

St. Clair College

Students'
Guide

to

Grade Appeals



ST. CLAIR
COLLEGE

Grade Appeals are never easy!

Grade Appeals are never easy and usually are stressful. A variety of emotions and feelings are involved when a student initiates an appeal against a grade that has been assigned to that particular student in a particular course. Understanding the grade appeal process, their purpose and operation will help to ensure that the student and the faculty member who assigned the grade are better able to contribute to the resolution of a grade appeal.

Reading this guide should assist you to make the right choices and decisions.

Discuss With Your Professor Before You Launch a Formal Grade Appeal



The best way to resolve questions and concerns about a grade is to engage in a discussion with your professor about your grade. You should clearly and respectfully identify the reasons for your concerns so that the professor can respond to your questions. This discussion will also permit the instructor to go over your entire grade with you to assist in answering your concerns and to learn why the assigned grade is what it is. Often this frank discussion will result in the concerns being resolved.

Time Limits for Launching a Grade Appeal

Students have a prescribed time within which to launch an appeal of a grade in a course.



College policy specifies that a grade appeal must be filed at the

Registrar's Office **within 10 college business days** of the **official communication to the student of the final grade** in a course.

Official communication generally takes the form of the release of the official college grade transcripts by the Registrar's Office. This means that the ability to initiate a grade appeal expires after the passing of 10 College business days after the Registrar's Office makes the transcripts available. However, the policy also indicates that in certain cases an appeal must be launched earlier than what is stated above.

If the **Chair of the School gives the student written notice that a failing grade is being assigned** to a student in certain circumstances, then the appeal must be launched within **10 College business days** of that written notice. Two examples of this earlier timeline would be:

1. **Termination from a clinical work placement** prior to the normal end of the clinical placement, and,
2. **Termination from a course** prior to the normal end of that course **due to academic misconduct** on the part of the student

College policy also allows for an appeal to be launched after the expiry of the 10 days if there are extenuating circumstances. An appeal to the Chair of the College Grade Appeal Panel (located in Room 0340 at the South campus: extension 4487 or wbeneteau@stclaircollege.ca) is required to permit an extension of time.

A Grade Appeal Will Look Only at Academic and Process Issues

The Grade Appeal Panel does not and cannot take into account the non-academic challenges that a student faced during the semester; such as **financial difficulties, personal health issues, family problems, or relationship problems.** The Grade Appeal Panel certainly sympathizes and cares about your personal issues but cannot take them into account in assessing the integrity and appropriateness of your grades. In the final analysis, the assessment of your learning can only measure the learning that has actually taken place. The program vocational learning standards are the same for all students and the concern of the Grade Appeal Panel is that each student is measured against the same standards.

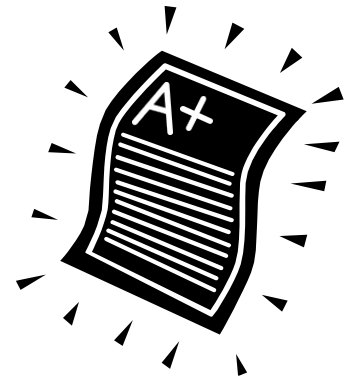


During the semester, if you are faced with personal issues, professors are very accommodating and compassionate. Generally, they will take into account the individual challenges faced by students by granting appropriate personal accommodations based on legitimate personal challenges. Of course, you may need to provide documentation of your reasons for these accommodations. However, a student who receives accommodations is still expected to perform at the same level expected of other students.

A grade appeal is a review of the final grade that was assigned to a student in a particular course. Neither the Chair nor the Grade Appeal Panel will review the academic merit of your assessments, nor should they. If you wish to have a test question re-assessed, then you should raise



that request with the faculty member and perhaps with the Chair at the time that you receive your marked assessment. Professors often review an assignment, paper or test at the request of a student. It is not the function of the Chair or the Appeal Panel to mark exam papers or to review the merits of an essay. Those are



academic concerns best left to the academic experts: the professors. You can save a lot of time if you deal directly with the Professor and/or Chair. The Chair and the Grade Appeal Panel will generally only review grading calculation errors or the impact of changes to the weighting plan that unfairly impacted a student's grade or a decision on the part of the professor that was unfair to a particular student. A good example of this would be to unfairly deny a person the right to take an exam or test.

