

Spiritual Exercise Journals Grading Rubric:

The Spiritual Exercises are an intense spiritual workout. Completing them is challenging and grading them can perhaps be even more challenging. The following grading rubric is used as a guide to assist you in grading the Spiritual Exercise journals and to provide some uniformity between the different sections and teachers. Like any other discipline, we are looking to help the student develop a set of skills that will allow them to develop a mature, healthy, adult spirituality. To that end, the student should be able to consistently express what is happening during the reflections. Contrary to the perception, we are not grading their prayer. As you will see the grading rubric makes no reference and does not expect the student to have a particular response to any given exercise. The teacher should not feel guilty for taking off points and a less than perfect score does not mean that the student did not have a profound, spiritual experience. It simply means that they did not completely demonstrate in that particular reflection one or more of the key characteristics that one hopes to foster through the exercises.

Assuming that each reflection is being graded for 100 points, points are earned as follows:

- 1) Student completes the Spiritual Exercise Journal (~250+ words) by due date. **(30 points)**
- 2) Student clearly, honestly and appropriately articulates a personal experience or example related to the exercise or otherwise provides evidence of personal reflection upon the particulars of his life. Student provides a concrete, detailed and appropriate image or example he found to be significant. **(20 points)**
- 3) Student provides a specific reference to one of the scriptural passages. **(10 points)**
- 4) Student articulates a personal response and/or interpretation of one of the scriptural passages. Student clearly, honestly and appropriately articulates personal feelings and insights from reflection and/or Scripture. **(20 points)**
- 5) Student clearly, honestly, and appropriately responds to key questions (listed in the table below) in the exercise in a thorough and thoughtful manner. **(20 points)**

As regards length, if the student writes about half of a reflection then I would give them half of the points for completion. Similarly, if the student submits the journal late then they lose points as for any other late assignment. Most students should be able to finish the assignment in class; however, I have allowed a student who has worked diligently during class request additional time so that he can put extra effort in to the assignment. I do not want to discourage the student from putting in extra effort by taking off points for it being late; however, if it is significantly late then I do take off points.

Each reflection should demonstrate that the student has engaged the Scripture in some form or fashion. The student may demonstrate that they have read and understood the passage by summarizing it and thus earn the points for providing a scriptural reference without engaging the Scripture. While explaining what the Scripture may mean to the student, the hope is that the student will be able to engage the passage personally and become increasingly aware of the feelings that the reading evokes. Such interaction with Scripture is to be encouraged even if it may seem to be a negative one. In addition to speaking about Scripture, the student should also share about himself and draw from his own life experiences. Specific memories, persons, experiences, and images will likely come to mind. The student should be encouraged to explain the relationship between those images and the Scripture passage in search of the deeper meaning that those memories have. By becoming increasingly aware of the types of imagery that God uses to communicate with the student, it is hoped that the student will develop over time a feeling of being able to personally identify with the deeper meaning of the passage. I try to encourage the students to be as specific as possible in their images and then work to highlight

what it is that God might be trying to say to them. The students should be challenged and learn to discover for themselves the meaning behind the images and stories that come to mind during the reflection time.

Finally, the students should show a serious attempt at answering the key questions presented on the reflection sheet. As the teacher, if you continue to ask the right questions in response to the journals you can help them to discover for themselves how to better develop their journal entries. Verbal feedback about the journal entries to the class can be helpful in guiding the class as it provides a way for the teacher to summarize at what level most of the students are. This feedback recognizes the progress of the students and encourages those who have missed the mark. By using personalized written feedback and more general verbal feedback to the class, the students are given the sufficient guidance to help them make progress without hampering their own creativity and freedom of expression which allows the student a more authentic way to discover and build the desired personal relationship with God and with Jesus. While the development of this personal relationship is the ultimate goal of these assignments, the students will also learn how to express their feelings, reflect on life events, and use the Scripture as a means of supporting their own personal prayer.

To the degree that the students are able to demonstrate the aforementioned tasks, I would suggest grading each of the five categories with a grade of 100% for an exceptional job, 95% for a very good job, 90% for a good job, 80% for an average job, 75% for a less than average job, 50% for a poor job, and 0% if the student did not meet the objective at all.

With that being said, discretion and some latitude can (and should) be given in grading to encourage a student who is making an effort so that their experience of the Exercises is not one of failure. Taking off a few points for something missing and encouraging the student to focus on that area more next time will likely produce the desired results better than strict grading. Grading can also be used to encourage a student to go deeper. An occasional 95 for a student who has been doing extremely well on previous exercises may provide that extra incentive to go just a little deeper. So the above rubric is not intended to reduce the grading to an exact science or mere calculation but to provide guidance, motivation, and feedback to the student. I have previously told the students that I start grading fairly generously at the beginning; however, as they become more proficient at praying with the Scriptures that my expectations increase. Hence, it is important that the student continue to strive to look more deeply into the Scriptures and one's self in order to get the most out of the experience. I have found that the students will write better journals as the semester progresses but may not necessarily get a higher grade.

In no way is the grading an indication of how well the student is doing in his relationship to God. An atheist should be able to get an A even though the feelings, experience, insights, conclusions and focus of his reflections may be very different than that of a more religious student. The most important thing is that the student openly, honestly, and appropriately express himself.