Mastery Assessment at Phoenix Middle School

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1. Introduction

Welcome to the Phoenix Middle School community! We're excited to have you embark on a transformative educational journey with us. At Phoenix, we take an innovative approach to learning, rooted in decades of educational research and practice. Our guiding principles reflect our commitment to fostering intellectual discipline, global awareness, creative expression, wellness, and character in our students.

As you know, we employ a mastery-based approach to learning and assessment. This user manual aims to help you understand the nuances of this system and how you can engage with your child's education through our Mastery Assessment Portal (M.A.P.). The portal serves as an essential tool for parents and students to track academic progress, access teacher feedback, and gain insights into work habits and behaviors.

As we venture through this unique learning landscape, this manual will act as your compass, helping you navigate and understand the fundamental components of our mastery assessment system and our M.A.P where you can see their progress.

This guide will help you to:

- Understand the philosophy behind mastery-based learning and its benefits.

- Navigate our assessment portal to track your child's academic progress.

- Interpret various types of assignments and assessments.

- Understand the work habits and behaviors expected from your child at Phoenix Middle School.

We hope this manual helps clarify any questions you might have and enhances your experience as a vital member of our Phoenix community.

2. Understanding Mastery-Based Assessment

What is Mastery Assessment?

At its core, Mastery Assessment is an educational philosophy that focuses on students' deep understanding of subject matter, rather than their ability to accumulate points or compete for grades. It's an approach aligned with Phoenix Middle School's guiding principles and aims to develop students who are accountable for what they are learning.

The basic idea of mastery-based learning is that learners progress from one skill, activity, or lesson to the next only when they have shown that they are ready to advance. In other words, they move to more complex learning tasks once they've shown

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an authentic understanding of the fundamental skills they need to truly learn those complex tasks. In a mastery-based learning environment, each new thing that students learn builds on itself, helping students develop sophisticated skills and understandings that prepare them for complex learning. The progression from lesson to lesson prevents learning gaps from forming and helps learners develop confidence and self-esteem along the way.

The Mechanism of Mastery Grading

Mastery grading starts by assessing a student's current understanding of a topic through a pre-assessment or a formative task. The assessment's feedback informs tailored teaching strategies aimed at areas requiring improvement. Throughout this learning process, students receive written and/or verbal descriptive feedback rather than points or grades, enabling them to focus on understanding rather than scoring. Assessments aligned with curriculum standards gauge the students' proficiency. If mastery is demonstrated, students proceed to the next topic; otherwise they have an opportunity to revisit and revise their work and/or receive targeted remediation.

Benefits of Mastery Grading

Mastery grading offers several benefits, including:

- **Improved Student Learning and Retention -** Mastery grading focuses on comprehension and skill development, allowing students to revisit material until they achieve mastery. Studies indicate that this can lead to a deeper understanding of content and better retention over time (Cohen, 1987; Guskey, 2010).
- **Increased Engagement and Motivation -** Mastery grading tends to increase student engagement because it makes the learning goals clear and achievable (Anderman & Midgley, 1997). Students are motivated to put forth effort, knowing that they have multiple opportunities to succeed.
- **Reduced Achievement Gaps -** Traditional grading systems often perpetuate achievement gaps among students from diverse backgrounds. Mastery-based assessment focuses on competency rather than speed or initial performance (Bloom, 1968; Guskey & Anderman, 2008).
- **More Meaningful Feedback -** In a mastery grading system, feedback is formative and aimed at improvement, which is more useful to students than a simple letter grade. This can lead to better self-assessment skills and more focused studying (Black & Wiliam, 1998).
- **Enhanced Student Responsibility and Autonomy -** Mastery grading encourages students to take ownership of their learning, promoting self-regulation, goal-setting, and metacognitive strategies. These skills are particularly vital for middle school students who are developing greater autonomy in their learning processes (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005).
- **Better Preparation for Future Learning -** Mastery grading ensures that students have a solid foundation before moving on to more advanced topics, making future learning more effective. This is critical for middle school students who are building the foundation for high school and beyond (Cohen, 1987; Kulik, Kulik, & Bangert-Drowns, 1990).
  [Here is an example](#) of Phoenix alumni reflecting on their time at Phoenix.

