SPEC GRADING SCHEME

In *Living Your Best College Life*, we will use a grading scheme known as *specifications grading*, or simply spec grading. Spec grading allows you to choose the grade you want to earn in a course based on the amount of effort you want to put in. In order to earn the grade of your choice, you will complete bundles of assignments aligned with that grade.

For every assignment, we will give you a clear and comprehensive set of criteria for successful completion (aka, the assignment's specifications). **We will not give letter grades for individual assignments; rather, for each assignment you turn in, we will 1) indicate whether or not it meets the specifications and 2) provide feedback you can use to improve the assignment (and other similar future assignments).** Our spec grading system also utilizes tickets you can exchange for limited assignments re-submissions or assignment drops.

Overview

The figure shown below provides a high-level overview of the spec grading scheme used in *Living Your Best College Life*. Detailed descriptions of the grade bundles, specifications, and tickets follow.

Bundles

The four grade bundles are:

1. **BUNDLE 1**: Weekly Pre-class Preparation Activities & In-Class Engagement (required for D/GC grades)
2. **BUNDLE 2**: Weekly Post-class Reflection Activities (required for C/CR grades)
3. **BUNDLE 3**: Letter to 1st-Year Students (required for B/CR grades)
4. **BUNDLE 4**: Infographic (required for A grades)
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 instructors. For example, if you only complete BUNDLES 1-2, a C/CR 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: Weekly Pre-class Preparation Activities & In-Class Engagement (required for D/GC grades)**

*Living Your Best College Life* is a participatory, 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 pre-class assignments on time—and actively participating during in-class discussions and activities. To earn a passing grade in the course, you must meet these specifications:

- **Weekly Pre-class Preparation Activities**: These will be posted to the course Collab site each week. In addition to reading short articles, book chapters, or news stories, watching short video or listening to podcasts, you will also complete a variety of short assignments, including, for example, completing online discussion posts, short writing or video assignments, or surveys. To earn credit for this portion of the course, you must meet these specifications:
  - Complete all assigned activities as described in the assignment prompt.
  - For online discussion prompts, posts should:
    - be between 200-300 words (or as specified);
    - respond directly to the prompt;
    - use pre-class preparation materials (e.g. readings, videos) to support your ideas and/or arguments.
  - Meet submission deadlines. Since these activities are designed to help you prepare for class, no late work is accepted.

- **In-Class Engagement**: During class, we will ask you to engage in small and large group discussions and short experiential activities. For discussions, engagement can take on many forms; one is not talking a lot. When you ask thoughtful questions, offer insightful comments, note relevant passages in texts or segments of video, point out connections between ideas, listen with an open mind, and share personal experiences, you contribute to a healthy, productive discussion. For in-class activities, engagement means actively participating in and contributing to small group work and completing assignments.

- **IMPORTANT NOTE**: If you are not able to attend class, you have the opportunity to watch the recording and complete all in-class activities. To earn credit, you must submit a summary of your responses or reflections of the activities to the instructors via email within 48 hours of the missed class period. If you fail to do so, you will not be able to complete the Weekly Post-class Reflection Activities since these depend on in-class participation (see Tickets to understand the implications of this). Since active in-class engagement is important to your learning, you may **not miss more than three class periods**.
BUNDLE 2: Weekly Post-class Reflection Activities (required for C/CR grades)
After each class, you’ll have the opportunity to complete 1-2 short reflection activities. The activities and accompanying reflections will help you explore the course materials and/or in-class discussions in more depth, provide a means for you to track your learning, document your experiences, record your questions, and pose your answers. To earn credit for this portion of the course, your reflections should be submitted on time and adhere to the following specs:

- be between 300-500 words each (or meet specified video/audio recording lengths);
- address the assignment prompt for the given week, be relevant to the topic, and directly connect to the course readings and in-class 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 living your best college life;
- make serious efforts to grapple with the ideas and demonstrate critical reflection, integration of ideas from the readings and class discussions, and original thought.

You will keep your reflections in a google doc you share with the instructors and also submit them as in-text Assignments in Collab.

BUNDLE 3: Letter to 1st-Year Students (required for B/CR grades)
Early on in the semester, you will draft a 500+ word letter addressing the following question: Based on your experiences at UVA so far, what advice would you give future 1st-year students for how to live their best college life? Each week during the semester, you will tweak, rewrite, or add to this letter based on the ideas we explore in class. In other words, your final, multi-page letter should reflect your evolving thinking on what living your best college life means to you and concrete ideas for how others might achieve this end goal. While the letter is in many ways personal, you should support your recommendations with ideas and principles explored throughout the course. To earn credit for this portion of the course, your letter should be submitted on time and adhere to the following specs:

- initially be drafted after the first class (500+ words) and be added to and/or revised regularly throughout the semester;
- be well-organized and labeled to help guide the reader;
- be appropriate for the intended audience: future 1st-year students;
- clearly reflect your evolving thinking about how to live your best college life by referring to course concepts and resource materials.

You will keep your reflections in a google doc you share with the instructors. You should turn on "Suggestions" when editing and clearly mark new additions by date. Your final letter should be submitted in Collab by the stated due date.

BUNDLE 4: Infographic (required for A grades)
As a culminating project, you will have the opportunity to create a series of infographics highlighting the range of topics examined during the course. This project 1) gives you the opportunity to explore a topic of interest creatively and in more depth and 2) allows you to share your new knowledge with current and future students also interested in living their best college life. Assignment details and rubric will be provided.
Tickets
You will be given four (4) tickets at the start of the semester. You may exchange these for assignment re-submissions or assignment drops (see the overview figure above for details).

Specific details regarding tickets include:

- Tickets are non-transferable between students.
- You can drop up to 2 Weekly Pre-class Preparation Activities and up to 2 Weekly Post-class Reflection Activities.
- If you chose to drop a Weekly Pre-class Preparation Activity, you will not be allowed to complete the Weekly Post-class Reflection Activity since these depend on in-class participation. In other words, you will need to drop both assignments, **costing you 3 tickets**, to remain eligible for a C/CR grade or higher.
- The only way to earn an A+ in the course is to complete every bundle to spec and also return four (4) tickets at the end of the course. In other words, you need to be perfect on every assignment.