How Grades Work

Keeping track of your grades in college is important for many reasons. Grades indicate your academic standing and qualification for honors when you graduate, and they determine your eligibility for some majors, scholarships, and programs. If you plan to go to graduate school, your grades will figure significantly in the success of your applications.

Academic standing

On the most basic level, your grades determine your academic standing at FSU. For example, you must maintain a grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.0 to be in "good academic standing." A GPA below 2.0 will get you in trouble, and there are three kinds of trouble: Warning, Probation, and Dismissal. The table below shows the grade ranges that apply. Warning is just that – notice that your grades are unacceptable and that you need to raise them. Probation means that your grades are even more unacceptable and that you must raise them enough to get off of probation by the end of the next semester. If you fail to do so, you will be dismissed from the University.

Attempted Hours	Warning GPA range	Probation GPA range	Dismissal
1-15	1.5-1.999	Less than 1.5	Failure to remove probation by the end of the next term.
16-30	1.75-1.999	Less than 1.75	
31 or more		Less than 2.0	

Letter grades and numbers

The letter grade you receive for a class comes from a calculation that your instructor makes to measure your level of achievement in his or her course. The instructor may use a percentage system, a point system, or some other way to come up with a letter grade. These systems differ from course to course.

A letter grade, once assigned, has a corresponding numerical value that is the same for all courses. These values, called "quality points" or "GPA points," are shown in the following table:

	B+ = 3.25	C+ = 2.25	D+ = 1.25	
A = 4	B = 3	C = 2	D = 1	F = 0
A- = 3.75	B- = 2.75	C- = 1.75	D- = 0.75	

The table above shows the quality points per credit hour. For a 3-credit course, you would multiply the above values by 3 to determine the number of quality points earned. For example, a grade of A for a 3-credit course would earn you 12 quality points. A grade of C+ in the same course would earn 6.75 quality points. For a 2-credit course the number of quality points would be 8 for an A and 4.5 for a C+.

Calculating a GPA from a transcript

Your grade point average (GPA) is simply the mathematical average, per credit hour, of all your grades. It is calculated by adding up all of your quality points and dividing them by the number of credit hours you have attempted.

If you go on Blackboard and look up your unofficial transcript, the record of one semester might look something like this:

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Term	Class		Division	Major
Spring xxxx	Freshman		BASIC DIVISION	EXERCISE SCIENCE

Title	Type	Course	Grade	Hours Attempted	Hours Earned	GPA Hours	GPA Points
GEN CHEMISTRY I		CHM1045C	B	4.00	4.00	4.00	12.00
HYB:MULTIFILM/CULTUR		HUM3321	A	3.00	3.00	3.00	12.00
SCIENCE OF NUTRITION		HUN1201	A-	3.00	3.00	3.00	11.25
PRECALCULUS ALGEBRA		MAC1140	A	3.00	3.00	3.00	12.00
Term Totals:				13.00	13.00	13.00	47.25

In this case, the student took 13 credit hours (Hours Attempted) and completed all of the hours (Hours Earned). The GPA Hours total is the same, 13, because all of the courses were graded by A-through-F letter grades. Finally, the GPA points total 47.25. To get this student's semester GPA, we would divide 47.25 by 13 to get 3.635.

The next example is a little more complicated.

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Term	Class	Division	Major
Fall xxxx	Freshman	BASIC DIVISION	BIOLOGICAL SCI/PREREQ INCO

Title	Type	Course	Grade	Hours Attempted	Hours Earned	GPA Hours	GPA Points	
BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE I		BSC2010	W	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
BIOLOGICAL SCI I LAB		BSC2010L	B	1.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	
GEN CHEMISTRY I		CHM1045	C	3.00	3.00	3.00	6.00	
GEN CHEM I LAB		CHM1045L	A	1.00	1.00	1.00	4.00	
FIG COLLOQUIUM		HUM1920	S	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	
PRECALCULUS ALGEBRA		MAC1140	F	3.00	0.00	3.00	0.00	
Term Totals:				9.00	6.00	8.00	13.00	

This student started out the semester with a course load of 12 credit hours. The Hours Attempted total is only 9 because the student withdrew (the W grade) from BSC2010, a 3-credit course. The Hours Earned total is only 6 because the student failed MAC1140 and therefore earned 0 hours. The GPA Hours total is 8 because, of the 9 hours attempted, 1 (HUM1920) was graded S/U (satisfactory/ unsatisfactory) and is not included in GPA calculation. The GPA Points total is 13, based on the numerical values for the grades received. To calculate this student's semester GPA, we would divide the GPA points (13) by the GPA hours (8) to get 1.62.

To get your GPA from your transcript, then, you would add up all of the GPA points from all of your semesters, do the same for the GPA hours, and then divide the total number of GPA points by the total number of GPA hours. If you include only grades earned at FSU, you will arrive at what is called your "FSU GPA," used to determine your academic standing at the university. If all of your college credits come from FSU, your FSU GPA is also your "cumulative GPA." However, if some of your grades come from other universities, your cumulative GPA will include those grades in addition to grades earned at FSU.

It makes sense from all of these calculations that, as you make your way through college and accumulate credits, the grade you get in a single 3-credit course will affect your GPA less and less. Sometimes it is useful to know exactly how the grades you get during your current semester will affect your GPA. You might be planning to apply for a limited major, you may be hoping to graduate with honors, or you may be concerned about possible dismissal from the university. You can use the FSU GPA calculator tool (found at

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http://mailer.fsu.edu/~phanowel/gpa/gpacalc.html) to figure out how the grades you get for the current semester will affect your cumulative GPA. The screen you start with looks like this:

Enter total credits and quality points accumulated up until this Semester (OPTIONAL).

Total   Credits: Total   Quality   Points:

(OPTIONAL) Enter Abreviated Course Title (e.g. MAC1105)

Course	# Credits	of Letter Grade	S / U	Major	<-Clear->	Quality Points
			☐ ☐			

	Total # of Credits	Grade Point Average	Total Quality Points
Cumulative			
Major			

The "Total Credits" box at the top would be where you put the total GPA Hours from your transcript. The "Total Quality Points" box would be where you put the total GPA points. (Hint: if you know your GPA and the total GPA hours, just multiply them to get your quality points.) Click on Submit (it shows on the screen, not on this diagram), and your GPA will show near the bottom of the screen. From here, you can add rows to the screen, enter credits and grades, and see how your GPA is affected by the grades in the classes you are currently taking.

Enter total credits and quality points accumulated up until this Semester (OPTIONAL).

Total   Credits: Total   Quality   Points:

8   13

Clears Data Entered in this Row

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Course	# Credits	of Letter Grade	S / U	Major		Quality Points
past info	8	D-	☐	☐	<-Clear->	13

	Total # of Credits	Grade Point Average	Total Quality Points
Cumulative	8	1.63	13
Major			

Another calculation tool, this one for determining what GPA you need to get this semester to reach a specific cumulative GPA goal is available at http://mailer.fsu.edu/~phanowel/gpa/gpa.html. For this calculator, shown below, you enter your current GPA, total GPA hours attempted, the number of hours you are registered for, and the cumulative GPA you would like to achieve. It then tells you what GPA you have to get this semester to end up with the GPA you want.

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"What GPA do I need to get to raise my cumulative GPA?"

Current GPA: (a)
GPA Hours attempted: (b)
Hours registered for: (c)
Desired GPA: (d)

Calculated using the following formula:
GPA needed = d(b+c)-ab/c