

## Assignment Reassessment, Grade and Standing Appeals

[Policy 134: Undergraduate Academic Consideration and Appeals](#), is a Senate policy that addresses undergraduate student requests for an assignment to be re-evaluated/reassessed; and grade or standing appeals. Please note that, although the undergraduate policy and the [graduate policy](#) are quite similar with respect to procedures, they do differ with respect to where requests for reassessment or appeals are filed.

The undergraduate policy is 25 single-spaced pages, and is a complex document to navigate and follow. Below, a number of key points are highlighted.

First, the policy clearly states that the “Academic Appeals process reflects decision-making in an academic environment and, as such, cannot be equated to decision-making in a judicial system. The principles of natural justice and fairness will apply to all decisions made.” The policy also clearly states that students and faculty have a responsibility to attempt to resolve all course-related issues as soon as they arise, and then, if necessary, with the Chair/Director of the teaching Department/School. The policy emphasizes that course related concerns should, whenever possible, be dealt with informally and at the lowest possible level in the university structure. That said, the policy also clearly states that if students are not comfortable approaching their instructor, they can bring their concern to the Chair/Director. Further, the General Regulations (section 1A), state clearly that “It is the instructor’s responsibility to respond in a timely fashion when students raise grading and course management issues.” Again, the goal is for this not to be adversarial, and to give all parties opportunities to reconcile concerns through discussion. However, in the event that this cannot be done, the policy is intended to provide clarity to students and instructors about how the process should evolve.

### **[Assignment] Grade Reassessment**

The most common situation is one in which a student disagrees with the assessment of their work. In the policy, this is called a **Grade Reassessment** (section IC1): this is a situation where a student believes that an assignment, text or exam, either in whole or in part, has not been appropriately graded, or that there has been a miscalculation of a grade due to an omission, improper addition etc. No matter what the concern, a few key elements of the policy are:

- a) Students must contact the instructor to resolve the issue within ten (10) working/business days of the date when the work is returned to the class. In cases where a Graduate Assistant (GA) graded the work, instructors should clearly explain whether the concern is to be raised first with the GA, or directly with the instructor. In the event that the student, out of fear or nervousness, is not comfortable bringing this matter to the attention of the GA or the instructor, they can submit their appeal directly to the Chair/Director of the teaching department.
- b) Students can be asked to submit a written request for regrading, stating why the work warrants a higher grade. [It is a good practice to include, in course outline or website, a clear explanation of this process, and to required students to submit in writing the reasons that they believe the assessment to be incorrect (see below).]
- c) Instructors **must respond to the student within five (5) working days of receipt of the request for reassessment** [there are provisions for this to be longer if it is at the end of the semester].

- d) Re-grading can result in the grade staying the same, going up, or going down.
- e) Some course work (e.g., presentations) does not lend itself to re-evaluation and thus may not be reassessed.

If a student remains dissatisfied after the instructor reviews, reassesses and explains the rationale for the grade, Policy 134 does provide for students to request formal regrading of their work by a 'third party' - someone other than the instructor. This is permitted when:

- a) a student does not accept the instructor's re-grading after the instructor has provided a rationale/explanation;
- b) the instructor does not respond to the student at all or within 5 days; or
- c) the student does not feel they can discuss the matter with the instructor for any number of reasons.

In these cases, the next step in the assignment *grade reassessment* process is that the student must submit reasons, in writing, to the Chair/Director, as to why the original grade and, if applicable, the instructor's revised grade, was inappropriate, based on evidence from the course outline, course notes, textbooks etc. A request for *grade reassessment* will not be accepted if the rationale is not based on the merit of the work. A student can only appeal a denial of grade reassessment if the student identifies a procedural error in the re-grading process, in which case the appeal would then move to the Faculty level as an appeal owing to a procedural error. If the request for reassessment is accepted, the Chair/Director will:

- a) Review the appeal, and discuss the appeal with the student and with the instructor to gain both perspectives;
- b) Consult with the Departmental Appeals Committee members as needed to consider the case and to identify appropriate individuals who can objectively re-evaluate the assignment/test;
- c) Request a clean original copy of the assignment/test without instructor notes if re-evaluation is undertaken;
- d) Communicate to both the student and the instructor, with rationale, the outcome of the assignment grade reassessment [Note that the grade on the assignment can go up, down, or stay the same];
- e) Request that the instructor recalculate course grades as needed, to incorporate the reassessed assignment grade.