Remedies

Neither the Chair nor the Grade Appeal Panel will simply change your grade. Students are always expected to be able to demonstrate their learning and professors have the obligation to measure the learning. For this reason, typical remedies involve



granting the right to take a test or to submit an assignment that was unfairly denied or refused by the professor. If the student is successful on the assessment or evaluation, his or her grade will be adjusted in accordance with the outcomes of the exam or assignment that was completed as a result of the decision of the Chair or Grade Appeal Panel.

A point of clarification: The Course Outline Can Be Changed

Course outlines are important documents that capture the learning plan that was developed to deliver the curriculum and to measure

how well the student has achieved the learning outcomes.

The course outline sets out the overall structure of the assessment plan, the weighting of each assessment. The professors are expected not only to create the learning plan in the course outline but to generally follow it. It is like a map or itinerary of where the professor plans to take the class.

Sometimes, it is necessary to

change the route or even the vehicle in order to reach the destination. **Professors may change the assessment plan to meet the needs of the particular semester provided appropriate notice of the change.** This should be a rare occurrence and should only be done after discussion with the students and after a clear communication to the students of the nature of the change and its impact on grades already achieved in the course. Changes to the learning plan that produce any form of unfairness to the students would be open to review by the Grade Appeal Panel.

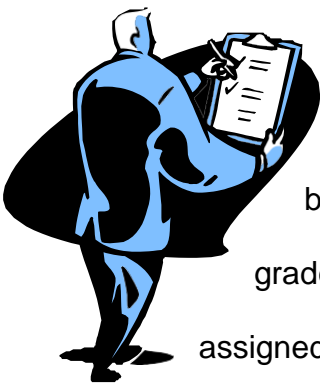


Failing to Take Action Could Jeopardize Your Appeal

If the concern that a student has relates to a test or assignment that was given in the early part of the semester, it would be expected that the student would have raised any issues relating to that mark immediately after the test or assignment was returned. Though not fatal to an appeal if a student does not raise any concerns about a mark assigned earlier in the semester, then there is a legitimate **presumption that the student had no concern with the assigned grade**. The appeal may be denied if no concern had been raised earlier. If a student did not express a concern at the time that the mark was given, the Grade Appeal Panel may decide there is no concern, weeks later, at a grade appeal hearing on the basis that if it was important, the concern should have been pursued at the time.



When the issue is the quality of the teaching that occurred, the student is expected to have addressed this concern during the semester. The **Quality Learning Environment** policy provides a path that can be followed if the concern is the learning environment and a student's concerns over any part of his or her experience in learning should be addressed under this policy and, generally, not through a grade appeal. A grade appeal is limited to simply looking at the appropriateness of the grade assigned. Once again, if those concerns were not raised at the time and pursued with the academic administration, the Grade Appeal Panel will likely take the position that there is no legitimate concern at the grade appeal level. Please discuss your rights under the Quality Learning Environment policy with your SRC or TSI representatives or the Chair of your school.



The Process Involved in a Grade Appeal

After the filing of a formal grade appeal with the Registrar's Office and paying the appropriate fee, the appeal document is sent to the Chair of the School that is responsible for the delivery of the course in which the grade is being appealed.

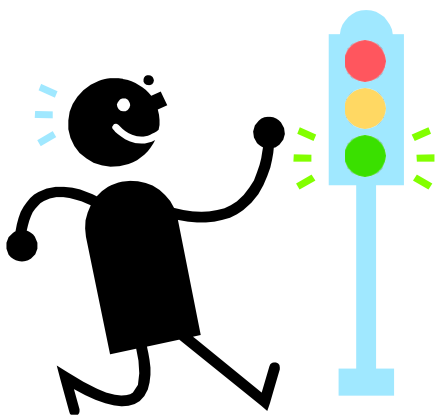
Meeting with the Chair

You should expect to hear from the School Chair fairly quickly as the Chair wants to meet with both you and the professor who assigned the appealed grade. Be prepared for that meeting by being very clear about the reasons why you are appealing and what sort of remedy you expect. These meetings are often separate though they could be joint meetings. The Chair is trying to determine and clarify the issues in the grade appeal.



