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orchestras, there is an exquisite network of communication—the alert from a fellow player, the arched bow, the lifted head—all of which reinforce and support the feedback from the coach or conductor.

Table 1.1 summarizes techniques to apply for ensuring accurate, fair, specific, and timely feedback.

Table 1.1: Elements of Effective Feedback

Elements of Effective Feedback	Techniques for Effective Feedback
Accurate	<p>Different observers, including other teachers, student peers, and the students themselves, understand the criteria used by the teacher to provide feedback.</p> <p>Teachers do not just make factually accurate statements to students; they ask students questions.</p>
Fair	<p>Feedback is not influenced by the gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other characteristics of the students.</p> <p>Teachers do not seek to compensate for biases in other tests by displaying reverse bias or awarding higher grades for lower performances by disadvantaged students.</p>
Specific	<p>Boundaries are distinguished from judgment calls.</p> <p>Feedback on boundaries is consistent, with variations in expressions of student performance expected within those boundaries.</p>
Timely	<p>Feedback is delivered incrementally, at precisely the time when students can use it.</p>

In this chapter we have considered the four essential elements of feedback: accuracy, fairness, specificity, and timeliness. For the remainder of the book, we turn our attention to that specific form of feedback known as grades, beginning with an overview of grading issues and the debate that surrounds them.



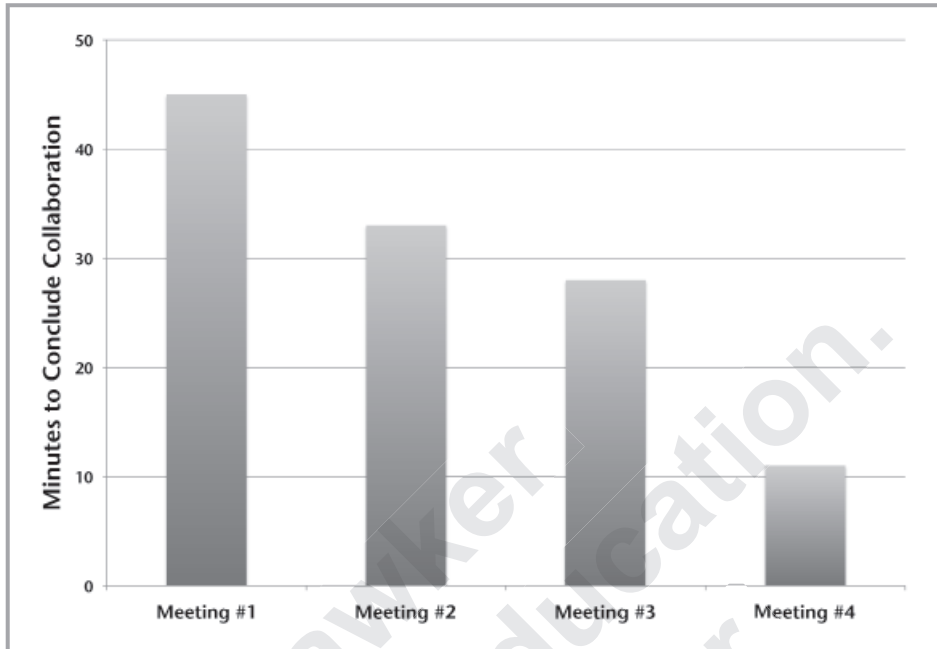


Figure 3.5: Improved speed of collaborative grading over time.

Avoiding Mathematical Distortions

The last practical method of improving accuracy has to do with the avoidance of inadvertent mathematical errors. Earlier, we addressed how the zero on a 100-point scale creates mathematical distortion. Some schools use the “50 minimum” policy to avoid this distortion. Unfortunately, this leads to a good deal of political discontent, because it appears to critics that students are being given 50 points without doing any work. Therefore, if it is psychologically necessary for stakeholders in your area to have the zero as an option for teachers, then we can remove its mathematically distorting impact by using a 4-point scale rather than a 100-point scale. This may require some adjustments to computerized grading systems, but it is not impossible. If teachers wish to preserve the fine distinctions among students that the 100-point system creates, so that they can distinguish between the bragging rights of students with an 85.6 instead of an 84.3, then the same precision can be used with the 4-point scale by allowing several places to the right of the decimal point. However, then when a zero is used, it cannot, by definition, have an impact any greater than 1 point below the D, which is worth 1 point.

alternatives, and finally we will discuss how to align the entire system to support those policies.

The Purpose of Grading

One of the most perplexing things about debates over grading policy is how very intelligent and rational people can look at the same set of facts and come to radically different conclusions. Perhaps the root cause for this phenomenon is that there are widely differing perspectives on the fundamental purposes of grading. These generally fall into the following categories:

- Giving feedback to students in order to improve their performance
- Reporting to parents on student progress toward specific learning objectives
- Communicating with teachers at the next level of instruction so that they can plan their instruction in a way that will meet a variety of student learning needs
- Giving rewards to students for good behavior and attitudes
- Administering punishments to students for poor behavior and attitudes
- Making public distinctions between good and bad students

While most educators would agree that the first three purposes—feedback, reporting, and communication—are the most important purposes of grading, it does not take very long for most discussions of grading policy to reveal that the last three—rewards, punishment, and distinction—are at the heart of most grading policies. The telltale phrases that reflect this conclusion include the following, paraphrased from many conversations and email exchanges I have had with teachers and school administrators on the subject of grading:

- “I know that she didn’t meet the academic standard, but how else am I supposed to recognize that she tried hard, came to class, and finished her homework? Honor roll grades are the only recognition that poor kid will ever get!”

