracts because I knew what to expect for the entirety of the semester and I knew what my expectations were for the grade I wanted” and “I love the method of grading contracts. I think it's a great way to encourage students to work for the grade they want.” With grade contracts specifically, they are able to lay out what a student has to do to get a specific grade and in what ways they will work to earn that grade. This has helped lay out the expectations from the instructor and helped students

identify what they need to do to work for the grade they want. This first question within the questionnaire helped identify points that have been discussed previously. Students feel more motivated for the course, have a better understanding of what is expected from them, and can focus more on the course work rather than the grade they received. While the majority of students commented on grade contracts, this simple transition from traditional grading scales to contracts has proven to help students be motivated, have clear expectations, and focus more on the course.

Within these responses, students made note that they tend to be harder on themselves when determining the grade they believe they should receive. It's been explained that there is "Evidence [that] shows that some students grade themselves more harshly" (Sorensen-Unruh, 2020, Prototype I Section). When instructors are using Ungrading their students may assess themselves more harshly for a multitude of reasons. This same observation can be found in the Eastern Kentucky study because when students were asked, 'Do you think you gave yourself a true or harsh assessment? Why?' One student responded with, "I think at the beginning I gave myself a harsh assessment. At the beginning of the semester I didn't know if I would do well in college or could handle the course load. I was scared I was going to be overwhelmed so I put myself a letter grade below what I actually did the work for and deserved." This response helps establish Jesse Stommel's comment that he usually has to raise grades. "The most common change I make is from an A- to an A for students who offer no good reason other than modesty for giving themselves the A-" (Stommel, 2020, How I Don't Grade Section). When instructors can help students and identify that they deserve a higher grade than they received, the students are going to be open to the feedback and acknowledge

the work they put into the class and how they deserve that specific grade. Students are typically the hardest on themselves because they have so much pressure to succeed in the classroom, as their effort and grades follow them through their entire educational career.

There can be a mix of feelings with students when grading themselves because some may believe they deserve a higher grade while others feel as though they deserve a lower grade than what they deserve. One student stated, “I think I gave myself a harsh assessment. I felt like I didn't exactly do as well as I could have, so I assessed myself more harshly.” One student explained, “I don't think I gave myself a true assessment because I am biased in my work.” These comments on Ungrading give evidence that students have different feelings when it comes to assessing themselves in the classroom. One believed that they were harder on themselves while the other believed they may have given themselves more credit than they should have because they are biased toward themselves. Both of these responses help demonstrate how students may feel about Ungraded classes; one is more harsh on themselves whereas the other thinks they did well because they are biased. Regardless of the student's feelings on Ungrading, they were able to explain their feelings on the method, what worked for them, and in what ways this method could continue to grow to help support students in the future. Grade contracts are going to lay out what the expectations are for the class. To get an X grade, you must do X on an assignment. When discussing a student's grade, clear expectations show the student who was harsh on themselves, why they deserve a higher grade.

By being able to respond to the grading method, students can explain what worked for them. One student noted, “I believe that I gave myself a true assessment. Because with everything I have been going through this semester I think I have done a



great job at keeping it together.” Another student said, “I think I'm pretty truthful with assessment because I believe it is important for the student to get a say in how things are graded instead of your basic grading scale.” These students' responses help show that students are harsher on themselves but can notice the effort they've displayed in the class and can assess themselves better because of Ungrading. Again, with a grade contract, it can be shown, very clearly, what the expectation for an A was and if they completed those expectations.

Another student remarked that they gave themselves a “true assessment. I was able to know exactly what was expected of me and it was up to me to meet those clear expectations.” When students can use a grade contract they are able to have clear expectations and can assess themselves truthfully because they knew what they had to do in order to get the grade they wanted. Another student said they were truthful with their assessments because they were, “still given feedback.” Even if instructors were not using grade contracts, Ungrading still gives students the ability to receive feedback and strengthen their writing skills before deciding on a grade they think they deserve.