Conditional Progression into the next semester

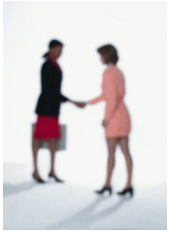
One of the first things that you should discuss is whether or not the course is a prerequisite for a course in the next semester. If it is a course that is required to proceed into the next semester, your



Chair will admit you to the next semester but that admission is dependent on your ultimate success in the grade appeal. If you lose the grade appeal, you will not be allowed to continue in the next course. You will be expected to withdraw from the course in the next semester. If the course is not a prerequisite then you simply continue in the next semester. If it is a prerequisite course, then the

Chair will ask you to sign a document called a **Conditional Progression to Next Semester and Condition of Cancellation of Admission.**

Minutes of Settlement (agreement on a grade change)



If you are able to work out a resolution of the grade appeal through negotiation, then the Chair will document the agreement in a document called **Minutes of Settlement**. This document will list the nature of the agreement and the terms of the settlement including any change to the final grade. This agreement is final and binding on all parties to the disputed grade and no further claim for a change to the grade can be made. The agreed grade is final and brings the grade appeal process to an end. The new grade will be recorded in the Registrar's Office by the School Chair.

Withdrawal or Discontinuance of the Appeal

As a result of the discussions with your Chair and the appropriate faculty member, it may be that you decide to withdraw or discontinue your appeal. If this is the case, you might be asked to sign and date a document called the Notice of Withdrawal. If you withdraw the appeal without the appeal going to the Grade Appeal Panel, you will receive a refund of the fees that you paid when you launched the appeal. In this case, the notice of withdrawal is sent to the office of the Executive Director, Program and Degree Accountability to process the refund of your fees.



Decision of Chair



If the Chair cannot mediate a resolution of the appeal, the Chair will make a decision based on the Chair's investigation of the appeal. This decision will be recorded in writing on a document copies of which should be provided to both the student and the Professor. .

Timelines

The Chair has **8 College business days** within which to make a decision if the issue cannot be resolved by agreement. From the communication of the decision, either the student or the Professor has **3 College business days** within which to lodge an appeal to the College Grade Appeal Panel.

Appeals to the St. Clair College Grade Appeal Panel

Up to this point, the student has dealt with the faculty member and the Chair in trying to resolve the disagreement relating to the assigned grade. When the first level of inquiry is completed (either because the Chair has made a decision or the time limit for a decision has passed) either the student or the faculty member may appeal the decision of the Chair if a decision was made. The appeal is to the College Grade Appeal Panel. The senior administration including the President has stipulated in college policy that the decision of the Grade Appeal Panel is the final decision on grade appeals. The decision of the Grade Appeal Panel, once endorsed by the Vice President, Academic in the form of a letter to the student, is final and binding with no further avenue of appeal.



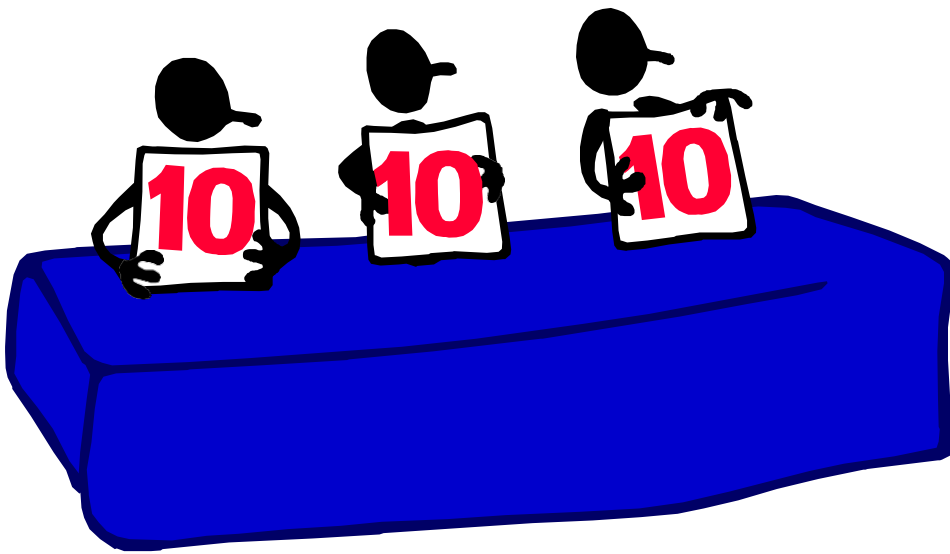
How does one refer a grade appeal to the Grade Appeal Panel?

