1. Montgomery, Alabama
m. Levittown, New York
n. Alamagordo
o. Write the initials LRS in the state which has the lowest annual rainfall
p. Write the initials CM in a state with a long history of coal mining
q. Write the initials IOM in a state with a long history of iron ore mining
r. Write the initials LI (low immigration) in three states with populations that were less than 1 percent foreign born in 1986
s. The course of the Columbia River

6. Choose four of the following and write a paragraph in answer to each.
a. Why did the Great Depression not recur after World War II?
b. Why did the Americans fail in Vietnam?
c. Why did Prohibition fail?
d. Was the New Deal a success?
e. Why did Martin Luther King Jr. become a national hero?
f. What factors made environmentalism popular in the 1960s and 1970s?
g. Why were college students so confrontational in the 1960s?

Anyone who paid attention and came to class regularly should be able to get close to 100 percent (in an ideal world, but not in this one). The dates will cause the most protest and misery, I expect, closely followed by the "who did the following" section and the challenge to draw the course of the Missouri River. The first and last sections, especially the last, give a bit of scope to the most intelligent to flex their brain muscles a little. I expect most students will finish with plenty of time to spare, whether or not they get many questions right. You, reader, may look in the appendix for the answers to sections 2, 3, and 4. I prepare the students for the exam with an e-mail, explaining in detail the form of the exam and offering sample questions and answers.

Grading

drive out the good. A teacher who is determined to hold the line and give students the grades they deserve, as opposed to the grades they want, is like a bull in a china shop. The first thing he will discover is that he is bitterly hated by the students, who feel as though they have been cheated of something that is rightfully theirs. The second thing he’ll discover is that he is equally bitterly hated by the students’ parents, who feel as though they’ve been cheated out of something for which they just paid $120,000. The third thing he’ll discover is that his own colleagues and the associate deans will soon be putting pressure on him to stop it. Otherwise enrollments in the department will go down, storms with students’ families will rage, and the quiet professorial life will be just a memory.

Look at the students I’ve been teaching this term. In an ideal world I would give about a quarter of them Fs. Why? Because they have no aptitude for history, no appreciation for the connection between events, no sense of how a historical situation changes over time, they don’t want to do the necessary hard work, they skimp on the reading, and can’t write to save their lives. That’s grounds enough for an F, surely.

Will I give them Fs? No. Most of them will get B- and a few really hard cases will come in with Cs. The only person who’s going to get an F this term is the one to whom I sent the threatening mid-semester e-mail. Briefly she began showing up for class, but soon her deep, deep propensity for not bothering reasserted itself. She missed nine classes in a row and failed to hand in the second paper. Her I can fail with a clear conscience, in the knowledge that everyone else around here would fail her too. Let her parents rage all they want: I’ll just refer them to their own dear girl for explanations and, if necessary, to my little attendance book. All the others, one way or another, are going to scrape through.

Where do grades come from? Out of my head, but in a rich social context. On my reading list this term it says the grade consists of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>26 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers</td>
<td>24 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>25 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There's a feeling of precision about that list, but it's belied by the human realities on every side. First, I hardly ever actually gave quizzes, and it would be unreasonable to make two little map tests comprise 10 percent of the whole grade. In reality, then, those ten are going to have to be distributed elsewhere. The idea of 26 percent for class participation as opposed to 24 for the papers, instead of a straight 25 for each, is my way of saying that it’s important for everyone to read the materials and join in discussion. Even so, many of them didn’t really do the reading properly, or else they just caused their eyes to pass rapidly over the lines of words on the page. I could write a hundred thousand words on the difficulty involved in making students really read an assignment in such a way as to understand it fully. One day I'll make a week's reading assignment just one paragraph, with the proviso that it has to be scrutinized in all its fullness and complexity! Until that day I'm always going to have exchanges like this one:

Me: Did you read the assignment?
Student: Yes.
Me: What does the author say about the changing immigration laws?
Student: I can’t remember.
Me: Did you take notes on the important issues?
Student: Yes.
Me: Did you think the legal situation was an important issue?
Student: Yes.
Me: Do you have the notes you took on the legal changes?
Student: Yes, they're on my computer at home.
Me: Can you remember what they say?
Student: No.
Me: Can you say anything at all about American immigration law?
Student: People were allowed to come from other countries to America.
Me: And . . . ?
Student: That's about all I know.

How do you grade class participation on the basis of this exchange? It is possible that the student did read the assignment hastily. It's possible that he made hasty and sketchy notes. It's equally possible that he did neither, and he's certainly been uncommunicative. It's one of those
many places where you might think the perfect solution lay with the
letter F, but the student's memory of this exchange will be that he and I
had a long class conversation about immigrants and that he showed a
real engagement with the issue.

Then there are students like the one who, throughout the term, never
once volunteered a word and would speak only if asked a direct ques-
tion. When asked, she would answer correctly but in the fewest possible
words, with every sign of shrinking distaste and giving away the mini-
um of information. Cross-questioning would elicit one or two addi-
tional nuggets of fact but no sign of engagement or interest. For her
everything was just such a chore. How do I decide on a score out of 26
for her?

