

Teach 4 the Heart Podcast Transcript

Episode 340—8 Best Grading Tips to Save Time

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Grading is important because we want to be accurate and fair and give our students good feedback, but at the same time, it can take forever. So today we want to talk about some time-saving strategies to help us grade well without taking so much time. Well, welcome back to the Teach 4 the Heart podcast, where we tackle teaching challenges from a biblical perspective. Why are we here? Because we don't believe that our spiritual walk and teaching profession should exist in two separate domains.

Rather, the hope we have in Christ should change how we approach everything, not just at home, but at school as well. So join us as we explore both the spiritual and practical sides of key teaching challenges, integrating them together so we can succeed at teaching, glorify God, and make a lasting difference in our students' hearts and lives. This episode is brought to you in partnership with the [Herzog Foundation](#). We also want to thank our sponsor, Dordt University. Has AI impacted your classroom?

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That'll take you right over to Dordt University's website where you can sign up for this free training. Well, once again, thank you for being with us. We are so excited to talk about some tips for saving time with grading. And when I think about this, one of the first things I think about when I think about time is just how we should desire to be good stewards of the time God has given us, right?

And you know, as a teacher, there's a lot to do. There are so many responsibilities that you have. And then you're not just a teacher, right? You have responsibilities at home, at church, in other relationships, other things that you are doing. And so we wanna be good stewards of the time God has given us. But we also, at the same time, it's very important, grading is important, right? We wanna give students fair assessments. We wanna be accurate in our grading.

And we also need to make sure students are getting good feedback on what they're doing well, where they need to improve. So today we wanna talk about how can we be excellent in grading? So we're not talking about shortcuts that are gonna make us less effective or make us not doing a good job. We wanna be excellent in grading for God's glory, but also stewarding our time well and freeing up some of the time that maybe I'm currently spending on grading to be used in other ways, either in or out of the classroom, where it can have a bigger impact.

So let's talk about eight ways to save time in grading. First tip I have, it's actually gonna sound a little bit counterintuitive, but I think it's important to start here. And that is number one, prioritize what is worth spending time on. Once again, a little counterintuitive to saving time. But this is important to start with thinking about when it comes to grading, what is worth spending our time on?

because there's certain times with grading where, yes, this takes long, but it's worth it. It's intentional, it's purposeful, it's what our students need either to be fair or accurate or to give them good feedback. And when we kind of recognize this is where I do wanna spend my time grading, that can actually give us the courage to cut time on things that aren't really as necessary. So I wanna encourage you to ask yourself, what is important in your subject, in your grade level, in the way you teach

What is important to properly assess students in your subject? What is worth a little bit of extra effort? I'll give you an example. When I taught middle school math, I felt that it was very vital to give partial credit. In other words, I didn't feel like it was right, least for the way I taught, to mark a problem. like I had to give a quiz. It might only have three problems on it. I didn't feel like that was fair.

to mark a problem completely wrong if the student did 90 % of the problem right and just added wrong at the end. I didn't feel like that was fair. I felt like I needed to give partial credit if they could show that they understood how the project worked and problem worked rather and just made a small error or if they had part. Anyhow, I felt that that was very important to give partial credit on tests and quizzes for math problems. Now, did that take longer to grade? Absolutely.

It would have been a lot faster to just be like, wrong, wrong, wrong. You you get a 33. But I did not feel like that was right or that was fair. And I didn't feel like that would be motivating to my students at all. And so I felt like this was worth my time to actually go through each problem, figure out where they went wrong and what percentage of the problem they got right and to give partial credit. That was very important to me. And so I said, I'm going to do that. It took longer to grade because of that, but it was okay because I cut time elsewhere. I was efficient in other places to make

Here's another example of something someone might decide is worth it. So, you know, writing class might say, okay, I don't need to everything the kids write, but there are certain papers, certain things that they write that I really need to grade super accurately, super carefully. I'm going to read these papers two or three times because it's this major project. really important. I need to grade them really carefully. Okay?

Those are just a couple examples and those are not prescriptive. In other words, I'm not telling you, you have to have the same ones as I did. But the idea is that there are certain things where we're intentionally saying this is important. It is worth it. And I think it's important to start there because once again, once we know that it kind of gives us the courage to save time other places to make time for what matters. So number one, and this is going to be different for everybody. What is worth spending time on in your class, in your grade? Number two,

Don't grade everything. This is so important. teachers fall into the trap of thinking I have to grade every piece of every paper we do. Obviously every test and quiz needs to be graded, but I have to grade every homework assignment. I have to grade every in-class assignment. And that's just not true. Our students need more practice than they need grades. They don't need a grade on every single thing. So what I recommend though strongly is have a policy in your classroom that anything you do could be graded.

but don't actually grade everything. By having a policy that everything can be graded, you keep that motivating factor. I don't think students are motivated primarily by that. You don't want that to be your only motivating factor, that's for sure. But if students know this is for sure not graded, that can sometimes be demotivating. So knowing anything we do could be graded helps them, know, encourage them to do their best and to work hard on everything. But then, like I said, you don't need to grade everything.

