



Frequently Asked Questions

Common questions about the Wasatch Academy Assessment Policy

- **Why is Wasatch Academy moving away from traditional grading?**
 - *The traditional A-F grading system discounts 60% of student learning and is based on an arbitrary scale. We are transitioning to a new grading system that clearly communicates to students what they have mastered and what they need to improve upon.*
- **How are competency-based grades reported on a transcript for colleges and universities? How will Wasatch Academy translate from a proficiency scale to a GPA or a letter grade?**
 - *At present, a Wasatch student's transcript uses traditional grades and GPA. We are actively thinking about this problem of translating our proficiency scales into a meaningful and holistic summary. We are in conversation with colleges admissions officers and other competency-based high schools to follow best practice with our future transcripts.*
- **If "Habits of Work" are not factored into grades, won't grades be uniformly lower among high achieving students? How will colleges and universities interpret these lower grades?**
 - *College admissions offices are becoming increasingly familiar with non-traditional grading systems, including the competency-based approach.*
 - *Our college counselors at WA will play an important role in communicating the changes in our grading system to colleges. They will elaborate on our grading system in the profile of our school that they provide to colleges.*
- **If a student does not perform well on tests, their summative scores may be low. How can a student demonstrate achievement?**
 - *Students learn in different ways, and consequently may demonstrate their learning in different ways. Teachers typically give students several different options to showcase their achievement. For a student to demonstrate their mastery of a standard, assessment options may include written exams, oral presentations, performances, or projects. If a student does not typically perform well on exams, we encourage them to suggest an alternative method of assessment by which they feel they can demonstrate mastery. Each student will have access to a redo form for each class, which allows them to communicate to teachers that they would like a second chance to be assessed and suggest a different form of assessment if desired.*
 - *As we transition into competency-based education, there will be less of a distinction between formative and summative work. Instead, the emphasis will be placed on demonstrations and artifacts of learning. Each artifact will then be viewed as a piece of mounting evidence towards a student's mastery of a content standard. In turn, proficiency scales act as the ruler by which artifacts of learning are assessed for mastery.*



- **In a traditional setting, if a student puts abundant effort into their formative work (homework and classroom activities), they are rewarded with high academic grades. How are students rewarded for their effort and hard-work in a competency-based system?**
 - *Competency-based education is designed with growth and learning in mind. Unlike the traditional system, a student has many opportunities to demonstrate their learning. Effort and hard-work are implicitly rewarded insofar as these attributes help a student master the content standards.*
- **How are Habits of Work grades included on a transcript?**
 - *At present, HOW grades are not included on a transcript. However, habits of work are often still communicated in a college application through letters of recommendation.*
- **Why are formative grades not included in GPA? Why should students do them if they do not factor into the final grades that are sent to colleges?**
 - *Formative grades are not included in GPA because they offer students the opportunity to practice and learn the essential skills that will be demonstrated in summative assessments. It is okay for a student to fail formative work since it will show them what they need to learn and improve upon. Students should do formative work because it will help them accomplish learning targets and prepare them for summative assessments.*
- **How do teachers avoid “covering standards” as opposed to fostering real learning?**
 - *Teachers at WA take a backwards approach to designing their curricula. Instead of viewing a course as a set of discrete learning targets, teachers instead think about enduring understandings and essential questions in designing their content. After arriving at the big ideas, teachers then consider specific sets of skills which students will need to master in order to gain understanding of the overarching concepts. Knowledge and skills that our students learn and demonstrate are aligned with the bigger picture, and standards are prioritized based on this alignment.*
- **Are students required to demonstrate mastery of prioritized standards? If a student arrives at Wasatch Academy late in their high school career, are they expected to have mastered the entire curriculum before they graduate?**
 - *Ultimately, it is the teacher’s responsibility to assess and determine a student’s level of mastery. The expectation is never that new students have to “make up” all the work they have missed. We seek demonstration of learning of the prioritized standards and not a certain number of assignments and assessments. We are actively working on making our prioritized standards explicit, and crafting policy regarding student mastery of prioritized standards.*
- **Why allow unlimited retakes of assessments? Isn’t this unfair to students who do well on their first attempt?**
 - *Distinct students have different learning styles and learning speeds. Students have a wide variety of test-taking strengths and weaknesses, and students are*



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encouraged to show mastery in a way which suits their learning. Occasionally, a student is prepared for an assessment may have an off-day, and fail to accurately demonstrate their ability. Allowing students to re-do assessments really does benefit all students. Students who have shown mastery on an assessment the first time around are not expected to re-do it later on.

- **As part of their college application, students are often required to submit standardized tests scores (SAT, ACT, TOEFL, AP tests). Isn't the Wasatch Academy re-do policy too lenient as students prepare for important standardized tests?**
 - *Our re-do policy allows students to master academic content that will help them succeed on standardized tests, which otherwise might be rushed through. Additionally, many students take and retake standardized tests several times.*
- **If multiple assessment options are offered to students, how do teachers ensure that each student is fairly graded?**
 - *In competency-based education, all assessments are designed with specific standards and learning targets in mind. Teachers design multiple different methods of assessment that test the same learning targets, creating a fair educational experience for all students.*