SPECIFICATIONS GRADING

In *Falling from Infinity*, we will use a grading scheme known as *specifications grading*. Specifications grading allows students to choose the grade they want to earn in a course based on the amount of effort they want to put in. In a specifications grading system, the professor creates “bundles” of assignments for each letter grade, often giving students choices of assignments within each bundle. In order to earn the grade of their choice, students complete the bundle of assignments aligned with that grade. For every assignment, the professor shares a clear and comprehensive set of criteria for successful completion (aka, the assignment’s specifications). **No letter grades are given for individual assignments; rather, each assignment a student turns in either meets the specifications or it does not.** Instead of a letter grade on each assignment, the instructor offers plentiful feedback. Specifications grading systems also often utilize tokens students can exchange for extensions, re-submissions, etc.

∞ Overview

The figure shown below provides a high-level overview of the specifications grading scheme used in *Falling from Infinity*. Detailed descriptions of the grade bundles, specifications, and tokens follow.
**Bundles**

The four grade bundles are:

1. Participation (required for a D)
2. Journal + Basic Reflection Task (required for a C)
3. Creative Reflection Tasks (2) + Learning Portfolio (required for a B)
4. Personal Reflection Task (required for an A)

You must complete and meet the specifications for all assignments in a particular bundle (and those that proceed it) to achieve the designated letter grade and to be eligible for a higher one. For example, if you complete Bundles 1-3 to specifications, you will earn at least a B. If you also complete the specs for Bundle 4, you will earn an A.

No minus (-) grades are available. Plus (+) grades may be earned by successfully completing a minimum number of assignments in higher bundles. The exact number will depend on the complexity of the assignments completed and will be determined by the instructor. For example, if you only complete Bundles 1 and 2, a C is the highest grade you can earn. But, if you complete some of Bundle 3 to spec, you may be eligible for a C+.

**Specifications**

**Bundle 1: Participation**

*(To pass the course, you must complete Bundle 1 to spec.)*

_Falling from Infinity_ is a discussion-based course and its success relies on everyone preparing for class—reading and thoughtfully considering all assigned course materials, jotting down discussion questions, and completing assignments on time—and actively participating in discussions. Class participation can take on many forms; one is not talking a lot. When you ask thoughtful questions, offer insightful comments, note relevant passages in texts, point out connections between ideas, listen with an open mind, and share personal experiences, you contribute to a healthy, productive discussion. To earn a passing grade in the course, you must meet these specifications:

- have no unexcused absences;
- complete pre-course questionnaire;
- attend 30-minute instructor meeting at the start of the semester;
- attend 15-minute mid-semester check-in meeting;
- come to each class prepared, having carefully read all assigned material and completed all assigned work;
- engage deeply during discussions:
• ask well-formulated and critical questions of the text and your peers;
• listen thoughtfully to your peers and generate insightful, constructive responses to the debates that might ensue;
• actively participate during in-class activities;
• complete self-assessments of participation;
• complete end-of-course evaluation.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Even if you choose not to complete an assignment (e.g. journal entry or reflection task), you must come prepared, having read and looked at everything.

Bundle 2: Journal + Basic Reflection Task
(To earn a C in the course, you must complete Bundles 1-2 to spec.)

Journal
Regular entries in your Reflective Journal will help you explore the course materials or the in-class discussions in more depth, provide a means for you to track your understanding of learning, document your experiments, record your questions, and pose your answers. To meet spec, your Reflective Journal should have twelve (12) well-developed entries that...

• are between 400-600 words each;
• address the assignment prompt for the given week, be relevant to the topic, and directly connect to the course readings and discussions by referring to specific sections and/or passages (cite in-text using author’s name, title of reference material, and page numbers);
• be personally reflective, focusing on your current or evolving thinking about the topic as it relates to infinity;
• make serious efforts to grapple with the ideas and demonstrate critical reflection, integration of ideas from the readings and class discussions, and original thought.

Basic Reflection Task: Infinity Interviews
This reflection task involves interviewing children, adults, friends, family, strangers about their views of infinity and comparing their answers to your own.

• assignment description and specifications
• annotated exemplar
Bundle 3: Creative Reflection Tasks (2) + Learning Portfolio
(To earn a B in the course, you must meet the Bundles 1-3 to spec.)

**Creative Reflection Task: Photo Essay**
This reflection task involves taking photos that captures, in your minds-eye, elements of the infinite and then reflecting on the limitations of your photos.

- assignment description and specifications
- annotated exemplar

**Creative Reflection Task: Short Story**
This reflection task involves writing a short story centered around one of the works of art discussed in the course that explore a theme of infinity.

- assignment description and specification

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**Learning Portfolio**
You will create a portfolio of your work to represent your evolving thinking in this course. Your portfolio should include consciously and carefully selected samples of your own work, inspirations from course materials, and a reflective essay explaining what the collection as a whole means to you and how this portfolio reflects the changes in your thinking about the infinite.

- assignment description and specifications
- annotated exemplars: example #1, example #2, example #3

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Bundle IV: Personal Reflection Task
(To earn an A in the course, you must meet the Bundles 1-4 to spec.)

**Personal Reflection Task: Digital Story**
This reflection task involves exploring your personal relationship some aspect of infinity through digital storytelling.

- assignment description and specification (must schedule 60-second demo at least one week prior to assignment due date)
- exemplar

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∞ Tokens
You will be given three (3) tokens at the start of the semester. You may exchange these for a variety of things, including excused absences, assignment re-submissions and extensions (see the overview figure
above for details). You may also earn additional token(s) for summarizing and/or leading part of our weekly discussion.

Specific details regarding tokens include:

- Tokens are non-transferable between students.
- Lost or stolen tokens will not be replaced, so treat them like any other type of valuable currency.
- Exchange rules only apply to the portion of the bundle for which they are defined. For example, you may not exchange one (1) token to resubmit a Journal entry. Similarly, you may not exchange two (2) tokens for a time-extension on the Portfolio.
- Additional tokens may be earned during the semester by summarizing one discussion (up to 1 token) and leading part of a discussion (up to 2 tokens). Tokens earned in this way may not be earned in the same week. Details and sign-ups will be announced in class.
- Any additional tokens you earn during the semester may be used for any type of exchange.
- The only way to earn an A+ in the course is to complete every bundle to spec and also exchange six (6) tokens at the end of the course. In other words, you need to be perfect on every assignment and earn all available additional tokens.