Students need feedback on their assignments to become better writers, and this feedback is important to understand what is or isn't working within their composition. There were some outlier responses such as, “I think I gave myself a harsh assessment. I felt like I didn't exactly do as well as I could have, so I assessed myself more harsh.” align with, “I don't think I gave myself a true assessment because I am bias [sic] in my work.” What all of these responses help display is that students' feelings range on Ungraded classes. Some feel as though they assessed themselves more harshly, while others felt like they had clear expectations and knew what to do in order to get the grade

they wanted. Overall, one student's comment about still getting feedback is the highlight from these responses because even though students are using grade contracts, they are still getting feedback from their instructors on how to strengthen their work.

Students were then asked if they were able to stay motivated for the entire course. The majority of the students responded that they were able to stay motivated, each with different reasons. One example was, “Yes. Since the grade contract was explicit about its requirements for the grade I contracted for, it motivated me to work for it.” Along with, “I was because if I wanted to put in the work I would. And I knew if I only wanted to put in a certain amount of work to get a certain grade I could do that if all else failed.” This understanding of having clear expectations through grade contracts was repeated throughout this question’s responses. By having clear expectations students are aware of what is due, and how to get a good ‘grade’ on it. What these expectations help do is keep students motivated for the course because there weren't any surprises, if they did the assignments and gave their best foot forward, they knew they would succeed in the class.

One student’s response is important to discuss because it is something that hasn't been touched on yet, seeing Ungraded classes as an ‘easy A.’ When asked if they were motivated through the entire course, they responded with, “Not as much because I was pretty much guaranteed an A.” Some Ungraded courses may cause students to feel as though they are guaranteed an A if they just complete the work. What is important to ensure here, is that they know they still need to complete the work in order to get through the course and the grade contracts have clear expectations that show that in order to get an A you must do XYZ. For example, it's been shown before that instructors have the ability to change their grades if they don't agree with what the students placed them in. At

the end of the day, students still need to complete the assignments and give their best, otherwise, the instructors have the ability to change a student's grade. Not to mention, students will still have some form of feedback within this teaching method, helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses and their growth through their drafts.

The last open response question was if students had anything more to build on the Ungraded grade contract method. One student said, "It really helped me be at peace. Although I am a little harsh on myself it kept me accountable and it felt like some of the pressure of having a college professor roast your work was off." This is such a major aspect of Ungraded courses because they take the pressure of receiving a paper back full of red marks and allow the student to assess their work and determine what could be improved. The student doesn't have the stress of expecting a low grade on an assignment they turned in. Instead, students can expect a teacher's feedback on an assignment, helping them identify in what ways they could succeed in their next assignment.

In this study there were a couple of closed-ended questions. These include, do you feel more comfortable in an Ungraded class, with a response of yes at 84.2% and 15.8% of students responding with no. There were a total of 19 responses to this question. The last closed-ended question was if students would recommend an Ungraded class to their peers. 15.8% responded that they would 'maybe' recommend an Ungraded course to their peers while 84.2% responded with yes, totaling 19 responses. While these aren't a substantial amount of responses, it is still a standard classroom size that helps identify a mix of opinions on Ungrading. Some limitations to this study include the low amount of responses, and how students' opinions can be influenced by particular ways the instructor explained Ungrading. If an instructor does not take the time to explain, and give time for

questions, the students can still feel confused by this method. Instructors need to be sure to take the time to explain the method in depth and give students the space to ask questions.

All of these student responses help show student perceptions with Ungrading, and what they find is working versus what is not. It's been supported by some students that they feel more motivated, more at ease, and enjoy the Ungraded teaching method rather than a grading scale. These responses help dive more into the ways Ungrading is working and in what ways it could be strengthened. A definite fix to some of the students' concerns is having multiple opportunities to discuss a student's work and giving feedback whenever possible. This would help students be able to vocalize what is or isn't working for them while having the instructor provide criticism, support, or be benign there to answer questions when students get confused. By having regular communication with the student, they can keep the instructor involved in their learning process and the instructor can better support the student. With this, students can have a clear idea of the expectations of the class and how to earn the grade they want, while knowing they can approach their instructor when problems or questions are presented.

