

# Grading System for Schools

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## Abstract

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*Reforms in the examination system are often recommended, sometimes discussed and rarely implemented. Introduction of Grading System in Assessment is one of such reforms which have undergone a painful journey. Very few state education boards have attempted to declare results in terms of grades in some or other form. CBSE is on the threshold of replacing marks by grades for Class IX in 2010 and Class X board examination in 2011. Therefore, a detailed picture about grades, usefulness of different types of grading scales and their implications are presented in this paper for better understanding and acceptability by this reform.*

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The Reforms in the examination is one of the important areas in which all Committees and Commissions on Education had made number of recommendations. The reforms were once again revisited in National Curriculum Framework (NCF) – 2005. The Position Paper on Examination Reforms has reiterated number of reforms such as introduction of the grading system, implementation of the school based continuous and comprehensive evaluation, use of multiple techniques of testing, online and on-demand examinations, abolishing pass/fail declaration etc. Since National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986, the issue of grading system has been discussed and debated up to a number of times in

the National Conferences of the Chairpersons of the Boards of School Education. Some of the boards have attempted to introduce grading system both in scholastic and other areas like arts, health and physical education etc. The examples can be cited of Central Board of Secondary Education and Kerala Board of Public Examination, Goa Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education, Haryana Board of School Education. All these boards don't have a uniform system of grading as each one is doing in its own way. In spite of that, the unreliable raw marks still continue to dominate the examination results which promote unhealthy competition among the children (even among parents) at different stages of

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school education. Different systems of grading are used in developed countries to classify and certify students' performance.

### **The Grading System**

The 'word grade' is derived from the Latin word *gradus* where it means 'step'. Grading is a process wherein subjects may be classified on the basis of pre-defined standards and aimed at minimising misclassification. In educational context, grading is essentially a method of communicating measurements of students' achievement. It involves the use of a set of symbols or numerals that ought to be clearly defined and uniformly understood by the students, teachers, parents and all other stakeholders. The absence of either of these will defeat the very purpose of awarding grades.

To measure achievement in terms of exact numbers like 50 or 51 is difficult though we accept these raw scores as true scores. Therefore, a better way of classifying and certifying students into different classes and categories is to put them into certain ranges or bands or grades. Therefore, students of similar ability will be put in a one group known as a grade. Thus the entire 101 point scale from 0 to 100 marks can be divided into 5 point or 7 point or 9 point scale depending upon our requirement. For example all students having marks between 91-100 can be awarded grade A and those from 81 upto 91 can be awarded grade B and so on. In this way the mis-classification of students will be minimised over a large range of marks but it will remain at the cut off points of

each grade. The score at the cut off points can be re-examined and if possible the benefit can be passed on to the students by awarding a higher grade if the experts feel so. To enhance the usefulness of these grades for the purpose of awarding merit scholarships or admissions to other higher classes etc., each grade can be assigned in numerical value such as 9 for grade 'A', 8 for grade 'B' and so on which can be used to determine the Grade Point Average (GPA).

While developing the grading system it is of utmost significance that the meaning of each grade is clearly spelt out. Having done so, it becomes obligatory on the part of each examiner to adhere to the specified system of grading. This would, however, in no way encroach upon the autonomy of the examiner to determine which grade to award to a particular student. A properly introduced grading system may not only provide for the comparison of students' performance, but also indicate the quality of performance with respect to amount of efforts put in and the amount of knowledge acquired at the end of the course.

### **Methods of Assigning Grades**

Grading may be carried out in a variety of ways. The classification depends upon the reference point. When the reference point is the 'approach', grading may be classified as direct grading and indirect grading. When the reference point is the 'standard of judgement', the grading may be classified as absolute grading and relative grading.

### **Direct Grading**

In direct grading, the performance exhibited by the examinees is assessed in qualitative terms and the impression so obtained by the examiner is directly expressed in terms of letter grades. This method may profitably be exploited for the assessment of both cognitive and non-cognitive learning outcomes; however, it is preferred for the assessment of non-cognitive learning outcomes. It is suggested that non-cognitive factors that are important should be enumerated stagewise and evaluated and reported separately in terms of letter grades. Employability of a three-point or a five-point scale for grading may be determined in consonance with the nature and the quality of the attribute. One of the advantages of direct grading is that it minimises the inter-examiner variability. Besides, it is easier to use in comparison of other methods. Direct grading, however, is devoid of transparency and diagnostic value.

