

A Headache-Free Late Work Policy

 [facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/late-work-policy](https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/late-work-policy)

By Laura Schisler, PhD

September 23,
2019



As a new faculty member, late work was the cause of many headaches.

- I wanted a policy that would recognize there may be valid reasons why a student might not submit an assignment on time, but I did not like the idea of then having to judge the merit of excuses that might be provided or attempt to decide if they were truthful.
- I wanted a policy that would acknowledge the merit of a completed assignment, so I did not want to deduct a letter grade or certain percentage of points just because it did not meet a deadline; a value I took to heart after reading O'Connor (2011).
- I wanted a policy that would put the responsibility for completing late work entirely on the student, so I did not want to use class time or send reminders out of what was missing and when it was due.
- I wanted a policy that would offer the opportunity for a student to submit work after it was due, but I did not want the hassle of keeping track of any new, individual deadlines and individual point deductions (Vatterott, 2009) for assignments that would occur if I allowed late assignments.

This was the biggest hurdle I saw to allowing late work—tracking who I allowed to make up which assignment for which course, and then remembering when the new deadline was based on the original due date of the assignment. Additionally, if the policy added in a

penalty of a certain percent off for each day the assignment was late, the headache of determining if I was able to accept an assignment, and until when and how much it was now worth, was enough to make me consider not allowing late work at all.

Enter the Make-Up Day

In a nutshell, the Make-Up Day is a late work policy that allows submission of missed work during a 24 hour period on a scheduled day of the semester and for up to full credit on the assignment. The details of the policy were more fully developed after conversations with colleagues and trial and error. The current version I use addresses all of my previous concerns regarding late work.

The first specific element of the Make-Up Day is that the reason the assignment was missed is irrelevant.

Busy working on a project for another class? Yes, you can make it up. Completely forgot the assignment was due? Yes, you can make it up. Grandmother died? Condolences, and yes, you can make it up. This portion of the policy eliminates the need to judge whether an explanation for missing work is valid or truthful. It removes the necessity to track doctor's notes, ask for details, or act as a human lie-detector.

The second important component of the policy is that Make-Up Day is scheduled near the end of the semester. The missed assignment can only be submitted during the day listed in the syllabus, which for me is typically the Monday two weeks before finals.

Limiting the day in which missed work can be submitted to one single day removes the challenge of tracking who owes what assignment for which class and by when. It also intentionally encourages the instructor to not schedule other assignments that are due near the Make-Up Day, in order to avoid getting overwhelmed trying to grade both late work and on-time assignments.

This arrangement also reduces any advantage a student might have when submitting assignments late, as they would be juggling material from different points in the course. A student taking a test originally scheduled for the beginning of the semester would not have the tested material as fresh in their mind. A student wanting to submit a late paper would either need to write it close to the original due date and hold onto it until the Make-Up Day or write the missing paper while at the same time working on new assignments for class. This would definitely not be an advantage, as the student would have already missed out on feedback that could have provided on the paper had it been submitted on time.

The third essential component is that any points associated with in-class assignments (e.g. daily journals, presentations, speeches) cannot be made up.

Many courses have assignments with both written and presentation components. With this

policy a student would be able to submit the written paper on Make-Up Day, but not be able to earn the points they could have earned for the presentation itself. This element is a practical one as it is often impossible to replicate the classroom setting, peer feedback, and the dispositions of a student presenting if some substitute for the actual presentation was attempted.

I feel this late work policy shows understanding toward students, is manageable for a teaching schedule, and removes the burden of judging excuses when it comes to late assignments. I share the details of the Make-Up Day both in the syllabus and verbally the first day of class. While I will continue to tinker with the particulars of Make-Up Day, for now, my late work policy headaches are over.

References:

O'Connor, Ken. *A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades, 2nd Edition*. Boston, Pearson Education, Inc., 2011.

Vatterott, Cathy. *Rethinking Homework: Best Practices that Support Diverse Needs*. Alexandria, ASCD, 2009.

Laura Schisler, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Teacher Education department at Missouri Southern State University. Following a career teaching junior high and high school science, she now instructs science methods and general teacher education courses.

© 2019 Faculty Focus | Higher Ed Teaching & Learning