

and individual assignment grades rather than their sum as in additive weighting. Figure 3 shows what happens when this method is used for all students from the grade record in Figure 1.

	A	B	C	D	E
1		Student #s1	Student #s2	Student #s3	Student #s4
2	Assessment #a1	w=40%, g=75%	w=40%, g=75%	w=40%, g=85%	w=40%, g=75%
3	Assessment #a2	w=25%, g=40%	w=25%, g=65%	w=25%, g=40%	w=25%, g=50%
4	Assessment #a3	w=35%, g=80%	w=35%, g=65%	w=35%, g=75%	w=35%, g=85%
5	Course Grade	G #s1=80%	G #s2=75%	G #s3=85%	G #s4=85%

Figure 3. A third example grade record.

Why bring all these different things to your attention? First, you need to remember that there are all these different parts of a course grading system. Providing grades to individual assessments is not all there is to this process. Only a decision about weightings and a method of putting together individual assessment grades and their weightings determines what happens next in the process. And second, because there are all these different parts, issues about impartiality and fairness and reasonableness in grading can come up about each of these parts. Are individual assessment grades assigned equitably? How about the weightings for different assessments? Are they done in an impartial and consistent manner? Finally, are the course grades the result of aggregating or putting together the weights and individual assignment grades in some manner that treats every student sensibly and fairly?

Now let's look at what Close tells us. It's this: An instructor's grading system in a course is fair only if it grades students in an impartial and consistent manner.⁵ Close doesn't specifically say whether he means this requirement to apply to assigning individual assessment grades, or assessment weights, or the method for putting these two together to get a course grade, or all three. I'll assume that he intends that impartiality and consistency are required at every point. Nor does Close say a lot to help us understand what impartiality and consistency amount to. But he does say this: "[it] means that . . . nothing should be relevant to any one student's grade in a given course that is not relevant to every other student's grade in that course."⁶

I'll try to identify what impartiality and consistency in grading systems are in a more useful way. I'll call it the "swapping" test. Here's the essential notion: We ask what will happen if we trade one student's individual assignment or their grades or their weightings or the method by which these are put together to get an overall course grade for those of another student. If the swapping shows there is a difference in the way the grading system treats students then it's not impartial and consistent in its treatment of different students. It treats

different students differently. If the swapping or trading doesn't do this then the grading process is neutral and impartial between students.⁷

Here's an example to illustrate how it works with individual assessments: Imagine we trade student #s2's submission for a particular assessment—a set of test answers or an essay—with student #s1's. What happens to grades student #s2 and student #s1 now get for these assessments? If student #s2 gets the grade student #s1 had and student #s1 gets the grade student #s2 had then the grading for these two students for at least this assessment is not partial or biased to either student.⁸ It's neutral to whose assessment this is. If this imaginary trading procedure works with the same the result for every pair of students then at least the grading of that particular assessment is not partial to any student. And if it works for all assignments then the grading of individual assignments isn't biased or impartial; it's impartial and consistent.

For another illustration, but now about the aggregation part of the grading process, suppose a grading system worked as in Figure 4. There are but two students in this course, student #s1 and student #s3. They have the same assignments and have the same weights on each assignment.

	A	B	C	D
		Student #s1	Student #s3	Student #s3 with #s1's weights and grades
1				
2	Assessment #a1	w=30%,g=83%	w=30%,g=81%	w=30%,g=83%
3	Assessment #a2	w=30%,g=77%	w=30%,g=77%	w=30%,g=77%
4	Assessment #a3	w=40%,g=84%	w=30%,g=79%	w=30%,g=84%
5	Course Grade	G #s1=81%	G #s3=79%	G #s3=79%

Figure 4. A fourth example grading table.

The last column swaps student #s3's grades and weights for those of #s1's. But #s3 still gets his or her untraded course grade. The grading system is somehow giving different students different overall course grades even when they have the same grades and weightings on each separate assessment. Plainly this grading system isn't aggregating or putting together the individual grades and their weightings in an impartial and consistent way.

For the last example of how this swapping test works let's look at weightings. In most grading systems the same assignments are given to every student and the weight for a particular assignment for one student is the same as that for every other student. This happened in