

Plus/Minus (+/-, Suffix) Letter Grading at LSU 2015
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This question and answer information will provide information on the implementation, requirements, use, and interpretation of plus/minus (+/-) grading, also known as suffix grading. The main goal of +/- grading is to allow more precise grading to reward superior efforts in a course.

For additional information regarding +/- grading, see the *Plus/Minus Grades Guidelines* published by the Office of Academic Affairs at:
<http://www.lsu.edu/registrar/academics/plus-minus-grades.php>

1) Q: What is +/- grading?

A: Plus/minus suffix grading is the use of +, -, or no suffix on the letter grade assigned in a course.

2) Q: When is +/- grading being implemented?

A: Plus/minus suffix grading will take effect for the grades given for the 2015 Fall Semester, meaning (1S/2016 [First Class Day – August 24, 2015]) and the First Fall LSU Online Module (1L/2016 [First Class Day – August 31, 2015]).

3) Q: Why is +/- grading being implemented at LSU?*

A: This grading change is consistent with current standards in the majority of LSU peer universities and provides greater resolution in the assignment of student letter grades to accurately reflect the student's overall performance in a course.

4) Q: Is +/- grading mandatory for all courses?*

A: The use of +/- grading is required for all undergraduate, graduate, and professional courses for which a letter grade (A, B, C, D) is assigned at LSU, with the exception of the Law Center. The letter grade F will not include a +/- designation.

5) Q: Does the new grading system apply to students in graduate courses?

A: Yes, the +/- grading system will be used in all graduate courses to allow reflection of student achievement in these courses with a higher level of desired competency for the specialized subject area.

6) Q: Do instructors and professors have to give letter grades with a + or – ?

A. Yes, all instructors and faculty members will assign plus, minus, or no suffix letter grades in each course for which they are the instructor of records. The course syllabus must specify the level of performance required for each letter grade including the level of performance for a + or – within the letter grade.

7) Q: How is +/- grading being implemented?

A: The Registrar's Office and Information Technology Services will reconfigure the online grade input systems so that the midterm and final grades will be entered as A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, or F.

8) Q: What changes will be required in faculty syllabus or other class documents?

A: At the beginning of each semester, faculty members must distribute written course syllabi in all courses, both graduate and undergraduate, which clearly state the relative weight of the component factors of the final grade. The grading scale must be described in the syllabus, as is currently required by PS-44 Student Grading. At any point in a semester, the instructor should be able to explain, on request, a student's standing in the course. That is, the instructor must provide the student with the grades assigned to that point, the basis for the grades, and the weight of these grades in the final grade.

9) Q: How are quality points assigned to course grades for calculating a Grade Point Average (GPA)?

A: The calculation of the Grade Point Average (GPA) does not change in the +/- grading system. That is, the total quality points earned across all courses are divided by the total number of credit hours the student was enrolled in.

Chart 1: Quality Points per credit hour and per 3 hour course

Course Letter Grade	Quality points per credit hour	Quality Points for 3 Hour Course
A+	4.3	12.9
A	4.0	12.0
A-	3.7	11.1
B+	3.3	9.9
B	3.0	9.0
B-	2.7	8.1
C+	2.3	6.9
C	2.0	6.0
C-	1.7	5.1
D+	1.3	3.9
D	1.0	3.0
D-	0.7	2.1
F	0.0	0.0

10) Q: What range of scores apply to each letter grade?*

A There is no "university curve" or other table of numerical equivalents of letter grades to which a faculty member must adhere. The instructor must define the grading scale to be used in the course, which is a current requirement of PS-44 Student Grading, and describe the grading scale in the syllabus. It is the right and responsibility of the instructor in a course to determine and assign the grade for each student in the course beyond the final date for withdrawing with a W. Individual instructors are expected to assign grades equitably and consistently in accordance with the standards established by the faculties of the various colleges and schools.

11) Q: Will different quality points be assigned to grades with a plus, a minus, or no suffix?

A: Yes. Each letter grade, including those with a + or – will have a different quality point assigned to it. See Chart 1 above.

12) Q: Does a “C-” in a required prerequisite course allow the student to enroll in a course that requires “C or better” in the prerequisite course?*

A: Yes, all regulations currently applicable for each course that are linked with a specific letter grade mean the letter grade range. Therefore, if a student must achieve a “C” or higher in a prerequisite course to proceed to the next course, the student must achieve a grade in the C range (i.e., C+, C, C-) under the plus/minus grading system to be able to take the second course.

13) Q: How does the use of +/- letter grades change department, college, or university GPA requirements?

A: The use of +/- for letter grades does not change any department, college, or university GPA requirement. It doesn't change the method by which a GPA is calculated, and doesn't change the interpretation or meaning of other grades such as F, I, P, S, U, and W that are awarded.

14) Q: What does a letter grade actually mean, then?

A: The definitions for undergraduate course letter grades do not change. The letter grades A+, A, and A- denote distinguished mastery of the course material; the letter grades B+, B, and B- denote good mastery of the course material; the letter grades C+, C, and C- denote acceptable mastery of the course material; and the letter grades D+, D, and D- denote minimally acceptable achievement. The letter grade F denotes failure to minimally master the course material.

Satisfactory and unsatisfactory grades (S and U) are awarded for graduate student performance, with a grade of S defined as equivalent to the letter grade of B- or higher and a grade of U defined as equivalent to the letter grade of C+ or lower.

