

# The Innovative Instructor

Topic Focus

Topic: Assessment Strategies

## Calibrating Graders

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### What this is

*The Innovative Instructor* is an article series (<https://cer.jhu.edu/ii>) and a blog (<http://ii.library.jhu.edu>) related to teaching excellence at Johns Hopkins

This article is a part of a collection that focuses on a specific topic listing strategies and resources to explore

### Article categories

#### Best Practice

How to use technologies and apply innovative instructional methods

#### Pedagogy

Hopkins professors share successful strategies for teaching excellence

#### Technology

Information about emerging technologies, who is using them and why you should know

For information on how to contribute to *The Innovative Instructor* or to read archived articles please visit: <https://cer.jhu.edu/ii> or email: [cerweb@jhu.edu](mailto:cerweb@jhu.edu)

### About the CER

The Center for Educational Resources partners with faculty, postdocs, and graduate students to extend instructional impact by connecting innovative teaching strategies and instructional technologies

Center for  
**Educational  
Resources**



### What it is

The purpose of calibration is to ensure that multiple instructors evaluate student work consistently, especially across sections when multiple graders are involved. The calibration process increases the accuracy and reliability of the assessment data. Rubrics, which communicate detailed assignment requirements and criteria to students, are a tool used by graders to help calibrate the grading. Commonly, graders come together and grade several assignment submissions (using a rubric) and discuss their ratings until differences are minimized.

### Challenges

#### Increased lead time

- Work required upfront for instructors to create clear, comprehensive rubrics for each assignment.
- Finding time for calibration exercises before formal grading begins.

#### Consistency issues

- Lack of consistency among graders.

### Solutions to consider

#### Educational applications

- Explore technology options available to assist with rubric creation and use.

#### Lead by example

- Provide examples of graded work for graders to model.

#### Meet often

- Schedule regular meetings with graders to provide feedback.

### Who is using it

Dr. Laura Foster, former JHU Public Health Studies instructor, uses rubrics extensively to calibrate grades and cites several benefits:

- Streamlines grading process and keeps grades consistent
- Helps clarify (for herself and graders) the most important points in grading
- Can be used to evaluate qualitative and quantitative elements
- Empowers students by letting them know what criteria will be used in evaluating their work

Reid Mumford, coordinator for the JHU General Physics labs, uses a more involved process to calibrate the grades of 600-700 students each semester. In addition to creating and using rubrics, he downloads lab assignment grades each week from Blackboard and creates a plot showing average scores. As outliers are identified, Mr. Mumford meets with those graders in an attempt to align these grades with others. He also looks for grading trends by section and works with graders to standardize any that look to be graded more harshly or leniently than others (Hall, 2017). He acknowledges that calibrating grades is not easy and can be a significant time investment (especially with large numbers of students) but is essential to keeping grades as fair and consistent as possible.

### Further reading

Dr. Foster and Mr. Mumford's experience calibrating grades are described on the Innovative Instructor blog: <https://ii.library.jhu.edu/2017/12/28/lunch-and-learn-creating-rubrics-and-calibrating-multiple-graders>

Faculty and teaching assistants teaching Introduction to Sociology at JHU calibrate their ratings before formally grading. Their methods are described in an Innovative Instructor quickguide: [https://cer.jhu.edu/files/InnovInstruct-BP\\_CalibratingGraders.pdf](https://cer.jhu.edu/files/InnovInstruct-BP_CalibratingGraders.pdf)