The midterm, paper, and final grades are a bit more objective, al-
though since we give the papers letter grades and the exams percentages
we have to find a way of turning their numerical scores into appropri-
ately corresponding letter grades. It's at least partly a subjective process.
Students don't always know how subjective, but they get a sense that in
the end every grade is based not only on objective criteria but also on
the teacher's judgment. Teachers decide grades, and canny students try
to do everything they can to influence their teachers' decision making.
Think about those sorority parties. Is it entirely a coincidence that they
take place just before finals, in the middle of marathons of paper grad-
ing? When it comes to deciding about hospitable young ladies, how will
the memory of their kindness the other day affect my judgment of bor-
derline cases?

There's a long-running debate about grading for effort. What do you
do in the case of a poor student who works flat out to keep up, who
devotes hours more to the readings than his nonchalantly talented con-
temporaries, struggles with the words and the meaning, makes painstak-
ing drafts of papers, and seeks advice and guidance every step of the
way? We're not made of stone; it's hard to slap a discouraging C on such
people—you find yourself being tempted up to at least a B. But then a
jaundiced awareness of the tricks people play makes you ask: suppose
he's just pretending to be a plucky struggler? Am I letting myself be
taken in?

Here's something to keep squarely in mind: everyone wants an A for
every course, and no student has ever, in my twenty-odd years of teach-
ing, reproached me for grading too generously (even though I do). Emory's full of eager strivers, often with a parental knuckle in their backs, eager to get into business school, law school, medical school, or graduate school. They know that only big GPAs and big test scores are going to get them there, and the prospect of a low grade makes them desperate, so much seems to hang in the balance. That doesn't mean they all go after it honestly, but there's no doubting the emotional seriousness and intensity of their desire.

The aftermath of distributing grades every semester, accordingly, is a series of visits from the students who didn't get straight As. Some of them come in a contrite spirit, asking, "Could you go over the exam with me and explain what I did wrong?" You go over it with them and they contest every point, decorously but remorselessly. Others arrive in a belligerent spirit, declaring, "I'm a straight-A student. Why didn't I get that A?" You go over it with them too and they huff and snort derisively. I've always found it difficult to stand up to their browbeating. I'm the teacher and they're the students, admittedly, but it doesn't quite feel that way. Students of both sexes are equally good at making this professor, at least, feel sheepish and mean-spirited—they make me wonder if it really was spite or insufficient appreciation for their greatness that caused my pen to write a B+ in the box where the A was supposed to be.

It's happened so often, however, that I've developed tactics of resistance. I say to them, "I'm not going to change the grade, because I'm convinced it is right. However, I see that you are not satisfied, and I'm willing to hand your papers and exams to one of my colleagues for a second opinion." Usually they grudgingly give up at this point, because somewhere inside they know they're wrong. Occasionally they are full enough of self-righteousness to accept the offer.

I know from years of experience that the possibility of an upward shift in the grade from one of these second opinions is vanishingly unlikely. First, my colleague rarely knows the student in question and feels none of the human sympathy that has developed over the course of the semester (if only the student knew it, he or she has already been given an unreasonably high grade because I'm so soft-hearted). He's more likely to grade the student lower rather than higher because he can see with a purely objective eye what's wrong with the work. Second, the
colleague can't help being aware that a complaining student has brought about this request for help. He has whiners too and knows what they're like—a gigantic pain in the neck. A sense of professional respect also restrains him—sooner or later he'll be asking me to return the favor. And, of course, this is the time of year at which he's got fifty big papers of his own to grade; the last thing he wants is another one.

In our department some professors offer students a second opinion with hazards attached. If the second professor thinks the original grade was too low he'll raise it, as the student hopes, but if the second professor thinks the original grade was too high he'll lower it, and the student will be obliged to accept that outcome too. There's a deterrent! I'm too weak to do that—I hold out to them the prospect of an increase without the threat of a decrease. In practice the real outcome is the same—the grade is not changed.

Grades and letters of recommendation are comparable. Both are conspiracies of exaggeration; we make ridiculous, dizzying claims in our letters of recommendation, knowing that if we don't we're dooming our candidates' chances, since other candidates against whom they are competing will certainly have exaggerated letters of their own. We inflate their grades too, to help them along in their quest to join professional schools, graduate programs, and to get good jobs. It happens all over the country, at every level—I saw the other day that the average grade at Stanford is A-.

I remember that about ten years ago some states began introducing basic literacy tests as prerequisites for graduating from high school. Kids with all-but-perfect GPAs began failing these tests, showing that their teachers had been giving them As even though they couldn't read and write. In one deep South state (not Georgia, for once) a good number of the teachers failed these tests too. There was a lot of indignant spluttering in the media over this discovery. Any professor who searched his soul and thought about what goes on in college as well as school cannot have been too deeply surprised.

On the question of student papers, incidentally, I was chatting last weekend with a friend who teaches music theory and music appreciation at a nearby community college. We were discussing plagiarism, and I explained my long-running struggle against it. He said, "Quite frankly,
I'm content to see students plagiarizing. It shows they've opened a book and read through a few passages before copying it out. Half the papers I get are completely unreadable, they're so bad; but the plagiarists' work flows nicely and is a pleasure to read!" He was kidding, but not by all that much.