Once the Chair has given a decision or the time limit for making a decision has expired the student may refer the appeal to the Grade Appeal Panel. This process is **not automatic** but it is simple and easy to follow. The student must indicate an intention to refer the appeal to the Grade Appeal Panel within the time limit specified in the policy which is 3 days. The intention to refer the appeal to the Grade Appeal Panel may be indicated by two means:

1. a **signed document delivered to the Executive Director, Program and Degree Accountability in Room 0340 of the South campus**. This document is called the Referral to the College Grade Appeal Panel (Appendix G of the Academic Grade Appeal Policy).
2. **an email sent directly to the Executive Director, Program and Degree Accountability**. The email should conform to the information required in the referral document in Appendix G. Please see Appendix G of the policy for details.

A student who appeals a grade will receive an email from the Chair of the Grade Appeal Panel and will also be provided with specific information on how to refer the appeal to the Grade Appeal Panel.

Membership on the Grade Appeal Panel



The St. Clair College Grade Appeal Panel is composed of **three people**: a representative from each of students, professor and administration. The Chair of the College Grade Appeal Panel is the Executive Director, Program and Degree Accountability.

The other two members have a rotating membership. The representative from the professors is a teacher from a School other than the one from which the appeal arises and is chosen from a group of professors who have volunteered their services to the Grade Appeal Panel. The student member of the appeal panel is either a member of the executive of the Student Representative Council or the Thames Students Inc. (as appropriate). The student representative on the Grade Appeal Panel may also be the manager of the SRC or TSI. Everyone who serves on the Grade Appeal Panel has received training in the operation and mandate of the grade appeal process.



Student Representative Council and Thames Students Inc.

Arrangements for the Appeal Hearing

Arrangements for the hearing are made through the office of the Executive Director, Program and Degree Accountability. Students will be contacted using the phone numbers and email addresses provided by the students on the Grade Appeal documents. **Both the professor and the student are present for the hearing and there may also be witnesses present as well as advisors.** The appeal hearings require that the person organizing the hearing find times that fit into everyone's schedules. It can take several days to coordinate and organize an agreed date for the hearing.



Generally, hearings are held at the campus where the appealed course is being delivered. However, students may request that the hearing be held at a different campus.

Once a time has been determined when everyone is available, the hearing can be held.

The Conduct of the Appeal Hearing

Though the proceedings before the Grade Appeal Panel are fairly informal, it is a judicial process and one should be prepared for that process. No one on the panel has any knowledge of the appeal prior to the hearing. Both the appellant and the respondent must present their cases clearly, concisely and truthfully. The decision that the Panel ultimately makes will be based on the evidence that the participants present to the Panel. So the participants in the appeal hearing need to be prepared to fully explain and document their respective views of the grading disagreement. The student needs to show precisely how the grade is not an appropriate assessment of his or her learning. The professor should clearly show how the grade was determined, the marks assigned for each component of the course assessments and the weighting of each component. Both sides should expect to clearly present their cases and to answer clearly any questions that the panel members have.



Witnesses

Both sides to an appeal hearing may bring witnesses, if appropriate. Witnesses are people who are able to speak directly to the issues in the case because they were themselves involved in some aspect of the grading decision or witnessed some aspect that led to the appeal.



If you are in doubt as to whether witnesses can help the panel to understand and clarify the evidence, please ask the Executive Director, Program and Degree Accountability for advice and assistance. Occasionally Coordinators or Chairs may attend the hearing as witnesses when they were directly involved in the grading decision or can speak to the process involved and the school or program policies that affect the grading decision.

