

Mrs. Witkemper's Grading Practices

My Philosophy:

Don't take a grade unless students have had plenty of opportunities to practice the skill in class and through homework. Take a grade when you feel that a student, with a reasonable amount of effort on his or her part, should be able to easily receive a good grade.

Because of this philosophy, I don't always take a recorded grade on everything we do. In fact, oftentimes homework assignments are not graded on a right/wrong basis. I feel that homework is one way to practice a skill, and if a student does poorly on homework, it is an opportunity to learn from mistakes. *That's* where real learning often takes place.

Therefore, many homework assignments are graded on more of an "effort" basis—and believe me, I can almost always tell if a student has put some effort into an assignment or not! ☺ You'll know if a grade is based on effort if you see an "E" beside the score. If not, assume that the grade was based on actual number correct.

Because there are so many different aspects to Language Arts class, there is often confusion as to how grades are calculated. Below is a breakdown of where my grades come from, as well as an explanation about some of the regularly-scheduled assignments.

Spelling

Spelling is, well, spelling. Our normal schedule is:

Monday— Pre-check test: words spelled correctly are written only 3 times and misspelled words are written 5 times for Tuesday's assignment.

Tuesday— 5 times each assignment and WB pg. on back of the word list is due. *This assignment is an effort grade, and **may be corrected** if all points are not received the first time.*

Wednesday— Pretest. Anyone receiving 100% will not be required to take Friday's test. A workbook page is also usually due on Wednesdays.

Friday— Final test. Students who take the test on Friday will receive Friday's test score—I DO NOT take the better of the two grades; **I only accept the Friday score**. My reason: I do not want a student to say, "Oh, I only missed one, I'm not even going to worry about studying for Friday." If a student truly knows the word, he or she will spell it right both Wednesday and Friday, and hopefully will be able focus his/her efforts on any words missed. Workbook pages are often due on Fridays.

Spelling workbook pages—I generally take a right/wrong grade only on a portion of the pages; often it is the students' choice which scores I record. For the other work completed in the workbook, students receive effort points for having the assignments completed with reasonable effort.

Reading

Reading scores come from a variety of places:

1. **Reading textbook and workbook pages**—Again, I often take more of an effort grade on workbook pages, because they are generally an opportunity to practice the things we have discussed in class. Actual score grades are taken on story quizzes (which are given after classroom discussion, reading journal writing, and workbook practice) and unit tests (which are given after several stories have been read and the same skills have been practiced several times.)
2. **Vocabulary**—I believe that learning new vocabulary is one of the best ways to continue to improve reading skills. Assignments are given from the Vocabulary workbook—usually the Synonym, Antonym, and Tell the Story sections of each chapter—and grades are recorded for effort for Synonyms and Antonyms (the students' opportunity to practice and become familiar with the words) and actual score grades are recorded for the Tell the Story section (where they must use what they know to apply the words to a sentence.) Vocabulary tests are also given on Fridays.
3. **Scholastic Reading Counts (SRC)**—I'm sure that you are familiar with SRC from 5th grade. Each 9 weeks students will be evaluated for their reading fluency and comprehension. Based on this evaluation, I will suggest a reading level range for each student. I then ask that the students choose SRC books to read somewhere within that range. (Exceptions can be made upon approval. ☺) The student must then read the book and take the computer quiz—passing it by a specific due date. On the due date, I will record then student's highest score on any book read within their reading level range. Whatever the score is for that test, it will be recorded as one reading test grade. Some grading periods require two SRC books to be read and some only require one. ***Students are more than welcome to read other SRC books to try and accumulate SRC points for prizes, but only the approved books' scores will be recorded for grades.***
4. **Student Reading Assessments (SRAs)**—Again, SRAs should be very familiar to you by the time 6th grade rolls around. I, again, see these as an opportunity to keep practicing some reading and language skills throughout the year, even if we are not specifically addressing those concepts in class at the time. It's continuous review and reinforcement. Therefore, it is not my intention that SRAs break a student's grade, but failing to do them could have significant consequences. Students are assigned to an SRA color each 9 weeks. Two SRAs are generally assigned every other week, and students have the opportunity to grade themselves in class on the day they are due. Students have been instructed how to score themselves on each SRA based on a 10-point scale. ***If a student receives a poor score, he or she is instructed to redo the SRA and try for a better score.*** Students are not expected to work through an entire color in 6th grade (mostly because we have many other projects that require a significant amount of attention), but they are welcome to work above and beyond to try and work through the SRA box for a reward, if they so choose. *Because I see SRAs as both practice in Reading and in English skills, the grades on SRAs will count for both grades.*

English

There are several components to the students' English grades, and various sources as the year progresses:

1. **Shurley**—This includes workbook pages, quizzes, and tests which evaluate both the student's ability to label sentences on paper and to speak the Question & Answer flow orally.
2. **Writing**—In my classroom, we will be utilizing a program known as 6 +1 Trait Writing. The idea is that students need to learn what traits a good piece of writing has and work toward adding those traits into their own writing. The scoring for 6 +1 Trait Writing is based on a 5-point scale, and the students will have access to rubrics (grading sheets) every time a piece of writing is assigned. This scoring provides a way for students to track their personal skills, and to work toward improving their individual writing abilities. Actual scores will also include effort- and criteria-based scoring, such as: the student's ability to follow the instructions for the writing assignment, whether or not the student obviously took some time and effort on the writing, and whether or not a student is making progression in his or her writing.
3. **"Projects"** —For 3 of the 4 nine-week grading periods, students will be focused on some type of "project": first a research paper, then a speech, and finally a "Me Book" project. Because these each require a great deal of writing and grammar skills, these scores will be a part of the students' English grades.
4. **SRAs**—See Reading section above.

I hope that this information might useful to you in understanding how I assess your child's progress. If you ever have any questions, please feel free to contact me at school: 663-2804 or email: twitkemper@stmarysgreensburg.com.