Challenges to Mastery Grading

Implementing mastery grading can come with its own set of challenges, particularly from the perspectives of parents and students who may be accustomed to traditional grading systems. Here are some common challenges:

- **Student Motivation** – Knowing that they have the option to revise their work can sometimes lead students to underperform on their initial attempts. Coupled with Phoenix's 'no-zero' policy, this can result in a backlog of assignments needing revision, which can quickly become overwhelming for students.
- **Increased Anxiety Over "Perfection" -** Since mastery grading aims for students to demonstrate a solid understanding of the material, some students may feel stressed or anxious about achieving "mastery" or "check minus" and might miss the point that it's okay to make mistakes as part of the learning process.
- **Time and Workload Concerns –** Mastery assessment at Phoenix allows for reassessments or revisions, which might be viewed as additional workload for students. Parents might be concerned about the time commitment required to attain mastery on multiple topics.

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- **Social Comparison and Competition** - In a mastery-based system, the focus shifts from competition between students to individual growth. Some parents and students who value class ranking or are college-bound may worry that mastery grading doesn't adequately distinguish high performers.
- **Learning Curve for Independent Skills -** Mastery grading often requires higher levels of self-regulation and self-assessment from students. Some may initially struggle with these independent skills, leading to frustrations at home.

3. Types of Assignments and Assessments

At Phoenix, we tailor our assignments to follow the natural learning cycle, which has three distinct stages: introduction, practice, and mastery. Each type of assignment serves a different but crucial role in your child's educational journey. Let's break down these assignment types to better understand how they fit into the grand scheme of educational growth.

Introduction Assignments

- *What They Are*: These are the initial steps into a new topic or skill. Think of it like showing your child their new bike and explaining how all of the parts work together - training wheels, brakes, handlebars, etc.

- *Purpose*: To explore and relate background knowledge in order to understand new concepts.

- *How They Fit into the Learning Cycle*: Much like first getting on a bike with training wheels, introduction assignments help students relate new concepts to current knowledge, giving them the initial balance and understanding they need to start the learning journey.
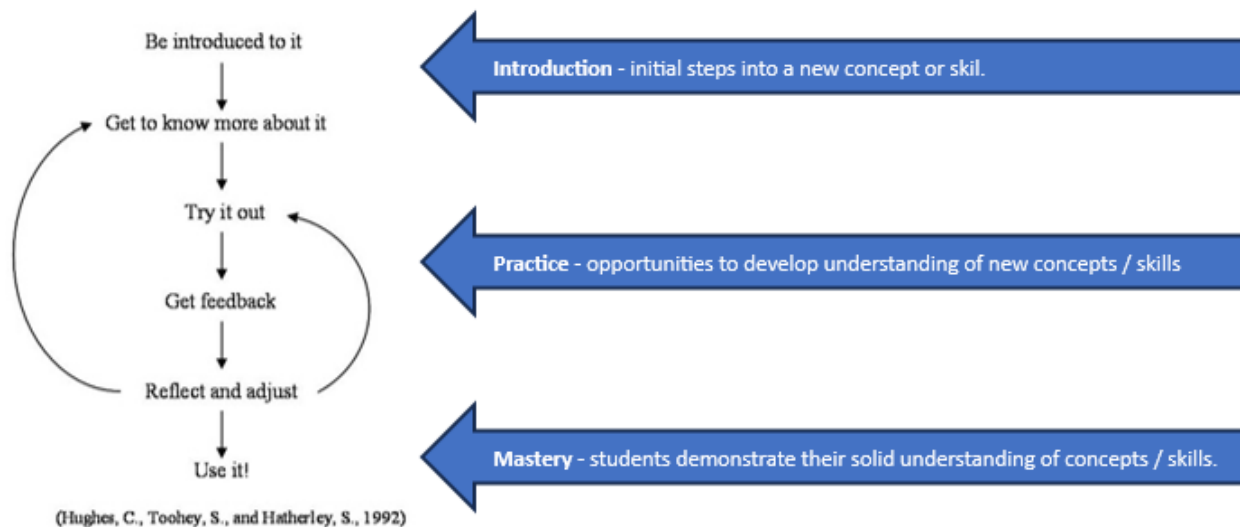
Practice Assignments

- *What They Are*: These are the bread and butter of our educational model, making up about 70-80% of all assignments at Phoenix.

- *Purpose*: To refine skills and deepen understanding of the concepts introduced.

- *How They Fit into the Learning Cycle*: Just as you spend most of your time practicing to ride a bike without training wheels, these assignments help uncover misconceptions, and provide the sustained practice needed to truly grasp new concepts and skills.

