



Penn Foster Academic Policies: Frequently Asked Questions

Grading

What is considered passing? What is a passing grade average per class/per lesson?

A 65% or higher is considered passing for all high school lessons and courses

When a student fails a lesson assessment, what is the next step?

For objective (multiple choice exams) students have 30 days to retake it. For subjective (written) exams, students must retake it, but the details are different depending on the exam. See our [retake policy FAQ](#) for details on all situations!

It is very important to monitor the student's work in the partner portal and determine if an intervention is required. It is our experience that students who read through all of the material and complete all practice exercises have a better chance to pass each course. Students should not be allowed to fail a lesson and take the makeup without intervention, or to fail more than one consecutive exam without intervention.

Failed Courses

When a student fails a course, what is the next step?

When a student fails a core course, they must complete the make-up exam. If they fail the make-up exam, they will be ordered a second make-up exam. If a second online make-up is not available, the student will receive a written examination. After three attempts, we will evaluate if any other alternatives are available. Please note that written alternative exams cannot be expedited.

When a student fails an elective course, they may have a makeup exam or may have to choose a new course, depending on the course and pathway. Call in to get the specifics on your situation.

How many makeups are available for each class?

This is not consistent across all classes, but there are typically three makeups available, two online and one on paper. For some courses, we offer an elective as a replacement credit instead of the paper exam or after the paper exam has been failed (for example, when a student runs out of other options for a failed civics course, they may be offered the Economics course to make up the social studies credit). This replacement course option is not available for every course.

It is very important to monitor the student's work in the partner portal and determine if an intervention is required. It is our experience that students who read through all of the material and complete all practice exercises have a better chance to pass each course and not require makeup work. Students should not be allowed to fail a lesson and take the makeup without intervention, or to fail more than one consecutive exam without intervention, to reduce the risk of failing an entire course.



Written Exams

What is the grading process/ turnaround time for written exams?

Written exams are graded in the order that they are received so the time may vary but we strive to keep it within 7 business days. The exams are first checked to make sure they meet the preliminary criteria established for the assignment. If they do not meet the criteria, they are returned ungraded. If an exam passes the criteria check, then it will be graded by an instructor and returned to the student through the portal.

Can grading be rushed?

Exams cannot be rushed under normal circumstances. Expediting will only be done in case of an emergency, such as a family crisis. The education department will determine if an exam will be rushed. When determining if an assignment should be expedited we look at the student's history. Factors such as plagiarism, exams returned ungraded, waiting until the end to submit the assignments, or moving very quickly through the coursework will most likely cause a denial of a grading request.

What is the difference between a Return and a Failed Exam? Why are exams returned ungraded?

An exam marked *Return* or *RTN* has been returned ungraded. There was a problem with the file, the correct exam was not received, or it did not match the basic requirements. The student must review the feedback from the grader, which will tell them what to fix and resubmit it for a grade. A *failed* exam has been graded and earned a grade less than 65%.

What is the criteria for each written exam?

This is found within the lesson on the student portal and partner portal. For more guidance, check the course guide for the lesson:

All Job Corps courses: [Click here for ELA1-4](#)

All other Clients: [Personal Narrative](#) [Developing Ideas](#) [Writing](#) [Spanish Course](#)

How can I find out why a written exam was returned?

Students should click on the Program and Courses page, scroll down to the course and exam in question, and click the "view project" or "view feedback" button, then download the feedback from the grader. This will explain why the exam was returned.

View [this guide](#) and [this video](#) for details

What if the exam was failed?

See our [retake policy FAQ](#) for details!

How do we know a student's assignment was received?

You will see *Received* or *RCD* on the student's grade page. To view the document submitted by the student, students should click on the Program and Courses page, scroll down to the course and exam in question, and click the "view project" button to get the option to download the file.



Plagiarism

What is the policy on plagiarism?

Any exam that is plagiarized will receive a grade of 1%. It is important for our partnering instructors to step in at that point to ensure the student understands plagiarism.

As students are warned in the lesson instructions, “Blatant, direct copying of another’s words is plagiarism, but paraphrasing another author’s ideas is plagiarism as well. Plagiarism is the theft of words or ideas, often both. If you haven’t constructed the logic of your essay by yourself, if you’ve “borrowed” wording that you feel is well-done, or if you’re using another writer’s words and/or ideas to create your own work without giving credit to that writer, you’re likely committing plagiarism.”

