

Grade Appeals: An Overview for Students

The official policy about appealing a grade, whether it is the grade for a particular assignment or the final course grade of a semester, is clear about the process and timelines:

Students wishing to file a complaint about a course grade or a grade received for a particular piece of work in a course should first attempt to resolve the matter through discussion with the instructor.

If the issue cannot be satisfactorily resolved between student and instructor, the student may specify in writing the basis for the complaint and request a review by the departmental chair or program director. A written complaint about a grade for work completed while the course is in progress must be submitted to the chair or program director no later than two weeks after notification of the grade. A student must submit a written complaint about a final course grade to the departmental chair or program director no later than four weeks after the posted date of the official notification of grades.

A student who wishes to appeal the decision of the departmental chair or program director shall appeal in writing to the office of the dean of the faculty offering the course. Written notification of the action taken by the chair, the program director, or the dean will be sent to the student within four weeks of the filing of the appeal, excluding those weeks in which classes are not in regular session.

STEP 1: BEFORE YOU APPEAL THE GRADE

Before you raise a concern about a grade, review the course syllabus carefully. The syllabus should specify how grades on assignments and exams are calculated and weigh into the final course grade. It should also communicate expectations about timeliness for handing in assignments and penalties for lateness.

Raise issues when they happen, not at the end of the term

It is always best to raise any concerns about assignments and grades as they come up during the course. As soon as you receive a grade that you do not understand, or have a problem with attendance or completion of some work, discuss it with the instructor. Don't wait for the end of the term.

STEP 2: APPEAL TO THE INSTRUCTOR

Discuss the facts with your instructor and keep it professional

To appeal a grade, discuss your concern with the instructor. Your best opportunity for a revised grade is with your instructor - while an appeal to a department chair or dean is open to you, it is much less likely to result in a grade change. It is the instructor who knows your work and is in a position to evaluate it and/or give you opportunities to improve your grade through re-submission or other means.

It is best to have the discussion with the instructor face to face, whether during office hours or by scheduling an appointment. Raising your concern via email or in the few minutes before or after class does not typically provide a good opportunity to address the issues thoroughly.

When discussing your concerns about a grade, present your case factually: explain how you believe your work meets the criteria and rubrics that the teacher gave you for the class. Be as specific as you can. If your appeal is about an instructor not accepting late work, present proof of any unanticipated and extraordinary circumstances that caused you to submit the work late. If you believe the assignment was ambiguous, explain how you understood the instructions that were given to you.

Avoid emotional language and personal attacks

It is unlikely that an emotional attack on the instructor, delivered in person or through a flaming email thread, will have a positive influence on your appeal.

Asking for a second chance

If you have missed a deadline, failed to raise an issue early, not followed all the instructions, it is best to admit where you have been culpable. Then ask for the opportunity to improve a grade, or have work reconsidered, or complete an additional assignment to make up for the previous work, or any other remedy you want to propose.

Mentioning your grades in your other classes is not relevant

When you are appealing a grade, you may think it is relevant to mention if you are a "strong student" overall. But to most instructors, that information is actually not relevant; they are considering only your performance in their class. To be fair, they should give a student with a 2.0 GPA the same consideration as a student with a 3.8 GPA because the issue is not your academic record. Note that your general performance in the class itself may affect your grade appeal: if you have attended class regularly, completed assignments to the best of your ability and submitted them on time, and participated in class, you have created a solid foundation on which to discuss concerns about a grade with the instructor.

STEP 3: YOU MAY APPEAL TO THE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

Once an instructor has made a final decision about your grade appeal, you have the right to appeal to a department chair or, for interdisciplinary programs, the program director. Such an appeal must be in writing. An email is fine.

When you present your case, write professionally with complete sentences and paragraphs and without informal commentary; this will help the chair or director consider your situation more carefully. You should attach the syllabus, the assignment given to you if that is a separate document, and a copy of your assignment or other documentation. After reading your appeal, the chair will speak with the instructor to hear his/her analysis of the situation. The chair or director has the option to re-evaluate the quality of your academic work as well as consider the process the instructor used in assigning the grade. When the chair makes a decision, he/she will let you and the instructor know.

STEP 4: FINAL LEVEL OF REVIEW: YOU MAY APPEAL TO THE DEAN

Once the chair or program director has made a decision about your grade, you may appeal that decision to the Dean's Office in the School of Communication and Information. The Dean's Office is concerned only with issues of process and will not evaluate the quality of your academic work. You should submit your appeal in writing to Associate Dean Dafna Lemish (dafna.lemish@rutgers.edu). Summarize to the best of your ability: explain what was assigned, what you submitted, and what happened when you discussed your concerns about the grade with the teacher and the department chair.

STEP 5: WHAT TO DO AND EXPECT AFTER YOUR APPEAL

If your grade appeal on an assignment is successful, the instructor will adjust your grades in the class record to reflect the new outcome. If the appeal affects your final grade in the class that was previously submitted, a change of grade will be processed by the school through the registrar, which may take about two weeks.

If your appeal is not successful and you think your grades will affect your progress toward your degree, you should make an appointment with an academic adviser or dean in the Office of Student Services. Your adviser can help you plan whether or not to repeat a course, help identify alternate classes to meet a requirement, and other options. The SC&I Office of Student Services can be reached at 848.932.7550.