

"A" STUDENTS



"C" STUDENTS



A way to evaluate student performance

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How do you measure a student's progress? Grades may not be it.

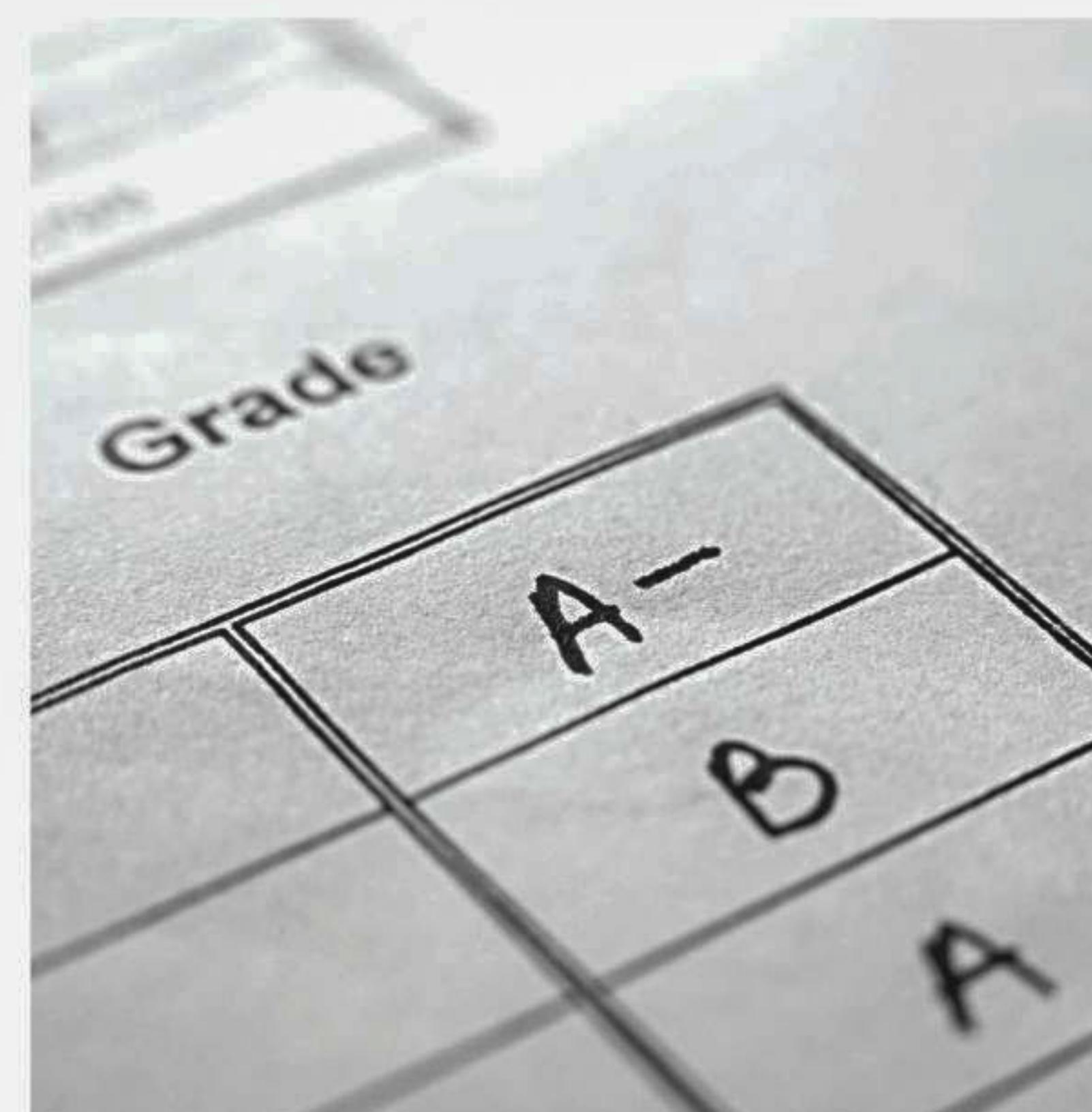
On results day, one letter tells students how they performed. It becomes a part of their identity and helps adults categorise them into different groups. But how a single letter displays all the efforts of a student and all that they have learned in a period of several months has always been a question of mine.

Many people will agree that it is not always the case that an A student is brighter or more hardworking than a C student. Robert Kiyosaki's book "Why A students Work for C Students..." cites the results of some studies and books regarding this very phenomenon in a chapter titled "Why Valedictorians Fail". The gist of the pieces mentioned seemed to be this: academic success (as measured by grades) does not always equate to real-life success.

Grades and GPA's seem to condense a lot of information in a very small space, but in reality, what they do is they leave out vital information on the very students whose performance they are used to measure. They don't tell us how hard the students studied, how they studied, how they felt about what they studied and whether they felt that what they studied added value to their lives.

Moreover, examinations and assignments in school measure a narrow range of intelligence and don't make use of the different skills and talents of individual students. The grades we use to judge the abilities of students seem to tell an incomplete story. Yet we continue to use them.

Of course, to understand why our grading systems are so ineffective we have to look at our education system itself. However, changing our grading system may be the catalyst for a change in the flawed education system that our method of grading is a part of.



Some people have attempted to bring about a change, but they haven't exactly caught on everywhere, maybe for good reasons. Albert Shanker, former President of the American Federation of Teachers, in an essay titled "The Smiley-Face Approach", discusses a new grading system adopted by the school board in Clark County where letter grades would be substituted by the words "emerging", "extending", and "developing". If you are unable to find much difference between the terms and can't figure out which comment it is desirable to have, no one blames you. As Shanker points out, this grading system doesn't really convey much information about a student's performance at all and could actually prove to be just like the old grading system if students figured out which term substitutes which letter.

Other methods like gamification and live feedback may require a significant amount of time and resources that many schools won't be able or willing to provide. Asking students to grade themselves or asking people to elect the Honour's students in a class may not exactly work either, especially considering that all students may not be capable of making the correct decision and may lack the knowledge and experience of a teacher.

Providing different test formats could help account for the different sets of strengths and abilities that students have, but this too could be a thorny issue as some will feel that others had an unfair advantage. The grading systems we've been using have not really been helpful, but we've been using them for so long without updating it that changing it seems like a task that won't really be possible soon.

A viable and somewhat simple alternative to using letter and number grades could exist however. This method would require teachers to devote at least one sheet of paper to each student during a year. They could fill it up at the end of each class, little by little. In it, they could provide some in-depth detailed information on each student based on their observation of them so that students actually had a better idea of where they stand at the end of an academic year. Teachers could give students feedback and recommendations tailored to each student's unique strengths and weaknesses and write about the behaviour of students, what they genuinely thought about each and every one of them, how they think each student would learn best and other such information that actually matters. Maybe then, students would finally get the valuable insight they thought (or maybe didn't think) they needed at times they felt lost.

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