Mastery Assignments

- *What They Are*: Think of these as the final test—riding your bike around the neighborhood without any help.

- *Purpose*: To assess whether a student has "mastered" the given concept or skill to the satisfaction of the teacher.

- *How They Fit into the Learning Cycle*: Like that moment when you finally ride a bike around the neighborhood unaided, mastery assignments offer students a chance to demonstrate that they can "ride" on their own, showing a complete and deep understanding of the material.

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Be introduced to it

Get to know more about it

Try it out

Get feedback

Reflect and adjust

Use it!

(Hughes, C., Toohey, S., and Hatherley, S., 1992)

Introduction - initial steps into a new concept or skil.

Practice - opportunities to develop understanding of new concepts / skills

Mastery - students demonstrate their solid understanding of concepts / skills.

Summary

At Phoenix, we've carefully designed assignment types—Introduction, Practice, and Mastery—to mirror the natural learning cycle, ensuring a well-rounded and effective educational experience for our students. Introduction assignments lay the foundation by presenting new concepts and skills to encourage students to apply prior knowledge, much like the initial stage of the learning cycle and new information is introduced and assimilated. Practice assignments, which make up 70-80% of the total coursework, align with the practice phase of the learning cycle, providing students with ample opportunities to apply, iterate, and refine their understanding. Mastery assignments come last, akin to the mastery phase of the natural learning cycle, serving as a final assessment of whether a student has achieved a deep, comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand. This structured, cycle-based approach allows for more targeted learning experiences, facilitating the progressive build-up of knowledge and skill mastery.

4. Separating Academic and Behavior Assessment

In educational research, there's a growing consensus on the importance of separating behavior from academic performance when assessing students. But why do we emphasize this at Phoenix Middle School, especially for our middle-schoolers?

The Piano Analogy
Imagine your child is learning a piano piece for a recital. If the teacher assessed them solely based on behavior—like the number of hours they practiced, how well they can sit still on the bench, or their positive attitude—it would not accurately reflect how well they can play the piece. On the flip side, a student might sit attentively, practice diligently, yet still struggle with hitting the right notes or grasping the emotional nuances of the piece.

Academic vs. Behavioral Assessment
We assess academics to gauge how well a student understands a concept or masters a skill—this is where our Practice and Mastery assessments come into play. Behavior, on the other hand, falls under our Work Habits and Behaviors Assessment, where we evaluate traits like timeliness, quality of work, active engagement in class, organization, and following directions.

The Research-Based Rationale

1. **Clearer Feedback**: Research shows that when grades are conflated with behavior, students get muddled feedback (Brookhart, 2011). By separating the two, it's easier to diagnose whether an academic issue is really a behavioral one, or vice versa.

2. **Targeted Interventions**: When academics and behavior are assessed seperatly, interventions can be more targeted (O'Connor, 2011). For example, a student who is punctual but academically struggling may benefit more from tutoring than a lecture on responsibility.
3. **Equity**: Studies have found that behavior-based grades can disproportionately affect minority and disadvantaged students, sometimes reflecting cultural bias more than true academic performance (Carter & Wun, 2020).
4. **Social-Emotional Learning**: Middle school is a time of significant social and emotional development. Separating behavior and academic performance allow educators to address these aspects individually (Eccles & Roeser, 2011).
5. **Motivation**: When students see that their efforts in academics and behavior are being evaluated separately, it can serve as a double motivation. They can clearly see the areas in which they excel and those that require improvement, which is crucial for middle school students who are at a stage where they're developing a sense of responsibility and self-regulation (Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2006).

By separating behavior from academics in our assessments, we offer a more nuanced, complete picture of a student's strengths and areas for growth. This approach allows us to provide targeted support in the specific areas where each student needs it, whether that be in mastering academic concepts or in cultivating effective work habits.

5. Sharing Student Progress - The Mastery Assessment Portal (M.A.P.)

Now, let's talk about how we keep you in the loop with your child's academic progress. Enter M.A.P., our Mastery Assessment Portal, this web application is custom-designed by Phoenix staff in collaboration with our friends at [Jacq Design](#).

What's M.A.P. All About?
None of the off-the-shelf grading apps quite met our needs, so we thought, "Why not create our own?". After countless brainstorming sessions and endless cups of coffee, we rolled out M.A.P., designed to offer you real-time, transparent insights into your child's academic journey.

