

Now that I teach in Japan, I've had to change how I think about grades. For some activities there are only letter grades (A,B,C...) and for others there are number grades. Not all activities have a full-range either. It's possible the worst grade a student could get is a C sometimes. That's very strange to me!



In the US, my schools were very different! My assignments—from homework to tests—got a grade from 0-100. At the end of the year, if my average grade was less than 70%, I failed the course. If I failed a course, I had to take the course that summer during vacation. If I failed more than one course, I didn't pass the year. Next year I would come back to school and take all the same classes again!

I'm not sure which system I think is better yet. I certainly saw a lot of problems with the US system. And I do like how the Japanese system makes me think about my students. When grading, a 70% on a test now means that student made a few mistakes but they got most of it right. In the US a 70% meant that student didn't understand the material.

I think this difference is part of a larger difference in how teachers and students think of each other in Japan and the US. I was always embarrassed to see my teachers outside of school but I don't feel that from the students here. The larger difference is how the school treats the students though!

I think there's less unhealthy pressure on the students from the school as an institution. I've seen the students stay late for clubs or juku and worrying about the eiken or entrance exams. But those pressures are all event specific. When I was in school, it felt like I'd joined the military or gone to prison. There was so much pressure all the time and so much punishment!

Write on a desk? Stay after school! Run in the halls? Go to the office and apologize to the principle. Late to class more than once? School on Saturday for you! Start a fight? Get sent home for a week!

My schools had police officers and security guards. Once a student went to the toilet on the bathroom floor in high school. All of the bathrooms except one were closed to all students for all of next term. We had to be escorted to the bathroom and the teacher on duty had to log when we were there.

I don't feel that here at all and it's wonderful! I know some ALTs got schools where the students are very disruptive and violent; perhaps they wish the Japanese system had more in common with the US. I guess it's a combination then of the system here and my luck at being assigned here in Shigaraki!