An instructor/facilitator/coach should review the writing to be sure it meets the requirements before submitting the exam, but the instructor should not correct the exam before it is submitted for grading. A submission that has been corrected by an instructor, another student, or anyone other than the student before grading would be considered plagiarized. Watch [this video](#) or [view this presentation](#) on appropriately helping students prepare for written exams.

What are some resources to prevent plagiarism before it happens?

Plagiarism is covered in several places, including in the lessons before students write. You can print out this shortened [guide to avoiding plagiarism](#) and go over it with students before they write.

Remind students that they cannot use other students’ work or look up example work online or in a book, even if they were to give the original author credit; these answers need to be entirely in the student’s own words, using the information and skills learned in this course.

Watch [this video](#) or [view this presentation](#) on helping students prepare for written exams.

For students in Practical English, be sure they have watched the video in lesson 4.2 titled “avoiding plagiarism” and the plagiarism reading assignment in section 4.3. Printing the [guide to avoiding plagiarism](#) for student reference is also suggested.

For students in written communication, be sure they have reviewed the “Penn Foster Plagiarism Policy” reading assignment in section 3.1, including the 10 types of plagiarism video linked within. Printing the [guide to avoiding plagiarism](#) for student reference is also suggested.

For students in the Job Corps ELA 1-4 courses, all of the lessons with a graded writing assignment also contain a “Plagiarism” reading assignment. Printing the [guide to avoiding plagiarism](#) for student reference is also suggested.

What happens if a student plagiarizes? (applicable for all clients except Job Corps)

If a student submits work in which any portion of their writing uses ideas, phrases, or structure from another source, they will receive a grade of 1% and be required to complete the assignment again. The instructor feedback file for the exam will include information explaining the results. The information will include the web address or addresses where the instructor found the work the student copied or used to develop their answers, or explain that the responses were the same as another student’s. Students won’t be able to finish the Practical English course until they submit an exam that isn’t plagiarized. If they plagiarize it a second time, but earn an overall passing grade for the course, they will have to complete an additional exam on paper. If they plagiarize a second time and fail the course, they will have to get makeup work (like any other course) which will come in the form of a mailed exam. The third time they plagiarize they may be terminated from the program.



What happens if a Job Corps student plagiarizes?

If a student submits work in which any portion of their writing uses ideas, phrases, or structure from another source, they will receive a grade of 1% and be required to complete the assignment again. The instructor feedback file for the exam will include information explaining the results. The information will include the web address or addresses where the instructor found the work that was copied or used to develop the answers, or explain that the responses were the same as another student's. Students won't be able to finish their course until they submit an exam that isn't plagiarized. If they plagiarize it a second time, they will either have to complete an additional exam on paper or do the same exam and write a letter of apology about their plagiarism, depending on their final grade for the course. The third time they plagiarize they may be terminated from the program.

Student Progression Policy

What is Penn Foster's student progression policy?

- a. Students must complete all reading assignments, practices exercises, and self-checks in their lessons. We recommend students complete approximately 1 credit per week, assuming the student is fully dedicated to their coursework. They should adjust their pace somewhat, according to course difficulty. On average, courses consist of 4-5 exams. You should ensure the student is doing well with the readings and exercises before allowing them to take exams.
- b. Students cannot take more than 15 exams in one week. The calendar week runs Sunday-Saturday, so for example, a student who hits the 15 exam threshold on a Thursday will be unable to take additional exams until the following Sunday. The student will still be able to access reading materials and exercises during this time.

What do I do if my student is pacing too slow?

Make sure they are working at least 12 hours a week, taking exams by the suggested exam date on their Programs and Courses page, and having regular one-on one meetings with you. Changing "My Program Goal" on the home page will change the suggested exam dates on the program and courses page to guide students to finishing by their goal. Contextualize the student's goals for completing the program to keep motivation and intent to finish high.

Will students receive any messages as they near the 15-exam auto-stop threshold?

Yes, once a student has taken 13 exams in the calendar week, they will receive [this warning](#) in the student portal that they are nearing the 15-exam threshold for that week. When they have taken 15 exams, [this alert](#) will display. These alerts will disappear at the beginning of the following calendar week.



Why can a student complete no more than 15 exams in one week?

