

# Implementing Specifications Grading: Enhancing Accurate Evaluation of Student Competencies

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**Topic:** AACN Essentials

**Category:** Quality Improvement/Evidence-Based Practice Project

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## Abstract

### Background/Introduction

This presentation outlines a comprehensive methodology for implementing specifications grading in a nursing course to enhance accurate evaluation of student competencies. Specifications grading emphasizes clear performance expectations and learning objectives, promoting student-centered learning and improving the assessment process. The lack of partial credit in specifications grading results in student opportunities to revise work not initially meeting preset standards or “specifications” utilizing instructor feedback, fosters a growth mindset, and supports continuous improvement.

### Purpose

To present a robust methodology for incorporating specifications grading in a nursing course, with a focus on improving the precision of evaluating student competencies.

### Methods or Processes/Procedures

Specifications grading was implemented in an undergraduate nursing research course, defining clear and measurable performance expectations for AACN Essentials sub-competencies. Learning objectives were aligned with assessments, creating a direct link between learning and measurement. Grading rubrics included the "specifications" required to meet performance expectations. Formative and summative assessments allowed diverse opportunities for students to demonstrate competencies.

### Results

Instructors can more accurately assess student competency levels, leading to fairer and more reliable evaluations. The transparent nature of specifications grading enhances understanding of performance expectations for instructors and students alike. Active student participation is encouraged through self-assessment and ownership of learning progress.

### Limitations

This methodology's implementation is currently limited to a single nursing course. Broader research and application across various courses and institutions are needed to fully assess its impact.

### Conclusions/Implications for Practice

Specifications grading provides a valuable framework for nursing instructors to accurately evaluate student competencies. Aligning learning objectives with explicit performance criteria and offering diverse assessments creates a fair and transparent evaluation process. Adoption of this methodology can enhance the learning experience and support the development of competent nursing professionals capable of meeting dynamic healthcare demands. Specifications grading stands as a promising tool for driving meaningful assessment practices and facilitating student success as nursing education continues to evolve.

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## Biography

Dr. Beverly Dabney is an Associate Professor of Nursing at the University of Michigan-Flint's School of Nursing. She primarily instructs in the RN to BSN program and mentors DNP students on their scholarly projects. Her research sheds light on inpatient service quality, patient-centered care, and the evolution of nursing education, especially for non-traditional students and online platforms. Dr. Dabney also emphasizes the importance of continuous quality improvement in the nursing education.

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