Your Comprehensive Guide to Navigating M.A.P Screens

Mastering the ins and outs of our Mastery Assessment Portal (M.A.P) is a breeze. Here's a detailed walkthrough of the Mastery Assessment Protal screens that'll have you navigating like a pro.

1. Ease Into M.A.P with Logging In

- Soon after starting Phoenix, you will receive an email where you can [register for an account](#) and be linked to your child? Your unique parent login credentials unlock a world of educational insights. After your parent account is confirmend and activated by M.A.P. administrators, head to [phxmap.org](#) to begin your journey.

2. Current Assessment: Your All-In-One Dashboard

- The moment you're in, you're greeted with a dynamic dashboard. Not just grades, but real-time alerts on academic progress, effort progress, eligibility for extracurricular activities, and upcoming Discovery Days await you. It's the heart of M.A.P., pulsating with valuable data.

3. Student Assignments: The Whole Nine Yards

- This screen unrolls the academic scroll—every assignment, from every course, spanning every quarter. Plus, you can customize your view by term, course, or even effort metrics. Information, exactly how you want it!

4. Class Efforts: Behaviors, Minus the Academics

- Here's where behavior assessments land—those teacher-noted observations that aren't tied to academic work. In short, it's the place to understand the habits shaping your child's classroom experience.

5. Course Standards: The Gradebook's VIP Section

- Want a quick snapshot? This screen organizes the assessments by academic standard, across all courses. It's your go-to for understanding your child's academic milestones.

6. Guardian Alerts: Stay in the Loop, Always

- Customize your alerts and choose to receive real-time notifications via email or text. Whether it's academic or effort updates, you're the first to know!

7. User Settings: Your Personal Corner

- From updating your profile and password to tweaking your contact details, this screen offers full control. It's also where you can peek into your student's user profile.

There you have it! Your comprehensive guide to M.A.P. We've designed every pixel to empower you, making the educational journey at Phoenix as transparent and enriching as possible. Enjoy exploring!

6. Assessment Key - Introductory and Practice Assignments

Symbol	Meaning	STUDENT Next Steps	PARENT Feedback
Check+	Student has gone above and beyond the expectations for the Introductory or Practice assignment.	Move on to the next assignment or enrichment	Praise your child for going above and beyond, but also ask them what they found interesting or challenging about the assignment.
Check	Student has demonstrated solid understanding of the concept or skill.	Move on to the next assignment or enrichment	Acknowledge that your child has grasped the concept well, but also ask them what they found interesting or challenging about the assignment.
Check-	Student work is incomplete and/or there seems to be significant misunderstanding of the concept/skill.	Identify mistake(s) and revise the assignment ASAP. If necessary, student should meet with teacher for make-up or revision instructions.	**Don't Panic!** Discuss where the gaps in understanding might be and encourage your child to seek clarification or extra help from the teacher.

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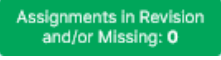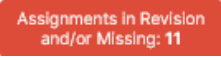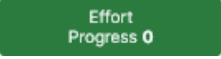**7. Assessment Key - Mastery Assignments**
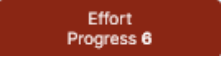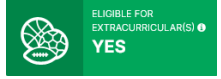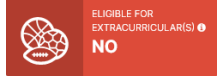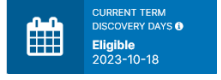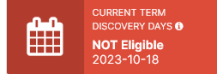
Symbol	Meaning	STUDENT Next Steps	PARENT Feedback
Exemplary **E**	Student has gone above and beyond the expectations for the Mastery assignment.	Move on to the next assignment or enrichment	Praise your child for going above and beyond, but also ask them what they found interesting or challenging about the assignment.
Mastery **M**	Student has demonstrated solid understanding of the concept or skill.	Move on to the next assignment or enrichment	Acknowledge that your child has grasped the concept well, but also ask them what they found interesting or challenging about the assignment.
Progressing **P**	Student work is incomplete and/or there seems to be significant misunderstanding of the concept/skill.	Identify mistake(s) and revise the assignment ASAP. If necessary, student should meet with teacher for make-up or revision instructions.	**Don't Panic!** Discuss where the gaps in understanding might be and encourage your child to seek clarification or extra help from the teacher.
Not Progressing **NP**	Student is not progressing towards Mastery. Major misunderstanding or missing work.	Student work is missing or unacceptable and/or there is significant misunderstanding of the Mastery concept/skill. Student should meet with teacher for make-up or revision instructions.	Discuss where the gaps in understanding might be and encourage your child to seek clarification or extra help from the teacher.