### **Indirect Grading**

In this method the performance displayed by the examinees is first assessed in terms of marks and subsequently converted into grades by using different methods. The transformation of marks into grades may be carried out in terms of both absolute and relative standards using absolute and relative grading procedures. Each of these procedures, have merits and demerits.

### **Absolute Grading**

This type of grading is based on a pre-determined standard that becomes a

reference point for assessment of students' performance. It involves direct conversion of marks into grades irrespective of the distribution of marks in a subject. It is just like classification of the students into five divisions namely, distinction, first division, second division, third division and unsatisfactory. The present system of classification as given under is an example of absolute grading which is arbitrary and unscientific.

75% and above	Distinction
60% - less than 75%	First Division
45% - less than 60%	Second Division
33% - less than 45%	Third Division
Below 33%	Unsatisfactory

It is possible to divide the absolute marks into any number of categories/grades. In absolute grading the range of marks for each grade is fixed and may be the same for different subjects, however the grades so awarded may not be comparable, for the marks themselves are not comparable. The range of grades may or may not be of equal width. As the distribution of marks varies from subject to subject and from year to year for a given subject, the number of students placed in different grades will also differ from subject to subject and from year to year.

Another example of a point absolute grading which is better classification is given below:

This method of grading has got several advantages. The procedure is simple and straight-forward to use. Meaning of each grade is understandable and easy for the teacher to use it. Since the classification of grades is pre-announced, each student has the freedom to strive for the

S.No.	Letter Grade	Range of Marks	Description
1.	A	91% and above	Outstanding
2.	B	81% to less than 91%	Excellent
3.	C	71% to less than 81%	Very Good
4.	D	61% to less than 71%	Good
5.	E	51% to less than 61%	Above Average
6.	F	41% to less than 51%	Average
7.	G	31% to less than 41%	Below Average
8.	H	21% to less than 31%	Marginal
9.	I	Below 21%	Unsatisfactory

attainment of the highest possible grade. In this method, the criterion being the focal point, it enables the students to know their strengths and weaknesses serving the diagnostic purpose.

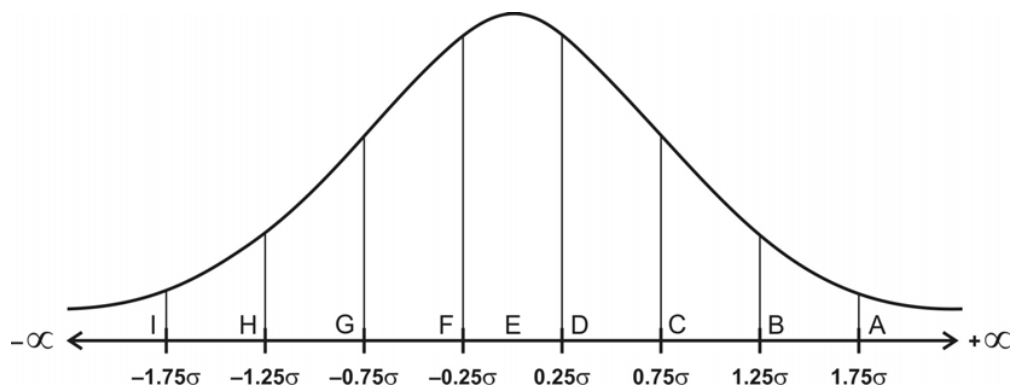
One of the limitations of this method is that the distribution of scores is taken on its face value regardless of the errors of measurement crept in due to various types of subjectivity. Another limitation is that the cut-offs for different categories/grades decided arbitrarily still remains a source of misclassification. Finally there may be subjects in which nobody gets grade 'A' due to nature of the subject or even lower one's i.e. G, H, I etc. due to large weightage to practical as in Music, Agriculture, Drawing subject etc.

### **Relative Grading**

This type of grading is popularly known as 'grading on the curve'. The curve refers to the normal distribution curve or some symmetric variant of it. The shape of this curve depends upon a number of factors and thus may assume any form varying from positively skewed curve to negatively skewed curve. In the

event of the application of relative grading method the actual distribution curve is transformed into a normal curve. Conversion of obtained curve into a normal curve stems from the premise that there is always a difference between the true level of achievement and the perceived level of achievement that is captured through the tests. The true level of achievement is expected to be normally distributed regardless of curricular areas for a larger population. A normal curve allows us to categorise the students' scores into any desired number of grades in a scientific manner. For a nine-point grading system, we may simply divide the entire measurement scale into nine equal parts. In this case the grade values will range from 1 to 9 with a mean of 5 and a standard deviation of approximately 2 units.