So, how do you know what to grade? Well, obviously, tests and quizzes need to be graded. Very important. Make sure you have enough each quarter. If you have one test in a quarter, that is not fair to students. That's going to be way too big of a percentage of their grades. Make sure you have enough tests and quizzes. But then for homework and classwork, you don't need to grade all of it. You really don't. I want to recommend choose assignments that are good reflections of students' mastery. Okay? So, for example,

If you give an assignment and it's something really tricky and half the kids are struggling with it and you're working on it, that's not the one to grade. Okay? Let the students figure it out. Pick the ones where you're like, okay, yeah, they should kind of have it by now. This is a good one to grade. So kind of you can be selective. I also typically didn't choose to collect and grade something when half the class was absent. Now didn't tell the students this, but I'm just choosing wisely which things I'm gonna choose to grade versus which things I'm not.

Here's a pro tip along with this. Pro tip, collect assignments even if you aren't taking them for the grade. In other words, if you do something in class or a homework assignment, you can say, pass it in, and you can take it right from your inbox and put it right in your outbox. You don't even have to look at it. Sometimes I go through and just put checks on them. Why am I recommending this? Well, it gives these students the impression that you are looking at it, that you do care, because you do care. But in other words, the fact that they're turning it in and then getting it back kind of

just gives them once again that impression that this is important, that this matters, that even, but they might not, it's not going in the grade book, it's not taking you any more time, but it does help just kind of, I don't know, I think it's discouraging sometimes for students that they do something and then it's like, well, they didn't even collect it. Or especially if they were to see you throw it in the trash, they would be like, my goodness, I worked so hard on that. So sometimes just simply collecting, even if you just turn it back in, once again gives that impression that this is important because it is important.

And sometimes they can get the wrong impression when we don't collect it. Hopefully that makes sense. Okay, so number one, prioritize what is worth spending time on. Number two, don't grade everything. Number three, don't correct everything. Here's what I'm saying. I've seen a lot of teachers that, let's say they're going over, they're grading a test, grading a quiz, and they will write in the correct answer for every wrong answer. Okay, that is very time consuming. Now listen, you may choose. Nope, that matters, I'm gonna do it.

But I don't recommend that. Here's why. Is feedback important for students? Yes. But this isn't necessarily a super helpful way to give feedback, especially if you're simply writing in the correct answers. Sometimes it's worth it if you want to give them little bit of explanation on an essay or something more complicated of why. But if you're simply writing in the correct answers, number one, if you really want them to have the correct answers, it would be better to have them go find them.

give them an assignment, give them five minutes in class, go look up all the ones you got wrong and find the right answer. That would probably be better for them to actually connect it. Because I think what happens a lot of times is you write in the correct answer and then students just throw away the paper or they don't pay attention to it. So there's not much learning going on by them just seeing the correct answer on the page. So it doesn't really do a lot and it takes a lot of your time. So once again, my recommendation is if you want them to have the right answer, have them find it themselves.

So number three, don't correct everything. Number four, use forms to give feedback quickly. I'm talking particularly here about bigger things like writing assignments, papers, or projects, where you wanna give students a lot of feedback on what they did well, what needed to be improved, why their grade was down. So rather than, this is my recommendation here, rather than having to write out a ton of things,

use either a rubric or a checklist grading sheet. So in other words, on this either rubric or checklist, you should list all the things you're looking for. And then you can simply, there's a lot of different ways to do it. When I did this, I like my key as it was, was I just circled what was poor, what needed improvement, and I put check marks or smiles next to everything that was really well done. In doing this, I gave a lot of feedback.

My students could easily see, these are all the things I did well. these are the things I didn't do well. was very easy for them to see that. I didn't have to write a lot of comments because all of my most common things I was looking for were right there on that checklist. So that can work really, really well. A couple of pro tips in this one. I really loved to use that same either checklist or rubric. I didn't use rubrics. I used the checklist. Use it as an editing checklist.

In other words, have the students go through your checklist and check their paper or project for those required elements. So you guys know those of you that do English or language arts, part of the writing process is you draft and then you edit, right? And sometimes I think students are like, I don't know what to edit. You say edit their paper and they don't know what to do with that. So by giving them a checklist of the things that you're looking for, you know, do you have a topic sentence?

Check for grammar. So if you have all these things listed out that you are looking for and you're going to grade them on, when they use that to edit, it helps improve their work. And then there's a very easy correlation then for them to see between what is being, what they're supposed to do and then how it's assessed. Okay. So, and then that also saves you time because they are kind of giving themselves

feedback, right? And it just works really well. One other bonus tip. This is a time saving tip in this regard.