8. Assessment Key - All Assignments

Symbol	Meaning	STUDENT Next Steps	PARENT Feedback
Excused **EX**	Student has been excused from completing work. This can happen when the teacher or student chooses an alternative assessment.	None - Check in with teacher before moving on to the next assignment.	None - Check in with teacher if you have any questions.
Collected ●	Work has been collected from student on time and is in the process of being assessed.	Wait for teacher's instructions or feedback.	Reassure your child that their work is being reviewed and remind them to check for the teacher's feedback once it's available.
Missing ❓	Student did not turn in the assignment.	Turn in the assignment ASAP! Meet with teacher for make-up or revision instructions.	Discuss the reasons for missing the deadline and strategize ways to manage time more effectively.

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Academic Progress	Assignments in Revision and/or Missing: **0** Student is progressing as expected. All assignments are up to date.	Assignments in Revision and/or Missing: **2** Student is progressing as expected. There are less than 5 assignments that are missing or in revision. Click the button to view.	Assignments in Revision and/or Missing: **11** Student is NOT progressing as expected. There are 5 or more (in this case 11) assignments that are missing or in revision.
Effort Progress	Effort Progress **0** Student is progressing as expected. There are no negative student behaviors posted.	Effort Progress **3** Student is progressing as expected. There are >5 negative behavior assessment posted.	Effort Progress **6** Student is NOT progressing as expected. There are >5 negative behavior assessment posted.
Athletic Eligibility	ELIGIBLE FOR EXTRACURRICULAR(S) ⓘ **YES** Student is eligible for athletics and other school activities.	ELIGIBLE FOR EXTRACURRICULAR(S) ⓘ **NO** Student is NOT eligible for Extra Curricular(s). Student has >75% @ Mastery or >5 Revision/Missing	
Discovery Days	CURRENT TERM DISCOVERY DAYS ⓘ **Eligible** 2023-10-18 Student is eligible for Discovery Day. All courses are at Mastery	CURRENT TERM DISCOVERY DAYS ⓘ **NOT Eligible** 2023-10-18 Student is NOT eligible for Discovery Day. One or more courses is not at Mastery	

Providing constructive feedback is essential for students to improve and develop their skills, particularly when engaged in a mastery-based learning environment. Here are some types of feedback parents could provide for practice assessments:

1. For "Check +" or "Exemplary"

Feedback: Praise your child for going above and beyond, but also ask them what they found interesting or challenging about the assignment.

- Examples:
    - "Wow, you really knocked this one out of the park! What did you enjoy the most about working on it?"
    - "I can see you put extra effort here, especially with XYZ. Great job!"

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2. For "Check" or "Mastery"

Feedback: Acknowledge that your child has grasped the concept well and encourage a deeper or broader application of the knowledge.

- Examples:

    o "Great job! You've got it! What was your strategy in understanding this concept so well?"

    o "Good work. You seem to understand the concept. Let's see how you can apply it in different contexts."

3. For "Check -"or "Progressing."

Feedback: Discuss where the gaps in understanding might be and encourage your child to seek clarification or extra help from the teacher.

- Examples:

    o "It looks like you might be missing a piece of the puzzle. Maybe it's time to ask your teacher for some clarification."

    o "You seem to be struggling with this concept. What do you think went wrong? How can you improve next time?"

    o "Do you need more help or more time?"

4. For "NP" (Not Progressing)

- **Feedback**: Focus on the need for immediate action and significant improvement. Reiterate the importance of consulting with the teacher.

- **Examples**:

    o "This shows that you're struggling with this material. It's crucial to speak to your teacher as soon as possible."

    o "This isn't up to standard, and you need extra help. Have you considered asking your teacher for additional resources or support?"

5. For "Collected - Green Circle"

Feedback: Reassure your child that their work is being reviewed and remind them to check for the teacher's feedback once it's available.

- Examples:

    o "Your teacher is reviewing your work. Make sure you read their feedback carefully once it's available."

6. For "Missing – Red Dot"

Feedback: Discuss the reasons for missing the deadline and strategize ways to manage time more effectively.