It may be pertinent to mention here that while classifying students' performance into nine categories using stanine scale, two tail categories at the either end of the distribution are combined so as to make nine categories instead of eleven.



In such a situation the grade wise distribution of students would be as:

S.No.	Letter Grade	Interval	% of Students	Grade Value
1.	A	1.75 s to ∞	4%	9
2.	B	1.25 s to 1.75 s	7%	8
3.	C	0.75 s to 1.25 s	12%	7
4.	D	0.25 s to 0.75 s	17%	6
5.	E	-0.25 s to 0.25 s	20%	5
6.	F	-0.75 s to -0.25 s	17%	4
7.	G	-1.25 s to -0.75 s	12%	3
8.	H	-1.75 s to -1.25 s	7%	2
9.	I	- ∞ to -1.75 s	4%	1

Should one decide to use a seven-point grade system instead of the nine-point grade system, the measurement scale may be divided into seven equal parts. Further, if someone wishes to still reduce the number of ability ranges from 7 to 5, the measurement scale may be divided into five equal parts. In this case, the grade values will range from 1 to 5 with a mean of 3 and a standard deviation of approximately 1 unit. The grade-wise distribution in this case would be as given below:

The method of 'grading on the curve' will have the following positive features:

- The pass/fail terminology will be completely eliminated as the performance of individual students will be rated in terms of grades and no grade will signify the failure of students.
- Grades so awarded will indicate the relative position of the individual student vis-à-vis his/her group and thus serve better purpose of certification.

S.No.	Letter Grade	Interval	No. of Cases	Grade Value
1.	A	1.5 s to $\infty$	7%	5
2.	B	0.5 s to 1.5 $\infty$	24%	4
3.	C	-0.5 s to 0.5 $\infty$	38%	3
4.	D	- 1.5 s to -0.5 $\infty$	24%	2
5.	E	- $\infty$ to -1.5 $\infty$	7%	1

- Grades will provide for comparability across the curricular areas and years because the normal distribution ensures the uniformity in spread of scores regardless of the nature of curricular areas and other factors like test difficulty etc.
- Grades may fruitfully be used for recording the growth and development of individual students.
- Grades will provide for meaningful additivity without distorting the scale of measurement for calculating Grade Point Average (GPA).
- Undue importance attached to raw scores will be considerably reduced.

The limitation of this method is that some bottom students in spite of having scored even 50% or 60% marks will still get the lowest grade in some subjects particularly having practicals or vocational subjects.

### CBSE Initiatives

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF)-2005 has recommended the use of different scales at different stages of school education. Accordingly the 3, point absolute scale at the primary stage 5 point absolute scale at upper primary stage and 9 point absolute scale at the secondary stage is appropriate and

should be used. For the public examination at Class X and XII a 9 point relative grading has been recommended as the number of students is very large and both absolute and relative positions within a group is more meaningful information. As a follow-up of NCF-2005, NCERT, has debated and advocated the use of grades in place of marks number of times. Now appropriate environment in favour of grading system in the country is built up. CBSE is planning to introduce 9-point Absolute Grading System in place of marks in Class IX this year (2009-10) and Class X in (2010-11) in all schools affiliated to it. The proposed model for Class IX is as follow-

The nomenclature of letter grades will be A1, A2, B1, B2..... E1 and E2. Each grade have descriptors such as Exceptional, Excellent..... These grades can be applicable to all subjects and to all areas i.e. scholastic and non-scholastic of development both for formative and summative evaluation. For Class X we need to use relative grades rather than absolute grades as the number of students is quite large. The measure will help in better interpretation of results, and will also reducing stress and unhealthy competition for raw, false marks. Let everybody concerned understand the process and improve if further.

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Grade point</i>	<i>Marks range</i>	<i>Descriptors</i>
A1	9	91-100	Exceptional
A2	8	81-90	Excellent
B1	7	71-80	Very Good
B2	6	61-70	Good
C1	5	51-60	Fair
C2	4	41-50	Average
D	3	33-40	Below Average
E1	2	21-32	Needs Improvement
E2	1	Less than 21	Unsatisfactory

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