



The **Empty Grade Book** is one of the biggest sources of anxiety in high school students as they recover from a concussion!

The “Empty Grade Book” phenomenon happens whenever a student:

- misses school completely or has spotty attendance
- has some in-class work or some homework completed but not all
- has been absent for quizzes/tests or has been allowed to “postpone” quizzes/tests
- For any *significant* amount of time
- For any significant medical or psychological reason, including *concussion*.

As educators, we always do our best to work with the hard balls that life lobs at our students. Our first inclination is to assume that all the “0’s” in the Grade Book will be filled in when the student returns to school/gets over their medical or psychological condition and **MAKES UP** all the work. And we assume that this will happen fairly soon – so we continue to give the “gift” of “postponement” and “extension of due dates”.

However, the strategy to “postpone and extend” classroom work, homework and quizzes/tests tends to only work well on short-term medical/psychological conditions. A typical concussion can last up to 4 weeks. A lingering concussion may last weeks to months. Postponing or extending deadlines for weeks to months may result in a very empty Grade Book. This can be academically devastating to a student.

What can a teacher do to avoid the “Empty Grade Book” phenomenon?

Try not to use “postponement” or “extension” as your primary academic support beyond week 2 or 3; definitely not beyond week 4. Combine with “Removal and Reduction” (View Slowed Processing Speed Strategies). As early as week 2 or 3, begin to consider:

- What is the most essential information I need to teach this student with a concussion over the next few weeks?
- Is any in-class work or homework non-essential? Can it be **REMOVED**?
- Is any in-class work or homework semi-essential? Can it be **REDUCED**?
- What in-class work or homework is essential? Make your expectations clear on how much work needs to be completed and how that work gets done (is an alternative project an option? Oral presentation, collage?)

- If mastery needs to be assessed (quizzes/tests), can a supported assessment be given? (i.e. Can you grade 5 problems instead of 10? Give an open book test?) Consider this: keep quizzes/tests to a minimum in weeks 1 and 2 of a concussion but do begin to attempt adjusted tests in weeks 3 and 4+. Healthcare providers like to “prescribe” a NO TEST rule during concussion recovery. This is a medical suggestion – not a mandate and it is often not realistic to sit a student out of ALL quizzes/tests for weeks on end. It is your prerogative as a teacher to choose to give a student a quiz/test as you see fit especially if you can find ways to adjust the test. Continue to ease in adjusted quizzes/tests for these reasons: 1.) it gives the student a grade in the Grade Book, 2.) it allows the student to put that material behind them thereby opening up room for new incoming learning and 3.) it helps students keep up good study habits. (*View What to Do About ... Tests*)
- Fill in your Grade Book with grades from adjusted work/tests completed. Do not penalize for work exempted. Make sure the amount of in-class/homework is appropriate, and make sure expectations of work increase each week, as tolerated. Filling your Grade Book **ALONG THE WAY** with some grades (even if the grade is on adjusted work/tests), peppered with some exemptions, makes all the difference in keeping anxiety at bay. Make sure when you enter exemptions that they are truly exemptions. Be careful not to enter “0’s” into the electronic Grade Book if the “0” automatically brings down the grade – even if you only intend to use the “0” as a placeholder for an assignment that you plan to later excuse or exempt. Students and Parents watch grades decline over weeks and do not understand or trust that those placeholder “0’s” will later be excused.

Some students will have a concussion that may impact attendance, work completion and tests for 10+ weeks. In those cases, it is almost a sure bet that you will bump up against a grading period. It is always better to approach the end of a semester with a full (even if adjusted) Grade Book than an Empty Grade Book. An Empty Grade Book close to a grading period deadline almost always leads to panic, frustration, confusion and anger. The end of the semester is not a good time to “call in” all the work you might have “postponed” or “extended” because you suddenly realize you are approaching a grading period with an Empty Grade Book. Keeping the Grade Book filled throughout the semester keeps your anxiety, and your student’s anxiety down! (*View End of Semester (Finals and Grades) Formula – Acute and Protracted Concussion*)