Advisors (counsel and support)



Students sometimes bring someone to advise them or to just be there for moral support and this is generally acceptable. Faculty would also have the right to bring counsel if they feel the need. Generally, the advisor is not expected to speak on behalf of the appellant or respondent. The evidence should come from the party not the advisor.

Rules of evidence

The hearing before the Grade Appeal Panel does not follow the strict rules of evidence and oaths are not taken. Simply stating something as a fact does not make it true. There must be clear, compelling, substantial and believable evidence presented to the Panel. Hearsay or second hand evidence will not be accepted. The ultimate goal is determine the truth about the matters in dispute.

Grounds

Without substantial grounds, there is no appeal. In other words, without grounds, the appeal will be denied or dismissed.

The grounds for the appeal should be based on an unfair decision or process that improperly impacted the grade.

The Grade Appeal Panel does not and cannot take into account the non-academic challenges that a student faced during the semester; such as financial difficulties, personal health issues, family problems, or relationship problems.

Neither the Chair nor the Grade Appeal Panel will review the academic merit of your assessments, nor should they. This is something you should arrange with your teacher at the time you get your test or assignment back.



It is not the function of the Chair or the Appeal Panel to mark exam papers or to review the merits of an essay or assignment. Those are academic concerns best left to the academic experts: the professors.

The review of the Grade Appeal Panel is largely based on a review of the process that was used to determine your grade. Questions of fair process and equitable treatment are the focus.

If you appeal to the Grade Appeal Panel and do not have grounds, you not only lose your appeal but you also lose the fee that you paid. If you have no legitimate grounds, you should withdraw your appeal and get a refund of the appeal fees.

The Process at the Grade Appeal Hearing

Although the Grade Appeal Panel is not a court of law, it is recognized by our legal system as being an administrative tribunal. As such it is subject to the laws of natural justice and principles of equity. These laws and principles are outlined in the official college policy that was approved by the senior administrators of the College.



The process before the Grade Appeal Panel is a reflection of the fact that it is exercising a judicial function and accordingly must follow those laws of natural justice and principles of equity.

The pattern that is followed is similar to the process that a court of law follows. The appellant presents his or her case first. The respondent then presents his or her case and responds to the evidence presented by the appellant. Once the respondent is finished the appellant responds to the evidence placed before the hearing. This rebuttal ensures that the appellant always summarizes last but both parties are given enough time to present their cases.

During the hearing, both sides may ask questions as can all the panel members. Generally there are lots of questions that get asked during a grade appeal hearing. It is important that these questions are answered truthfully and fully.

When both sides have finished presenting their cases and offering their points of view to the Panel, the participants are excused and the Panel meets immediately to review the evidence and to make a determination.

The Grade Appeal Panel makes its decisions by building consensus and the decisions are usually unanimous and represent the conclusions of all three members. It is possible for a dissenting decision but that situation has never happened.

Remedies

Neither the Chair nor the Grade Appeal Panel will simply change your grade. Students are always expected to be able to demonstrate their learning and professors have the obligation to measure the learning. For this reason, typical remedies involve granting the right to take a test or to submit an assignment that was unfairly denied or refused by the professor. If the student is successful on the assessment or evaluation, his or her grade will be adjusted in accordance with the outcomes of the exam or assignment that was completed as a result of the decision of the Grade Appeal Panel.



Decision

The Chair of the Grade Appeal Panel drafts a written decision that the Chair believes accurately reflects the decision of the Panel. The draft decision is sent to the other two panel members to review and to suggest changes if necessary. Once the final form is agreed upon, the decision is prepared in the form of a letter from the Vice President, Academic. The Vice President, Academic will review the decision and, if there are no concerns, sign the letter. This letter from the Vice President, Academic records the decision of the Panel and is addressed to the appellant. This decision is final and binding and not subject to further review or appeal by College policy. The decision is sent to the appellant and other parties by email immediately after the signing by the Vice President, Academic. The appellant is also called at the phone numbers provided on the appeal documents. The original letter signed by the Vice President, Academic is mailed directly to the appellant.