

The Low-Down on Extra-Credit

December 2019

Teaching and Learning Services

Making Bonus Marks Pedagogical

What is extra-credit?

These are additional marks that students can earn during a semester. The grade breakdown is still 100% of the total grade, but then extra credit gives students an opportunity to earn marks above and beyond that total. This is an important distinction, because it means that a student can still earn that A+ without doing any of the extra-credit assignments.

Why is extra-credit used?

Extra-credit should be used intentionally, to contribute to the pedagogy of a course. Thus, you need to consider your reasons for including (or excluding) these opportunities. Most importantly, extra-credit opportunities should contribute to a student's learning and skills and not just be an empty GPA-booster. While research on extra-credit is still growing, there are some promising results. Extra-credit assignments, daily extra-credit quizzes, and research participation marks in research courses have all been connected to improved exam performance.

How is extra credit used?

There are lots of ways to implement extra-credit. You need to decide how it fits in the overall design of your course. Some questions you should consider include:

- Is showing up enough? For example, do students get a mark for attending an activity, or do they need to turn in some work like a reflection or a solved problem?
- Are bonus marks all-or-nothing? In other words, will activities be marked as complete/incomplete or will you assess quality?
- Can all students access the opportunity? Students shouldn't need to skip class or spend money to earn a bonus.
- Does the opportunity reinforce or extend course content? There should be a valid reason for including the option.

The students most likely to complete extra-credit activities:

- Are taking the course as a required part of their major
- Are female
- Are enrolled in larger, lecture-style courses
- Have higher grades

Further Reading

For more information about this topic, please see the following resources:

Norcross, J. C., Dooley, H. S. & Stevenson, J.F. (1993). Faculty use and justification of extra credit: no middle ground? *Teaching of Psychology*, 20, 240-242.
https://doi.org/10.1207/s15328023top2004_13

Padilla-Walker, L. M. (2006). The impact of daily extra-credit quizzes on exam performance. *Teaching of Psychology*, 33, 236-239.
https://doi.org/10.1207/s15328023top3304_4

Radhakrishnan, P., Lam, D. & Ho, G. (2009). Giving university students incentives to do homework improves their performance. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 36, 219-225.



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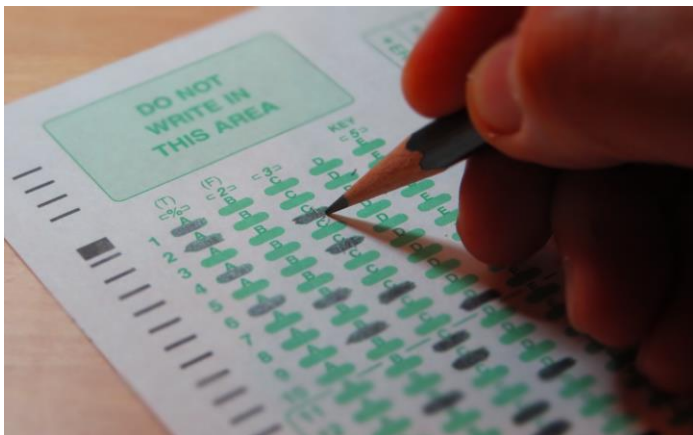


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Examples of Extra-Credit Options

There are many ways to implement extra-credit. We've provided a few suggestions here, but you can also come talk to the educational developers in Teaching and Learning Services (TLS) for more ideas, or for help implementing the ideas you have.

- Bonus questions on a quiz or exam.
- Corrections: Let students turn in their corrected midterms with explanations of where they went wrong. For students who aced the test, offer a challenge question instead.



- Double deadlines: Have an early deadline and a final deadline. If students submit by the early deadline, they can get feedback so that their final papers can be stronger. This isn't really 'extra credit' but it is an opportunity for students to do extra work to improve their grades.
- Time management bonus: Some instructors give students the opportunity to skip a quiz or get one no-questions-asked extension on an assignment. These flexible options are a great way to help students when life gets in the way of class. What about the students who don't use any of those options? Perhaps they can be offered a bonus mark, or have a low mark dropped, to recognize that they completed all available work.

- Replace a mark: Provide an optional assignment that will replace the lowest quiz or assignment mark, if a certain standard is met.
- Media reports: Course topics may also be hot topics in the news or on social media. Students who bring these items to class for discussion could earn extra-credit.
- Mark exchanges: Offer opportunities for students to shift the weight of their various assignments. For example, if students complete extra-credit assignments then they can reduce the weight of a final exam. This works well if the extra-credit work covers similar content to what is covered on a cumulative exam. It helps students to manage exam anxiety and distributes their work across the term (rather than cramming for a high-stakes final).

Note that some of these options are easier to implement, mathematically, than others. Blackboard Grade Centre does not have an easy way to enter bonus marks into your final grade calculations, but the educational developers in TLS can help you create a system to incorporate extra-credit. Email us at teaching@macewan.ca to make an appointment.

