



No Zeros Allowed

Should you ever give a zero for a grade? Reflect on this by going to the **Going Beyond** folder for Chapter 20 or scan the QR Code in the book.

The first inclination when a student does not turn in the required work is to give it a zero. Nothing turned in is nothing, and zero is nothing. Seems logical. After all, in real life, if work is not performed, the person is not paid. However, is zero a logical result when a student does not turn in work?

Let's assume you have explained to a class that you will use a 100-point scale with 10-point intervals: 90=A; 80=B; 70=C; 60=D; and anything below 59 is an F. Pretty standard, and practiced rather universally.

So let's say a student named Jonathan did not turn in a paper. You give it a zero. Zero. Nada. Zilch. Jonathan is really quite a bright student, but he did not turn in his work. Some people feel strongly about this: "What is this world coming to? What are we preparing kids for? How are they going to pay their taxes on time, get to work on time, get what the customer wants on time? When are they going to learn to face the consequences?" They believe that no work quite rightly results in zero.

Some teachers have a sense of righteousness; they find it enjoyable and downright proper to give an irresponsible delinquent who failed to complete an assignment the punishment they deserve. No work, no credit—that's life.

Let's do the math. The next assignment, Jonathan gets 100. Jonathan is rather smart; he just missed one assignment. Averaging the zero and the 100 gives him a 50. He's still failing. But he just got a perfect score!

The next assignment, Jonathan gets another 100, which is quite difficult to do when you have a teacher who believes in righteousness and punishment. Are you following the math? (Get out your calculator if you do not believe the next number you will see.) $100 + 100 + \text{zero}$ divided by three equals 66. After two perfect papers, Jonathan still only has a D. At this point, the Jonathans in the world have given up.

Then Jonathan does four perfect papers giving him 400 points. Divide that by the five assignments, and he now has a B. But if he misses just one point, giving him 399, he has a C.

OK. Let's cut to the chase. Jonathan would have to do nine perfect papers to finally reach an A. But remember, if he loses just one point in any one of these nine papers, he has a B. All it takes is one zero, and the student is all but doomed for the entire school year.

So, what's the solution? Go online and access "The Case Against the Zero" by Douglas Reeves and "Guskey and Grading: Lots to Think About" outlining Thomas Guskey's arguments.

One last thing. There were not nine assignments given in Jonathan's class. He came back to school after skipping the first assignment and three days of absence because his mother had been killed in a car accident. An emphasis on disciplined work habits is important, but even more important is the general well-being of each student.