### Student Interviews

The trends amongst students in an Ungraded course were that they were nervous about using this method, but once explained, they were more excited to experiment with Ungrading. Brandi Sears is an ECU student doing the 3+2 program where she can complete a BA and MA in 5 years and volunteered to give her insights to Ungrading, agreeing to be cited within this study. Brandi was recruited through this study as being a peer of mine in a previous course and asked if she'd be willing to volunteer for an

interview via Discord. Brandi's experience with Ungrading as an undergraduate student identifies some of the thoughts and feelings other undergraduates initially have with Ungraded courses. Brandi's classes primarily focused on grade contracts and she found that it took pressure off of the students to do well. She said, "I am a perfectionist. If I feel like something isn't good enough I am going to keep going over it until I am exhausted." Brandi found that with her Ungraded classes, she didn't have the pressure of worrying about the numbers and felt more confident with her assignments. When introduced to Ungrading, she was a tad bit worried because it wasn't something she had heard about before and didn't think it would be allowed. Eventually, she felt "empowered, I could hold up my part of the deal and still be able to get the grade I wanted for the class without stressing over it being perfect."

Brandi was asked if she thought she gave herself an honest assessment, and she noted that she is heavily critical of herself. However, she found that she gave her best effort, turned assignments in on time, and was able to focus on higher-order concerns. With this, she was able to identify where she truly should be on the grade contract and was able to answer truthfully, with examples, on why she graded herself the way she did. She also found that her grades were less stressful because she knew she was going to be able to try new things without the fear of failing, and knew that if she did her assignments and followed all the things she had to do for an A, she could get the A. She noted that she had to focus on other classes with traditional grading scales more because she didn't know what the instructors expected of her, whereas, in her English class she could try new things and be herself without the fear of failing.

Brandi made the comment that she thought, at times, it was an easy A. When asked about this she explained that she is an A student, but if you put down an A on the grade contract your assignments and effort in the class are going to be noticed. She notes, “This is an English course, if you don't read the material and do the assignments, you're failing the grade contract and won't know what is going on.” She also made a point to explain how she had to detail why she thought she deserved a passing grade, and that helped eliminate her not doing the work and still passing the class. One last thing she discussed with her Ungraded class is how she works with Appalachian students in the Noel Studio at ECU (the writing studio) and has been able to advocate for students using their language. This is tied to her Ungraded classes because she could also use language, and words, that aren't typically accepted in an educational institution. She explains, “This goes back to the student's agency, students should have the right to speak in their own language, and with a grade contract it's possible.”

The idea of an 'easy A' has been noted from the study, but it should be considered that if a student truly will do anything to get an A, then an Ungraded class isn't going to stop them. There is evidence that “If a student is going to try to cheat a system, they're going to find a way in any teaching method, even Ungrading. What we can do is create a system that offers a richer experience when you do not game it or one that doesn't make a lot of sense to game the system” (Inoue, 2021, Will Students Stop Trying to Write Well and Game the System? Section). Ungrading helps create an environment where students feel as though they can succeed and can give their honest feedback on their work creating a successful interaction with the class. When students can give their thoughts and opinions, have the agency to do what they want in the class, and don't have the fear of

failing, they're going to have a better experience with the class. This better experience is going to have them wanting to strengthen their writing or learning the information in the course. In one study, “students tended to view grades as a game; consequently, they typically found ways to game the system. Ungrading short-circuited this tendency and opened up new ways of being a student. If learning has been “gamified” through grades, then Ungrading is a way to de-gamify it” (Gorichanaz, 2022, De-gamification Section). When students are in charge, they can potentially choose assignments, respond in a language they are comfortable using, and choose their grades. They're going to have a better experience in the classroom because they are more in control, and they have a deeper desire to grow and to learn and will be less likely to try to game the grading system because it is a teaching method they can succeed in.

### Instructor Interviews

Instructors and adjunct instructors had the opportunity to sit down and give their thoughts and opinions on Ungrading. The trends for these instructors were that they were still gaining confidence in Ungrading, but preferred that over the typical grading scale. Rachel Hampton and Lauren Bailey served as adjunct instructors at ECU and gave some insights into being in an Ungraded course, explaining how they took that teaching method into their own teaching instruction. Both instructors, Lauren and Rachel, agreed to sit down and give their experiences with using Ungrading within the classroom and agreed to be cited within this study. They were both peers in another course of mine and were contacted via email asking if they'd volunteer to be interviewed for this study. Rachel Hampton noted that it was a “unique experience to get the perspective as a student and instructor.” By getting the combination of being a student and being introduced to grade

contracts and then using those contracts as an adjunct, we can get a better idea of what worked for them as students and what ways it may be difficult when introducing the method as instructors, even identifying in what ways professors can improve when integrating this method into the classroom.