Senate policy vests authority over Department appeals with the Chair/Director, or his designate. That said, it is hoped that instructors will, as experts in their areas of instruction, provide clear guidelines for assignments and test evaluation, and discuss clearly their grading rationale with students, so that Departmental reassessment will be rare. Nonetheless, policy 134 does provide students with these rights and everyone must understand them. Students should know their rights, and indeed they are explained in the Student Handbooks on the Department website. Respect for instructor expertise and autonomy is not antithetical to students' having access to a process to request for grade reassessment when the rationale for the request has merit.

Instructors are encouraged to relay to their students, via syllabi and course websites, the following points about *grade reassessment*:

1. [Senate Policy 134](#) provides information about grade reassessment, as well as about grade and standing appeals.
2. A request to discuss any assigned grade (whether test or assignment), and to have it re-evaluated, must be made within 10 working days of the receipt of the assignment.
3. Any request for reassessment should be made in writing, by email. Oral requests are acceptable but email is encouraged to keep a record of the request. [Instructors are encouraged to also use email to communicate all decisions].
4. A time will be arranged to meet to discuss the assignment/test if desired, otherwise, a formal request for reassessment by email can be submitted.
5. When a formal request for reassessment of an assignment/test is submitted, the initial grade on the assignment/test becomes void and the new grade can stay the same, go down, or go up.

6. A request for reassessment should be accompanied by a clear explanation of the grade is thought to be incorrect or inaccurate, particularly providing details about what seems to have been missed in the initial assessment.
7. A decision will be communicated by email or in person within five working days of receipt of the reassessment request.
8. A request for reassessment is not intended to be adversarial, however, the request can be made to the Chair of the Department if there is discomfort in speaking to the instructor.
9. If, after reassessment by the instructor, dissatisfaction remains, a request for reassessment can be submitted to the Chair of the Department of Politics and Public Administration, who will review your case, and decide on its merit.

### ***Grade or Standing Appeals***

Grade and Standing (meaning the student's academic standing in the university) appeals do not normally involve instructors, but when they do, it usually involves the Chair and/or Appeals Committee seeking information and clarification about the situation with the instructor. Again, Policy 134 expects that concerns about course grades and standing will be resolved informally with the instructor or Chair (see Section II of the policy) whenever possible and before a formal appeal is submitted. But when this is not possible, students can file a Grade or Standing Appeal (sometimes both, in which case the course Grade appeal will be handled first and then the Standing appeal).

There are four grounds for (course) grade and standing appeals:

- 1) medical reasons;
- 2) compassionate reasons;
- 3) prejudice; and
- 4) procedural error.

Course management may also be considered as a grounds for a Grade appeal but not a Standing appeal. See explanations in section IIA1-5, pages 6-7 in the Policy. Grade and Standing Appeals are submitted directly to the Department Chair. In these cases, students will be required to submit documentation. The Chair, in working with the Appeal Committee, will consult with the student and the instructor to seek clarification on the situation. The exception to this procedure is if the ground of appeal is cited as prejudice, which are limited to grounds defined by the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. Students who believe their grade has been adversely affected by another form of personal bias or unfair treatment will be told to appeal under the grounds of Course Management. If a student files an appeal on the grounds of prejudice, students must submit a copy to, and consult with, the Human Rights Office (Ryerson). That Office will do an assessment and make a recommendation to the Chair before the appeal will proceed.

Grade and Standing Appeals are first reviewed by the Chair, in consultation with the Appeals Committee. Grade Appeals for Chang School courses that are the responsibility of the Department will normally be submitted to the Chang School, which will coordinate with the Chair. Depending on the outcome of the Grade and Standing Appeal at the Department level, students can then appeal to the Faculty level, and ultimately to the Senate level.

Policy 134, also makes reference to student and instructor obligations and procedures surrounding accommodating and addressing missed assignments, tests and exams owing to

- a) a conflict with a religious, aboriginal or spiritual observance;
- b) a disability; and
- c) medical and/or compassionate reasons.

Please see pages 12-15 for guidance about these issues. Although there are specific timelines for students to submit requests – for example, a student who has missed an assignment deadline, test, or exam for medical reasons is required to submit medical documentation within three working days of the deadline – ultimately the instructor may allow documentation, or a request for reassessment, to be submitted beyond the timelines specified in the policy. For example, if a student was unable to get to a doctor until the fourth day after a missed test, the instructor is certainly NOT obliged to dismiss the request because it was submitted four, rather than three, days after the test.

Finally, with respect to grade reassessments and appeals, instructors must ensure that their course policies and procedures are in compliance with [Policy 145: Course Management](#). This policy is often invoked or referenced in Grade and Standing appeals and when students are unclear about whether an instructor has followed fair evaluation practices.

Students submitting grade reassessment requests, or grade or standing appeals, may seek guidance through this process from their program director, staff, the Chair, the student advocate in their students' union, and from the Student Handbook (which is available on the department website).