



Specs grading **simplifies grading** and allows more time to **provide feedback**.



Scan for the course syllabus & detailed assignment specs

## References

1. Nilson LB, Stanny CJ. *Specifications Grading: Restoring Rigor, Motivating Students, and Saving Faculty Time*. Stylus Publishing; 2015.
2. Leslie P, Lundblom E. Specifications grading: what it is, and lessons learned. *Semin Speech Lang*. 2020;41(4):298-309. doi: 10.1055/s-0040-1713781
3. Kleppinger EL. Specifications Grading: A step towards competency-based education? *Pulses*. Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning Scholarly Blog. May 25, 2023. <https://cptlpulses.com/2023/05/25/specifications-grading-a-step-towards-competency-based-education/>

Specs grading **simplifies grading** and allows more time to **provide feedback**.

## What is Specs Grading?

- Assignments** • Aligned with learning outcomes  
• Graded pass/fail  
• Clear “specs” provided in advance  
• Specs correlate to at least B-level work  
• Feedback relates to performance on specs
- Grade Bundles** • Assignments grouped into bundles for each letter grade  
• Higher grades require more skill or content mastery  
• Advanced learning options offered for self-motivated students  
• Students decide their desired letter grade
- Tokens** • Limited opportunity to revise assignments  
• Instructor-defined ways of earning or usage  
• Allows for flexibility in completing assignments

## Objective

Describe the redesign, implementation, and outcomes of a pharmacy self-care elective course incorporating specifications grading.

## Methods

Self-Care and Nonprescription Pharmacotherapy  
1 credit hour, 6-week elective for P2 and P3 students  
Synchronous Zoom classes (2 hours, once per week)

**Prior to 2023**  
Traditional grading structure  
Each assignment associated with points  
Grading rubrics provided to students in advance

**Spring 2023**  
Utilized specs grading  
Class session topics remained the same  
Some adjustments in assignments  
**GOAL:** have students focus more on learning than grades

## COURSE DESIGN

- The only ‘grade’ is the final course letter grade
- Assignments graded satisfactory/unsatisfactory
- All assignments in a specific grade bundle must be marked ‘satisfactory’
- Assignments are bundled into 3 tiers (A / B / C)
- Final grade determined by which bundle of assignments is completed

## ASSIGNMENT GROUPS

Presentation Objectives  
Group Presentation  
Exam Questions  
Patient Handout  
Peer Feedback  
Final Exam  
Engagement

**A Bundle Example**

**Group Presentation:** B&C bundles + Create a written patient case summary & grading checklist  
**Patient Handout:** Create a handout unrelated to presented topics  
**Final Exam:** Score ≥85%

**B Bundle Example**

**Group Presentation:** C bundle + Present a self-care patient case simulation role-play  
**Patient Handout:** Create a handout related to presentation topic  
**Final Exam:** Score ≥75%

**C Bundle Example**

**Group Presentation:** Present a self-care condition overview & summary of treatment options  
**Patient Handout:** Not required  
**Final Exam:** Score ≥65%

**Results**

**TOKENS**  
All students started with 1 token  
21 students (95.5%) *earned* at least 1 token  
19 students (86.4%) *used* at least 1 token  
At course conclusion, token average/student = 4 (range 0-9 tokens)

January 9 – February 17, 2023  
22 students enrolled  
4 P3 students, 18 P2 students  
Grade Distribution: 17 As, 4 Bs, 1 C

**Tokens Earned**

	4	Muddiest Point
	7	Class 3-2-1 Submission
	93	Submit Assignment 24 Hours Early

**Tokens Used**

	31	Revise & Resubmit an Assignment
	5	Submit Assignment 48 hours Late
	2	Retake Final Exam

Zero	2
One	3
Two	8
Three	9

**Conclusion**

- Considerable time was spent redesigning the course, but overall specs grading worked well for this elective.
- A streamlined grading approach allowed the instructor to provide more feedback to students instead of focusing on allocating points.
- Students seemed okay with specs grading, although they were sometimes confused with what grade they had in the course.
- Most assignment resubmissions were due to minor technical errors.
- Communication with students about specs grading throughout the course was key.
- Challenges: (1) keeping track of tokens & assignment resubmissions  
(2) integration with the LMS grade book