Rachel Hampton and Lauren Bailey had the opportunity to use Ungrading in one of their English courses as adjunct instructors. When introducing Ungrading to her students as an adjunct instructor in 2022, Rachel was still gaining confidence with the method. She did find that Ungrading was beneficial to her students once introduced because, “grade contracts gave the students more liberty, and students were able to admit their shortcomings.” By giving students a platform to be honest about their grades and how they did in classes helped give them authority and helped express how they felt about the course and their focus on the assignments. Being able to use Ungrading as a student, and then as an instructor, she can explain how Ungrading works and the ways she plans on using it within her classes while also understanding what she didn't understand as a student and explaining in detail what it is and how it works.

Lauren Bailey explained that using Ungrading as an instructor, made her feel like she was giving her students “realistic goals that encouraged them to take risks to experiment with new things and grow.” Lauren pointed out that students have lives outside the classroom where they must stress and worry about other things that are unrelated to their education. She notes that students can “prioritize their lives, and don't have to be worried about being penalized for trivial mistakes like grammar.” Lauren brings up some major points for Ungrading, students can have a clear outline and realistic goals they can achieve while also being able to juggle school and their outside lives.



Portfolios and writing journals help students identify their growth throughout the semester, and give students space to write in their own language, hitting on the agency that Ungrading advocates for. By using a writing journal, students are able to write in the language, dialect, and responses they feel confident using all while giving themselves the space to not feel pressured to respond in a certain way and write about what they are interested in. Using methods like portfolios and writing journals, helps support Ungrading by helping students develop their voice and agency. Rachel made a point to include writing journals in her classes because it gave students the space to express themselves, helping Ungrading be more supported through student agency and the absence of pressure for receiving a grade on the journal. By allowing her students the space to express themselves while also integrating Ungrading into classes, she felt like she could “let students express themselves while also making their learning experience enjoyable.” With writing journals students can express themselves in their writing without the pressure of failing a course because their language is accepted, they aren't expected to use big words or have to sound smart. What this means is that a student can use the language they like without the fear of their instructor telling them that they are wrong, communicated incorrectly, or used an incorrect or uneducated word.

On the other hand, Ungrading is better supported through portfolios because they allow students to develop their voice through the entire course while promoting agency in using and writing about things the student is interested in. Lauren used portfolios for the course because she wanted to show students their growth through the semester while also giving them the option to do assignments they would want to do. For example, one of the assignments students could do was choose a piece of writing they completed from social

media, poetry, another class, or anything they wanted to demonstrate their composition. She explains that each assignment scaffolded them for the next one, but this method allowed them to choose the work they wanted to turn in and gave them even more agency in determining their work and grades. These instructors allowed their students more agency and accountability in the classroom to experiment with language and multimedia they may not have been able to experiment with in another course

Lauren details how using Ungrading put her more at ease as an instructor. She explains how she was excited to use Ungrading because, “I didn't have to use an A-F scale, I was terrified because I haven't used grading before and I didn't want to be unfair, every student comes from different journeys and I felt with grades we are comparing two students writing.” Due to removing the grading scale instructors can assess each student as an individual instead of comparing a classroom of students. This comment Lauren made is parallel to another statement Colleen Flaherty made where she explained that a “single standard (like the traditional grading scale we currently have in place) can be described as unfair because students arrive with different readiness levels, interests, and strengths -- and against a curve or class norm and by growth or effort” (Flaherty, 2019, para. 15). Lauren also explains how, as a student, she was at first nervous about using Ungrading because it was a new approach she wasn't used to. She didn't understand what the expectations were before the class and felt like she was going to have to put in twice the effort to get the grade she wanted. However, once she was in the class her instructor was able to clearly define what their expectations were for the class because there were still assignment sheets and instructor feedback she could fall back on.