I like to assign sometimes. I didn't do this when I was first starting out and it didn't work for every paper. But a lot of times I got to the point where I could grade holistically versus using a rubric. Here's what I mean by that. If you're experienced with grading, some people this won't work for. But sometimes you get to the point where you know a paper is A, B, C, D, you know that. And in that case,

It can be a waste of time if you're using a point rubric to try to get the numbers on the rubric to match the grade you think it should be. Sometimes you find yourself working backwards and spending a lot of time on the math that actually isn't necessary. Sometimes you know and you're being fair because you just know. You can tell what the grading should be. And so I actually did not like rubrics. I felt like as a math teacher, it just didn't work for me.

So I would grade holistically or if I wasn't sure and I was like, wanna make sure I'm being fair, going back to that checklist grading sheet, I would have a certain number of points for each thing I circled. So each thing that I circled as needing work would be a certain number of points off the grade or each. So I would use kind of just simple math in my head rather than trying to make the math of a rubric work out. That might be a little like personal pet peeve for me. I just hated rubrics.

So if it's working well for you, stick with it, but just a little bit of encouragement. If you find yourself fighting with rubrics and like they're driving you crazy, you don't have to use them. You can be very fair, like I said, with a checklist system or even grading holistically if you kind of have that skill level where you are able to do that. All right, so number four, use forums to give feedback quickly for papers, writing, and projects. Number five, batch your grading.

What I'm saying here is do the same kind of grading together because your brain gets into a rhythm and you'll naturally be more efficient. So one of the most obvious examples of this is when you're grading either a test or like a larger packet to grade one page at a time. So in other words, don't, let's say you have a three page test. Don't grade, you know, page one, two, three of student one, then page one, two, three of student two, then page one, two, three of student three. No, grade all the page ones.

then grade all the page twos, then grade all the page threes, because your mind just gets in this groove and it goes so much more quickly. Your brain sometimes even like holds the answers in your working memory, so you almost don't even need to look to the key. If you've never done that before, try it out. It

works so much more quickly. This can also work if you have like short answers or essay questions. You might even just do them one at a time. So you might grade like, even if they're on the same page, you might grade all of essay number one for every single student and then grade all of essay number two.

For the other students, this just helps keep the topic in your mind. Your brain isn't switching. Every time you have to switch, that takes time. So that can really, really help. Pro tip here with batching, have a student, before you turn things in, put them in alphabetical order. Put all the papers in alphabetical order before putting them in your inbox. Or go through and grab them, put them in alphabetical order. Or number order if you have numbers in your classroom.

and then have them, because that way even as you grade, you can just keep them in order and that makes them faster to put them in the grade book. All right, so number five was batch your grading. Number six, grade in small pockets of time. Now this almost seems like the opposite of batching because I'm definitely talking about switching here. But what I'm talking about here is redeeming little moments here and there that

aren't necessarily wasted, but aren't really used in your classroom. So here's what I mean. I found that I could get a ton of grading done simply by keeping a stack of grading handy and grabbing it whenever I had a few minutes. So for example, if students are working and I'm walking around the classroom just keeping an eye on them, I could have a stack of grading in my hand and just kind of be doing one here or there in between. I would still be batching in the fact that I would be doing the same thing.

So my mind wasn't getting in as good of a groove because I'm constantly being interrupted because I'm teaching, I'm doing things, I'm just using a minute here or there, but still nonetheless, I'm making progress. This obviously works best for papers that do not require concentration, just simple checking. So I would not grade essays during that time, not paper, nothing complicated, but just you know how it is. There's always that simple stuff that's just, I just gotta check through it real quick.

that works really well for just redeeming time. And I would typically find I could get quite a few things done just during the day in those few minutes here, few minutes there, and then my stack was smaller when I sat down to grade later. So number six, grade in those small pockets of time that you have throughout the day. And then number seven, schedule grading retreats. Okay, once again, this is an opposite. So we have a lot of tips that almost like compliment each other by being opposite of each other. That's how this one works.

So schedule grading retreats is almost the opposite. This, and once again, not contradictory, it works together. So here, this is what you wanna do when, so the last tip was, you know, use all the tiny pieces. This tip is schedule a block of time to really focus on grading. This is really useful a few times. I'm not necessarily saying do this every week or do this super regularly. This is more for when you're either behind, you say, man, I am behind, I need to get caught up.