Some courses allow Pass/Fail grading. A Pass grade (P) is the equivalent to the letter grade of C- or higher in courses for undergraduate credit and a P grade is equivalent to the letter grade of B- or higher in courses for graduate credit. A Fail Grade (F) is equivalent to the letter grade of D+ or lower in courses for undergraduate credit and an F grade is equivalent to the letter grade of C+ or lower in courses for graduate credit.

15) Q. Won't the requirements for financial aid and scholarships change?

A. The use of the plus/minus system does not change the awarding of financial aid or scholarships because the primary criterion is the student's GPA.

LOSFA has informed the university with respect to TOPS, that they will not accept plus/minus grades. Therefore, for example, if a student earns an A+ the university is required to report an A.

16) Q What about grades given in courses prior to Fall Semester 2015?

A: Grades given in semesters before Fall 2015 remain as they were recorded using A, B, C, D and F grading scale and the respective numerical quality points for each credit at that time.

17) Q: When a grade change is made, what system is used?

A: Grade changes will be made based on the grading system in force at the time the original grade in the course was awarded.

18) Q: How are the grades recorded on transcripts?

A: Grades for Fall 2015 and thereafter will be listed as the letter grade with + or – symbols as assigned by the instructor of record when final grades are reported. Grades previous to Fall 2015 will be letter grades without a suffix. Transcripts of students completing courses before, during, and after Fall 2015 will have the grades as assigned, with an explanation of the change in the grading system noted along with an explanation of the meaning of the letter grades and quality points associated with each letter grade.

19) Q: How does the calculation of grade-point average change?

A: The formula for calculating the GPA does not change. The GPA equals quality points earned divided by the number of credit hours attempted. Overall GPA is calculated as the total quality points earned from all courses attempted divided by the total number of credit hours of the courses attempted.

20) Q: Does +/- grading influence how University (Latin) Honors (summa cum laude, magna cum laude, cum laude and the University Medal are awarded?

A: The determination of University Honors is made after computing two GPAs for each student, one on all work completed and the other on all work completed on all LSU system campuses. The two GPAs are inclusive of all grades, including grades previously excluded through the Grade Exclusion Policy, so all grades are used to determine University Honors. The lower of the two GPAs are used to determine eligibility for University Honors. The +/- system does not change how University Honors are determined, with summa cum laude if the lowest GPA is at least 3.9, magna cum laude if the lowest GPA is at least 3.8, and cum laude if the lowest GPA is at least 3.7.

The University Medal is awarded to the undergraduate student or students grading with the highest GPA, provided that more than 50% of the credits required for the undergraduate degree are earned at the LSU A&M campus. GPAs are calculated for all work completed and all work completed at LSU A&M with the lower of the two GPAs determining the eligibility for the University Medal. Course grades previously excluded under the Grade Exclusion Policy are included in calculating the GPA to determine Medalists. The +/- grading system will impact the awarding of the University Medal since all students with an applicable GPA of 4.0 or higher will be awarded the Medal. A GPA above 4.0 will be considered as a 4.0 GPA so a student earning all A+ grades would have a cumulative GPA of 4.0 and a student earning equal numbers of A+ and A- grades would have a cumulative GPA of 4.0, with both students eligible to receive the University Medal.

21) Q: Will transfer credit be affected by +/- grading?

A: Undergraduate Admissions will apply the +/- grade policy on incoming transfer credit starting in the fall of 2015, if +/- grades are recorded on the incoming student's transcript. The Graduate School will accept the +/- grades from other institutions and the calculated cumulative GPA on student transcripts. The Grad School will apply the LSU +/- conversions of +0.3 or -0.3 as appropriate to the letter grade or whole number grade in courses in calculating the final two years or other variations on the GPA.

22) Q: Will LSU grad schools lower their admission requirements based on the changes?*

A: There has been no indication that departments will lower their minimum admission requirements.

23) Q: How are students supposed to gain from this system?*

A: +/- suffix grades allow for a more accurate reflection of a student's performance in a specific course, which could increase their overall GPA.

24) Q: How will the new grading system work for classes such as physics where the grading scale is already altered, where the "C" range is anywhere between 60%-74% and the "B" range is 75%-89%?*

A: Paraphrasing Dr. Andy Maverick, Associate Dean for Student Services in the College of Science:

This example is just one possible grading scheme. Any individual course may not follow the "hypothetical example", but each course's grading scale will show the point or percent range that corresponds to the A+, A, A-, B+ etc. as determined by the instructor. This information will be in the syllabus that is distributed for each class.

25) Q: Will the points at which the +, -, or neutral level grades be universally mandated or will professors have the right to adjust the benchmarks depending on the class?*

A: See answer 10

26) Q: Why didn't the students get to vote on this?*

A: Student Government did pass a resolution regarding plus/minus grading. In addition, this is a matter of academic policy. Academic policy originates with the faculty and requires provost approval.

27) Q: How will this affect my TOPs GPA?*

A: See answer 15

28) Q: Do teachers have to stick to the grading ranges provided by the school?*

A: See answer 10

29) Q: How many points is each grade range given?*

A: See answer 9

IF YOU HAVE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS REGARDING +/- GRADING AT LSU, PLEASE CONTACT THE VICE PROVOST FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT SERVICES MATTHEW LEE AT MLEE@LSU.EDU.