One of the many benefits Rachel found with Ungrading was that it was a relief to help keep her students on track through things like a grade contract and self-assessments. She was also able to find that Ungrading helped spark conversations between instructor and student because “if you see performance slacking, I could have a conversation with the student and be able to check in with them.” One of Rachel’s biggest recommendations for Ungrading was that instructors need to start by having conversations with their students, “it’s okay to try something, but it should always be evolving, to find what works best for the instructors and the students. I was surprised to find how much pressure it can take off of an instructor while still working with students for the same goal.” This same goal she mentions is the goal of understanding the course and soaking up information rather than referencing it for recall measures.

When asked about honest assessments, Lauren noted that she would assess herself a lot lower than she deserved because she was so critical of herself. She also found her students would assess themselves in the same manner, and to combat this she would bring up the grade contracts and highlight that they did X amount of work and deserved X grade. Jesse Stommel notes that he also ran into this but explains, “I do make it clear on the syllabus (and in class) that ‘I reserve the right to change grades as appropriate.’ But, I do this only very rarely, and I usually have to raise grades” (Stommel, 2018, How I Don't Grade Section). Rachel Hampton said that her students had to explain at the end of the semester why they thought they deserved that grade they put down but had to provide examples and explanations. She found that they were able to admit their shortcomings and were able to have a conversation with their professor where they could talk about the grades and reference the grade contract to agree or disagree with their final grades.

Lauren goes into more detail on the pros and cons of Ungrading. She said that Ungraded classes need to explain the grade contract in detail and give their students a chance to process and ask more questions: “Typically, when introducing the method students have to reconsider how everything is weighted and they need the space to do that and ask questions.” She found that as an instructor, when mentioning this method most of her students were excited to use it because it was something new but students were able to have clearer expectations than they would in a graded course. She said that she never had an Ungraded course before her master class, but said that she does recall some instructors using a point system in place of their grades that reminded her a lot of Ungrading.

Professors who use Ungrading are typically willing to share their experiences on what worked and what didn't, and by having the interviews with Lauren and Rachel they were able to identify what instructors need to do to use Ungrading successfully. What Rachel and Lauren encourage is that instructors who want to introduce Ungrading into their curriculum are that they should keep an open mind. Rachel states it is “okay to try something and it does not work.” Just by allowing your students to try something new they understand you are putting their best interest forward and allows them to want to come forward with other ideas on how they could succeed better. Lauren wanted to make a note that instructors should try new things but should realize how “biased A-F grading is. Anyone using Ungrading is making a pro-student decision and helping student advance in their writing.” Lauren is right: “All grading does require uniformity. It assumes Uniform input, uniform process, and uniform output...students don't start out the same. They don't have the same life experiences - or even academic experiences” (Blum

2017, para. 8). We need a teaching method that advocates for all students, not just the ones that start from a specific point. Rachel and Lauren have helped bring forth some important aspects of Ungrading as a student and as an instructor that parallel with what other instructors have found within Ungraded courses.

Instructors can help give their students a space where they can express their opinion on the course and what was doing well versus what wasn't through constant feedback and meetings with the student. We need to be opening the floor to our students. By doing this we can facilitate honest communication between them and their instructors, and instructors can build on what is working for their students to make adjustments for the next class. To open the floor to the students would foster the kind of communication Rachel Hampton advocated for, students should be able to express what works and what does not work for them. While using portfolios and writing journals we can advocate for students to find their voice and gain student agency.

### Conclusion

The study done at Eastern Kentucky University has shown that instructors and students have a mix of emotions when it comes to an Ungraded class. There can be times when students are confused and instructors are hesitant on where to start. What this study was able to show is that, through all of these anxieties students and instructors can still feel confident, more involved, and motivated for the course when Ungrading is explained, and instructors give the space for their students to ask questions. By using Ungrading, we allow students to be more motivated for the course because they are given more agency in the instruction and grades. Students also get consistent feedback when Ungrading is in conjunction with self-reflections, assessments, and portfolios. Students

are better able to use this feedback and work it into their writing because they aren't worrying about whether or not they are failing the course. The Eastern Kentucky study helps prove this, while the interviews of instructors and students explain other complications that arise with Ungrading. The answers to these complications, as Rachel Hampton and Lauren Bailey explain, are having open discussions with students, giving them the time to ask questions, and doing your best as an instructor to explain and answer students' remarks.