Or you anticipate a lot of grading being needed. So might say, it's exam week. Or sometimes you have those tests all at the end of the quarter. my goodness, I'm gonna have five tests I have to grade this week. Or, okay, everyone just turned in their big project or their research paper. I have to grade a lot. So you might plan a block of time to just grade. And that can be so valuable to help you get caught up. It also is so stress relieving to know you have a grading block.

coming up because rather than being like, when am gonna get to these papers? Your mind knows, okay, Thursday evening, I'm gonna be able to take care of all of this. And so it frees up your stress and able to focus on other things until you get to the grading block. So couple pro tips to make this amazingly effective. Number one, go somewhere you will not be interrupted. So if that's your classroom, great. But if you know, if I'm in my classroom, I'm gonna keep have people coming in.

You might say, I'm going to go off campus. I'm going to go to a coffee shop. I'm going to go to Panera Bread or I'm going to go to the library. Go somewhere where you know you won't be interrupted. Pro tip number two, if you really want to maximize your time, schedule it in a way that redeems time you wouldn't normally have. In other words, consider time outside of when you'd normally work and during times when you'd normally maybe even have other responsibilities.

For example, let's say you normally come home from school at around four o'clock and you do work around the house. So if you have kids, maybe you're helping them with their homework. If you don't, maybe you're exercising or getting things ready around the house. Maybe you make dinner, you clean up dinner, and things don't really calm down, you might sit down to work at like seven or eight o'clock at night. But that time between four and seven is all on household things. Well, you might say, okay, what I'm gonna do instead is I'm gonna go to the library. I'm gonna go to Panera Bread and I'm gonna work

from four o'clock to eight p.m. And I'll just take a little tiny break for dinner in there. And then I'm gonna come home and I've redeemed all that time that I would have normally been using to make dinner, to cook dinner, to clean dinner up, to do little things around the house or to spend some time

with my family. Instead, I'm gonna do that. If you have a family, say, well, I can't do that. Yes, you can. If you have a spouse or a partner or a mom or dad or someone that could help, say, hey, can they go over to your house for dinner? Or, you know, hey,

Hubby, can you pick up pizza and just take care of that for the night? Okay, once again, remember, this is not something you're doing all the time. So because you're not doing this all the time, it is absolutely reasonable to say, hey, I'm doing something out of the routine, I'm doing something different so that I can redeem this time and really get either caught up or get this big thing off my plate rather than it eating away at my time for weeks on end or stressing me out for weeks on end. So that can be really, really valuable.

to try, I encourage you to try it. Redeeming that time feels so good. And then just, you can get so much done when you have no one in to interrupt you and you're just able to focus for a few hours. It's really incredible. So number seven was schedule grading retreats. Finally, number eight, have students self grade. Now obviously depending on the age of your students and your school environment, this may work better for some than others. But when you can, have students grade papers for you.

This is especially good for practice or formative assessments that you're not actually taking for a grade. So remember we said we don't have to grade everything, but you can still go over it in class and have students grade it. You can even have them grade it and turn it in and then just give it back to them. So you can have students, once again, self-grade. If it's allowable in your school, you can also have students exchange in grade for smaller assignments. I really did this a lot. I didn't like having students grade their own paper if it was going to be counted for a grade because I felt like that was

just inviting cheating and I didn't want to put that pressure on them. But I'd have students exchange and grade each other's papers. And that saved so much time because when I got it, I still looked it over, but it was mostly already graded. So I would use that with small things, homework assignments, classwork assignments, sometimes quizzes. So it depends what you're comfortable with and what your school is comfortable with. But if you're able to do that, that can be super, super good. Pro tip for grading in class. If you grade in class and have students grade each other's papers,

Do not take grading questions. It will waste so much class time if students can ask, well, what if it's spelled wrong? What if they have this instead? What if they forgot the comma? You will waste so much time. So what we did was I trained students to put a, if they have a grading question, in other words, if they don't know if it's right or wrong, put a question mark at the top of the page and put a question

mark by that one. Because when you are on your own, you'll be able to check it right or wrong super quickly.

When you're in the spotlight in front of all 20 eyes on you asking if it's right or wrong, not only are you wasting time, sometimes you get put on the spot. It's just not ideal. So yeah, question mark at the top and buy the question that they have. And then when you grade them and actually putting the grade and putting them in the grade book, it's super easy to just do those really, really quick. All right, let's review real quick our eight time saving practices for grading. Number one, prioritize what is worth spending time on. Number two, don't grade everything. Number three, don't.

feel like you need to put correct answers on everything. Number four, use forms to give feedback quickly, particularly for papers and projects. Number five, batch grading by doing the same type of thing together. Number six, grade in small pockets of time. Number seven, schedule grading retreats. And number eight, have students self-grade when possible. I hope these tips were helpful for you. If you would like more time-saving advice and tips, we encourage you to check out our free training

five time-saving practices to stop feeling overwhelmed. You can sign up for that training. It's absolutely free at [teach4theheart.com / save time](https://teach4theheart.com/save-time). Well, I hope that you've enjoyed this episode. If so, if you would like, subscribe, review, share the episode, all those things really are super helpful to help more teachers find this podcast.

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