



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 G.P.A. will play in your job search process, realize that employers will evaluate your qualifications for 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 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

This realization that employers are interested in more than a G.P.A. 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 G.P.A. 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 G.P.A. 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 G.P.A.

Some employers will not even ask about your grade point average. However, you need to have an understanding of how to market your grades if an employer does want the information.

The first item to consider when deciding how to market your grades is what an employer considers acceptable. Generally, a grade point average of 3.0 or better (on a 4.0 scale) is a selling point. Most professionals suggest that job seekers not allow their G.P.A. to drop below a 2.5. When combined with extracurricular activities, work and internship experiences, a prospective employee with a 2.5 G.P.A. is still considered competitive. When translating these suggested G.P.A.'s 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.

If your grades are good, your G.P.A. can be presented simply and with pride. For example:

Cumulative GPA = 3.2

Major GPA = 3.5

What if your grade point average is less than desirable? The key to marketing yourself when

your G.P.A. is low is to emphasize your other abilities and experience. Unless your G.P.A. is above a 3.0, your grades should be excluded from your résumé (unless required by an employer). The focus of all your interactions with an employer should be the skills that would be beneficial to the job responsibilities, your experiences related to the desired position, and your ability and willingness to learn, rather than your G.P.A.

When revealing a lower G.P.A. on your résumé, indicating your major G.P.A. 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 G.P.A. 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. Some examples of "grades with an explanation" are provided below:

Example #1 - Low grades due to classes outside of major

Major G.P.A.: 3.4

Cumulative G.P.A.: 2.8

OR

Major GPA: 3.4

Overall GPA: 3.1 (Since transferring from engineering program as a sophomore)

OR

Major GPA: 3.4

Cumulative GPA: 2.8 (Cumulative average suffered due to grades while in engineering program)

Example #2 - Low grades due to extenuating circumstance

Major G.P.A.: 3.4

Cumulative G.P.A.: 2.8

OR

Major GPA: 3.4

Overall GPA: 3.1 (Except for a poor freshman year)

OR

Major GPA: 3.4

Cumulative GPA: 2.8 (Would be a 3.1 except for a poor freshman year)

Example #3 - Low grades due to working half-time or more

Major G.P.A.: 3.4

Cumulative G.P.A.: 2.8

OR

Major GPA: 3.4

Overall GPA: 2.8 (Worked 30 hours each week during every academic semester to finance education.)

NOTE: In a situation like Example #3, your work ethic and self-reliance may overshadow some weakness in your grades. Employers may be more influenced by your hard work and realize that you have more to offer than your grades indicate.

When Grades Really Matter

If having a great grade point average is not critical to securing career opportunities, when is a good G.P.A. important? Maintaining a high grade point average 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 minimum G.P.A. requirements. Additionally, some of the top employers will also use minimum G.P.A. requirements in their employee selection process. However, do not get discouraged and intimidated if you do not meet the minimum G.P.A. requirements. By clearly indicating the other 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.