



Ready Reference B-3

Evaluating Your Grades

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If you were to ask students and alumni about the reason that they chose to pursue a college education, the most common response would likely be “to get a good job.” Obtaining a college diploma is often perceived as the key to career opportunity and success. Unfortunately, this view is a misconception. Completing a college degree does not guarantee that the doors of opportunity will be open to you. Opening the doors of opportunity requires more than just college completion – career success mandates college achievement. Does this mean that those students with a less than perfect grade point average are doomed to failure? Definitely not.

It's the whole package that counts!

When considering the role that your GPA will play in your job search process, realize that employers will evaluate your qualifications based on more than your grades. While academic success can be a selling point, employers are typically seeking well-rounded employees. Employers want workers who demonstrate intelligence through their abilities to process information, observations, and ideas, and who can act on them to obtain results. These qualifications can be displayed not only through a successful academic record, but also through college achievements such as work experience, internships, volunteer work, and organizational involvement. Employers hire more than a person's academic ability – they hire the whole package!

Reasonable Reasons for Low Grades

The realization that employers are interested in more than a GPA does not imply that you can intentionally let your grades plummet. Employers correlate grades to subject mastery, ability, self-discipline, and personal determination. Consequently, academic performance should not be taken lightly.



While some employers may use your GPA to evaluate your level of ability and self-discipline, a lower grade point average may not reflect poorly on you if the cause of the lower grades is reasonable. Employers understand that working to pay for your college education, being involved in campus and/or community activities, taking classes outside of your area(s) of concentration, and the occurrence of extenuating circumstances may result in a lower GPA because of the balancing required between your major academic work and these situations. Excessive social involvement, however, is not an extenuating circumstance or a reasonable justification to allow your grades to decline.

Marketing Yourself with Your GPA

Employers who hire CEAT students will nearly always want to know your GPA. If you have a less than stunning GPA, you will need to have an understanding of how to market your grades.

The first item to consider when deciding how to market your grades is to what an employer considers acceptable. Generally, a GPA of 3.0 or better is a selling point. Most professionals suggest job seekers not allow their GPA to drop below a 2.5. when combined with extracurricular activities, work and internship experience, a prospective employee with a 2.5 GPA is still considered competitive. When translating these suggested GPAs into individual course letter grades, you should strive to limit your transcript to A's, B's, and an occasional C. Employers may view any grade less than a C as an indication that you are unable to manage multiple responsibilities.

When revealing a lower GPA on your resume, indicating your major GPA or including an explanation may soften an initial negative reaction by a prospective employer. By reporting your grades with an explanation you may minimize any ill effect of less than outstanding grades. While employers do not universally welcome the concept of "grades with an explanation", realize that an employer who excludes you on the basis of your explanation might also exclude an applicant who indicated only a low cumulative GPA or who included no information about his or her grades at all. This approach, however, should only be used when it accurately describes and explains the reasonable reason for low grades.

When Grades Really Matter

Maintaining a high GPA can be important to your career plans if you are seeking to acquire or retain scholarships, financial aid, and some organizational memberships. If your career plans involve continuing your education, you should realize that graduate and professional schools usually have a minimum GPA requirement.



Many of the top employers will use minimum GPA requirements in their employee selection process. However, do not get discouraged and intimidated if you do not meet the minimum GPA requirements. By clearly indicating your skills and/or experience you can contribute to the employer, you may still be able to get your foot in the door. If the door remains closed, you may simply have to take a detour of employment with a different organization to gain more experience before seeking reconsideration by your ideal employer.