It can be scary for instructors to implement an Ungraded method when their institution still requires a grade but this can be alleviated through Ungraded methods. Writing portfolios, self-assessments, rubrics, or feedback helps instructors experiment with new methods in the class and find which one a professor, and their students, are comfortable using. When a grade is still required at the end of a semester instructors can use Ungraded methods to communicate with students on what that grade should be, or hide no surprises by having monthly conferences with students to discuss the grade they will be receiving at the end of the course. Other ways instructors can introduce Ungrading is by creating professional learning communities, reading scholarly journals, and opening the floor to students' opinions. By doing this, they can discover what worked for other professors, provide insight into the method, and potentially allow other professors to discover and use Ungrading. The findings of this study have shown that professors and students are at first, nervous about this method, but after experimenting with it, they both can build confidence and support students and their writing more in the class.

Classes that use Ungrading need to have open dialogue and provide student agency, and transparency to help students succeed with this teaching method. EKU's First-Year Writing students have proven that the Ungraded method is more accepted, and liked among students because it gives them the ability to grow as writers without the fear of failing the class. Students made the observations that they have clear expectations, are motivated for their class, and have less pressure to receive a perfect grade. Students can try new things within their writing, and even sometimes can choose the assignment they wish to complete. This promotes their students' agency by allowing them to make the decisions in the classroom and changing the focus from an authoritative instructor to a more accepting classroom environment.

If professors want to implement Ungrading into the classroom, they need to ensure they put the expectations in the syllabus, have a space where students can ask questions, and always be open to adjusting this to better suit their students. Students will feel more motivated to do their assignments when the motivation comes from them, and not the pressure of failing a class or from the extrinsic motivation instilled by their instructors. We as instructors need to make sure we are meeting students where they are because the entire point of an Ungraded course is to help students grow as writers. To do this, we need to give them the space to try new things within their writing while also being able to have meetings with them, where they are comfortable, to help identify in which ways they can strengthen their writing. The first step in creating an Ungraded class is by sparking the conversation with other instructors and getting student feedback to implement this structure. One way to do this is to implement a Professional Learning Committee like Eastern Kentucky University has. The other is to utilize instructors like

Susan Blum, Jesse Stommel, and Peter Elbow (and more) to get a better understanding of what already works in the classroom and build on what can be strengthened.



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## **Appendix A: Google Questionnaire**

## **Appendix A: Google Questionnaire]**

Would you like to participate in this research study? 19 responses - 18 yes, 1 no

What were your thoughts on being Ungraded? 19 responses

Do you think Ungraded classes were beneficial to you? 19 responses - 100% yes

Do you think you gave yourself a true or harsh assessment? Why? 16 responses

Did Ungrading make you more comfortable with your instructor? 19 responses - 16 yes,  
3 no

Were you able to keep yourself motivated throughout the whole course? Why or why  
not? 19 responses

Would you recommend Ungrading to other students? 19 responses - 16 yes, 3 maybe

Other thoughts/questions/comments/concerns? 8 responses

Are you interested in being interviewed? Please include email below 4 responses - 3 no, 1  
maybe.



## **Appendix B: Student and Instructor interview questions**

## **[Appendix B: Instructor and Student Interview Questions]**

Questions for Students:

Have you ever had an Ungraded class before?

What were your initial thoughts on Ungraded classes?

Do you think you gave yourself an honest assessment on your grade?

What do you think could be improved in an Ungraded course?

What did you enjoy about your Ungraded class?

Would you take an Ungraded course again?

What were your final thoughts on an Ungraded class?

Any other comments/questions?

Questions for Instructors:

How long have you been using an Ungraded approach?

Do you think Ungrading is beneficial to students? Do you think they give themselves an honest assessment?

What Ungrading approach do you use? (portfolios, self assessment, etc)

How did you discover Ungrading?

What would you critique about an Ungraded approach?

What would you tell other instructors who want to start Ungrading?

Any other comments/questions/concerns?