- Examples:

    o "You missed this assignment. Let's figure out how to manage your time better."

    o "It's essential to turn in your work. Why do you think you missed it, and how can you prevent this next time?"

Remember, the objective of mastery-based grading is not just to assign a label to the student's work but to help them grow and understand their own learning process. The feedback parents provide can be a vital part of that growth.

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10. How to Register for M.A.P.

1. Retrieve Worthington Student ID from Infinite Campus:

Students were given their student IDs (student number) in class, but they can also be retrieved online by accessing your student information via [Infinite Campus](#) and clicking on your Phoenix student's profile. The student number should be under your Phoenix student's photo. Carefully Record the Student Number. This is what links you to your child in our M.A.P. database.

2. Enter your contact information to Register for MAP:

Go to the Mastery Assessment Portal [Parent/Guardian registration page](#) to complete the M.A.P. registration form. If you would like to receive text updates when we post weekly grade reports, enter your cell number and service provider.

Parents/Guardians can register as a couple by putting two first names in the "First Name" field (ex. Robert & Stephanie), OR Parents/Guardians can register with separate accounts.

OPTION 1: Parents/Guardian Signup - One account

ex. First Name: ***Robert & Stephanie***   Last Name: ***Estice***

_____ _____

OPTION 2: Parents/Guardian Signup - Multiple accounts

ex.   Account1 - First Name: ***Robert***   Last Name: ***Estice***
             Account 2 - Name: ***Stephanie***   Last Name: ***Estice***

_____ _____

3. Review the information and click the " Register" button.

Please use a Username/Password that is secure, and that you can remember. Usernames and Passwords are encrypted on the server and can only be reset by clicking the "Forgot Password?" link on the MAP login page ([phxmap.org](#)).

Please feel free to contact site administrators if you have any questions or problems.

Robert Estice (restice@wscloud.org) or Tony Kabelo (ckabealo@wscloud.org)

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Further Resources

1. **"[Formative Assessment and the Design of Instructional Systems](#)" by D. Royce Sadler** - A foundational paper that explores the role of formative assessment in instruction, including mastery assessment.

2. **"[Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#)" by Carol S. Dweck** - Though not strictly about mastery-based assessment, this book delves into the growth mindset, which is foundational to mastery learning models.

3. **"[Fair Isn't Always Equal: Assessing & Grading in the Differentiated Classroom](#)" by Rick Wormeli** - This book offers a nuanced look at assessment, including mastery-based approaches, in a diverse classroom.

4. **"[Handbook of Formative Assessment](#)" edited by Heidi L. Andrade and Gregory J. Cizek** - This comprehensive handbook includes a range of articles and research findings related to formative and mastery assessments.

5. **"[The Case Against Grades](#)" by Alfie Kohn** - An web based resource that makes the case for more qualitative, mastery-based forms of assessment instead of traditional grading.

6. **"[A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades](#)" by Ken O'Connor** - This resource provides practical advice on how to fix common grading problems, including insights into mastery-based assessment. [Here](#) is a quick summary.

7. **"[Assessment, Grading, and Feedback In a Learning Culture](#)" by Lorrie A. Shepard** - A seminal article that talks about the difference between traditional grading and mastery assessment.

8. **"[Transforming Classroom Grading](#)" by Robert J. Marzano** - The book outlines a variety of grading models and the research that supports them, including mastery-based grading systems.

9. [The Mastery Transcript Consortium](#) **(MTC)** - Not a reading per se, but an organization that aims to change the way students are assessed and credentialed in a mastery-based system. Their website offers articles, research, and case studies.

10. **"[Rethinking Grading: Meaningful Assessment for Standards-Based Learning](#)" by Cathy Vatterott** - Vatterott's work is a comprehensive guide that includes discussions about replacing traditional grading with more meaningful and mastery-based assessment systems.

Video Resources

- Sal Khan | **[Let's teach for mastery](#)** -- not test scores

- **[Sir Ken Robinson and assessment](#)** | HundrED

- Rick Wormeli: Part One - **[Redos, Retakes, and Do-Overs](#)**, | Part Two - **[Redos, Retakes, and Do-Overs](#)**,

- Thomas Guskey | Corwin Leaders Coaching Leaders Podcast - **[Mastery Learning](#)**

- Ken O'Connor | Excerpt from "**[A Repair Kit for Grading](#)**: 15 fixes for broken grades" -