

The Grading Portal

As you log into the grading portal, you will find that all of the grades in the school have been placed into the same three categories: Assessments, Projects, and Academic Practices. (Please see below for an explanation and a few examples of these categories.) While teachers will still list the assignment's name, ie "Chapter 2 Unit Exam," they will then group assignments together under one of those three headings. In this packet, we have created some suggestions for how you can approach improving grades within a class. An important part of this packet is that there are suggestions listed for both students and parents. It is our hope that this structure will help foster constructive conversations about learning and being a student, instead of discussions about point values and letter grades.

Definitions of the Three Categories

Assessments

In this category, students will be expected to demonstrate mastery of material, a concept, or a skill. For example, while a unit test is obviously an assessment; a creative writing essay may also be an assessment of a student's ability to use the conventions of writing in a multi-paragraph structure.

Some examples of some student work that may be categorized under Assessments are: tests, quizzes, oral presentations, and essays.

Projects

While this category could also be described as assessments; there is usually a larger, more in-depth, approach to projects than there is in assessments. In addition, the time line for projects is usually longer than standard assignments. Another component that may be included in projects is group work.

Some examples of some student work that may be categorized under Projects are: lab reports, research papers, and the creation of a reader diary.

Academic Practices

This category demonstrates a student's commitment and involvement in his or her own education. The goal of assignments within this category are to develop the academic, study, and self-motivation skills necessary to become an involved, active learner. Being a student takes more effort than just showing up to class and participating. These grades show teachers and parents, how much effort and investment students are putting forth to learn, and demonstrate their learning, on a daily basis.

Some examples of some student work that may be categorized under Academic Practices are: homework, participation, vocabulary, class work, check-ins, and do-now's.

What can we do to Improve Grades?

Our focus when creating these categories and moving forward with this new process was to help foster constructive conversations about learning between everyone involved at MVMS: Teachers, parents, and students. It is our hope that when you look at the portal to identify areas of improvement, you begin with the following suggestions for each category.

Improving Assessments

Student process:

1. Reach out to your teacher BEFORE the assessment
If you commit a homework club or two and meet with your teacher before that assessment, you will be able to review the concepts that are to be mastered before you will be tested on them
2. Complete the review sheet (if provided)
3. Create your own review process
Whether it be 3 x 5 flash cards, re-reading important passages, or being quizzed by a sibling or a parent; you need to find a way that helps you learn the material. Everyone learns differently, and you may have to experiment with a couple of different review activities until you find the one that works the best for you.
4. Read and follow the rubric (if provided).
For a non-test assessments such as a lab report or an essay, grading rubrics are typically provided. Make sure you read and follow these rubrics to address the specific criteria being assessed.
5. Do not procrastinate
When an assessment is listed on the assignment board, begin preparing for it that night. The more you review, the more prepared you will be.

Parent process:

1. Encourage your child to use his/her own voice
Encourage your child to set up time with the teacher to review for the assessment. Attending Homework Club to meet with teachers for 30 minutes after school can be very helpful in ensuring students are focused on what will be assessed.
2. Help foster study routines at home.
As the time for an assessment approaches, assist your child in identifying the most successful review strategy for their learning style.
3. Help create a quiet study place at home
Research demonstrates that creating an area for studying at home, and setting a routine around the use of that area is vital to a student's success. Research also shows that the location (kitchen/dining room table, bedroom desk, etc) is less important than the routine of setting aside one area for studying and then talking about what is to be done that night.

Improving Projects

Student Process:

1. Make sure you understand the timeline of the assignment
Many projects occur over a longer period of time, make sure you understand what is due on which dates. For example, in the process of writing a research

paper, you may have to turn in a list of sources, notes from those sources, a thesis statement, and/or a rough draft, all before you actually turn in the paper. When a teacher gives out those due dates, make sure you write them down in your assignment notebook, and post them somewhere at home too.

2. Create a rough draft

Never turn in a first draft. If your teacher does not require you to turn in a rough draft, have someone read your first attempt. You can approach a teacher, a parent, an older sibling, or a friend for feedback.

3. Read and follow the rubric (if provided).

For projects, there are often grading rubrics that come home. Make sure you read these rubrics to address the specific information being assessed.

4. Do not procrastinate

Do not wait for the due date to complete a portion of the project. Instead, we encourage you to create your own time line that moves up those due dates. By building in some extra time at home, you will be prepared for unforeseen delays.

Parent Process:

1. Assist your child by monitoring the time line.

Even though we are working on independence in middle school, we encourage parents to help keep track of due dates at home. Middle school students need to learn how to juggle their home and school lives. You are a vital model in this process.

2. Encourage and support independent research.

While you may know of some of great resources for your child's project, encourage your child to find their own resources first. Seeking out appropriate, valid, and informative sources is another great skill you can help support at home.

3. Help proofread the rough draft.

When you read a rough draft, while we encourage you to assist in checking for errors, we also want to make sure that the project turned in is a product of the student. Checking for grammar errors is different than re-writing an entire paragraph for your child. The most powerful statement while reading a rough draft is, "Read this out loud." Most students will notice their own mistakes when given the chance.

Improving Academic Practices

Student Process:

1. Meet with your teacher

If you are confused about an assignment, missed some time in class, or were absent from class, you need to attend a homework club to go over that material before you work on it by yourself.

2. Keep up with your assignment notebook

Writing down the assignments is easy, because most teachers remind you in class every day to write down the work due. However, checking them off at home, and completing the assignments on time is how you do well in this grading category.

3. Ask questions

Whether it is in class, after school, or at home, ask questions of adults if you do not understand something.

4. Do not procrastinate

If you have an assignment, do it as soon as possible so that the material and the requirement of the assignment are still fresh in your mind.

Parent Process:

1. Create a quiet study area.

As listed in the assessments section, set aside a location and a time to complete assignments and readings.

2. Monitor your child's assignment notebook

Go over the assignment notebook with your child *each day* to ensure that assignments are complete and on time.

3. Be a resource

When your child is confused by a reading or an assignment, do not hesitate to explain a concept or a process. While we encourage independence, we also encourage *active* learning. When a student asks a question, we either provide an answer, a hint of what the answer may be, or the location in which they can find the answer.