

Contracts in the classroom

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While contracts are an indispensable tool in the modern workplace, a new study has found that they may also be very effective in contemporary classrooms. According to a new article published in *SAGE Open*, courses in which students design their own course based on a contract lead to both higher grades and higher student satisfaction than traditional points-based courses.

The article, "Use of Contract Grading to Improve [Grades](#) among College Freshmen in Introductory Psychology," details this study. Researchers Dana Lindemann and Colin Harbke assigned a total of 40 college freshmen enrolled in one introductory psychology course to a traditional or contract grading system. Those assigned to the contract system signed a contract at the beginning of the semester in which they indicated what grade they were aiming to receive and specified which assignments they would complete to receive that grade. [Students](#) who wanted to receive a better grade had to complete more assignments and receive a higher [score](#) on exams than those aiming for a lower grade.

Though the instructor and course materials were identical for both sections, at the end of the semester, the group of students who were graded contractually were three times more likely to earn an A grade, one third as likely to fail or withdraw from the course, perceived a higher degree of control over their grade, and consistently rated their own effort, their instructor, and the course overall more favorably.

"Students indicated higher ratings for working hard for their grade, enjoying the course format, and for enhancing independent thinking,"

wrote the authors. "Contract graded students may be more motivated to perform well."

For the students assigned to the contract-grading system, the course instructor implemented components into the course structure which are unique to a contractually-graded course, unbeknownst to the other students in the classroom. These components included allowing students to choose their coursework from a variety of assignments, grading their exams and assignments as pass or fail, requiring that each student master 85% of the material to receive a passing grade, and allowing students to resubmit their assignments one time in order to receive a passing grade.

Lindemann and Harbke continued, "When assignments are graded pass or fail, emphasis is placed on mastery of the material, as opposed to gaining a partial understanding of the material."

Provided by SAGE Publications

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