Penn Foster first and foremost to ensure that we are maintaining the academic integrity of our high school diploma program. Additionally, we expect this program to have numerous benefits for students and partners. These include

- i. Ensuring students have the **skills and competencies** they need to process onto their next step
- ii. Ensure students have the **discipline** required for success by having completed the program in the way it was designed
- iii. Building student's **confidence and self-actualization** because they see success as they progress (good grades on exams because they are doing the quizzes and readings)
- iv. Trust that the graduates are **prepared and have the skills** and competencies required
- v. Support our organization's mission for **supporting better student outcomes** (college and career readiness)

Will this policy slow down students?

The policy aims at ensuring students have mastered the skills and competencies needed to move onto their next step, while protecting the integrity of the program. Students can still work on all the reading/practice activities while they wait for exams to open. Focusing on these activities reinforces a student's mastery of the materials and creates those "ah-ha" moments that teachers love.

This policy is based on Penn Foster's course design, which allocated a certain amount of time that students should be spending on both knowledge acquisition (textbook readings) and knowledge application (practice exercises, final exams). Students should be spending time completing the textbook readings and self-checks, in addition to final exams.

Why should students complete practice exercises if they're not graded?

Students are expected to complete all parts of the high school program. Students are expected to do all of the practice exercises (Discover More, Reflect and Respond, Self-Check, etc.) They should be completing all readings, and utilizing the practice exercises to reinforce their learning. Any time a student exhibits irregular study patterns or has been caught using unethical resources we reserve the right to ask for any work for review, or review their online work via our admin portal. This is to protect the integrity of the program and the value of the Penn Foster diploma for all students.



Can students access the answers to practice questions and copy and paste them as their answers?

Per our honor code, we expect students to complete the assigned work in an ethical manner. Students are expected to use the practice exercises (Discover More, Reflect and Respond, Self-Check, etc.) to ensure that the content in a given section of a course has been mastered. The answer key should only be accessed once the work has been completed. Students may review the answers to determine whether they made errors in their own answers, and may edit their answers, using their own words to fix the errors. Students should not copy the suggested answers as their own answers. Doing so does not benefit the student in any way, and the answers can be easily identified as the stock suggested answers when the work is submitted to Penn Foster. If students opt to copy/plagiarize any work – including practice exercise answers – they are subject to termination, as per the academic integrity policy set forth in the Student Catalog. In short, we would much rather see an imperfect attempt at an answer in the student's own words, than a copy and pasted answer that they didn't read.

Does this policy take into learning disabilities or those that require extended time?

We are always happy to review any possible accommodations for students with learning disabilities. Extended time to complete coursework is certainly an option, as appropriate.

Does this policy neglect to take into account prior knowledge students may have accumulated? (For instance, students who have taken a previous course may have learned much of the material despite not passing the course overall).

Students have the opportunity to submit a transcript to gain credit from previous work that was passed. While we understand that students who are taking a course the previously failed may have familiarity with the subject matter, we must be able to justify the previous knowledge and a passing grade from a previous transcript that indicates the student has learned the materials (while a failing grade does not). We expect all students to complete all the required coursework, regardless of previous knowledge.

Is there messaging in any of the student catalog or lessons that says a student is required to submit practice exercises to graduate?

This is an integrity issue which overrides anything else. The Student Catalog does state that Penn Foster may request substantiated evidence of learning in cases of irregular study patterns.

General Program Questions

Where can I find a copy of the student code of conduct and Penn Foster's academic integrity policies (cheating, plagiarism, etc.)?

This information can be found in the Penn Foster Student Catalog.

What is the difference between a Credit and Course/Class?

Most courses in Penn Foster's High School Diploma program are worth 1 credit; students earn 1 credit when they earn an overall passing grade on the course. Orientation and Digital Citizenship are worth 0.5 credits.



Why do students have a different number of lessons?

The total number of lessons depends on the elective courses a student selects. Electives have various amounts of lessons, which will cause a different number of total lessons.

Can students complete courses out of order or have more than two courses open at once?

No. Students are required to move through the Penn Foster curriculum in order. Lessons and courses build a foundation and bridge to the next set of lessons, and it is important they follow the pathway that has proven to work.

Our learning management system only allows for two courses to be open at a time; if opening more is attempted, students will not be able to access any of their lesson materials. A course will open when students have ≤ 2 lessons left to complete in the previous course.