

Course Contract Example

Here is our agreement:

As your professor for the course, I will give feedback and support, as will the Writing Program Team to aid you in your writing assignment toward successful completion of the course.

Assignments will earn the following:

- “E”—or Excellent (this is rare and used only to let a writer know that a particular assignment went beyond what was expected)
- “S”—or Satisfactory (this will be the norm and communicates a job well-done)
- “U”—Unsatisfactory (if time, the writer can revise the project to earn a S)
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Here’s how you can get a B/B+ as your final grade:

1. Meet the course requirements for attendance
2. Do all assigned work—writing, web design, visuals, etc.
3. Earn a “S” on both of the major projects left in the course

When you’ll get “Unsatisfactory”:

1. Failing to do the complete final project with all the various parts
2. Failing to revise and proof read your major project (responses are more informal writing and not held to the same standard)

But I do want you to show me that you engaged in some genuine work in trying to figure something out, put things together. You tried to be really reflective, really intellectual. You tried.

Your grade will fall rapidly below a B if you don’t meet the terms of this contract. This contract is designed to make you reach your full potential at least in the time we have together.

To get an A- or A, you will need to do everything required for a B, plus something more, such as

- Earn an “Excellent” on either project, or
- Stretch yourself in a new skill—for example, in using one of your own pictures, you might play with a graphic design program and create something truly original, or
- Decide to take risk in your writing or web design that actually seems to work, or
- Help a fellow classmate with his/her project in such a way that it makes a difference for your friend (a community-based action!), or
- Find a way to do something collaborative with another or several others in the class that is displayed on the website (again, a community-based action!), or
- Any kind of thing that goes beyond just “getting the assignment done.”

In your final reflection paper (2-3 pages), please explain what you did in your project or anywhere during the course that went beyond the ordinary and contributed to your learning in the course—so, you get to make the argument in your final reflection paper.

If you've never seen a system of evaluation such as this, don't fret. I think you'll learn to relax. This system will allow you to focus on the rest of the course, on learning, on finding out about yourself, rather than on worrying about your grade. You do have work to do, but you'll feel a certain freedom as well, knowing that if you do your best and stretch just a little, you can be confident of a good grade in the course. You will be more in control of your learning this way. You will learn to be a risk taker, and those risks will help you learn better. Our class will be a real supportive community of learners instead of a bunch of people competing for the best grades. If you are ever concerned about any of this, just let me know.

From Peter Elbow—guidelines for designing contracts:

Here are some activities that are often specified in contracts: attend class regularly; turn in assignments on time (to increase the benefit from discussions and lectures); revise certain papers; get rid of mistakes in spelling and grammar on final drafts; give written feedback on certain drafts to other members of the class; get written feedback from other members of the class (also perhaps people not in the class); turn in a *process log* with drafts and papers (containing elements such as a clear précis, a discussion of the writing process, an estimate of the strengths and weaknesses, and questions for the reader to answer in giving feedback).

It's probably most common to use a contract for a course grade of B—and then fall back on the question of excellent quality in deciding higher grades. But some teachers make contracts for higher grades containing additional contract requirements such as these: with each major paper, submit an outline that accurately shows the logic of the argument—the relation between main points, subsidiary points, and evidence; write a report on a book, lecture, movie, play not assigned for the course—showing how it sheds light on the course material; meet outside of class in small groups for certain tasks; make a presentation to the class or to some members—perhaps outside of class time; interview someone outside the class who has important expertise or experience in the realm we are studying—and make a report; give or get additional feedback on certain drafts; re-revise certain papers.

Here are some more intriguing and speculative ways that teachers have tried to specify *activities* in writing to try to force students to write more productively: make sure that certain essays contain an element of exploration or perplexity or questioning—rather than just a summary of material or just an explanation of what is indisputable or obvious; certain essays must demonstrate the intersection of theoretical academic issues and some part of your personal experience— and how they shed light on each other.