Some Suggestions for Grading Exams

The following is a set of suggestions for grading. You will undoubtedly think of many others as you grade this semester.

1. Create clear criteria for assigning points when grading. This is sometimes referred to as a grading rubric.
2. Construct the point structure according to the difficulty of the question or the number of steps required to solve the problem. Make sure that the point structure allows you to assign points in a systematic and consistent way. At the same time, make sure that enough points are allotted to the more basic problems to maintain a reasonable distribution of scores. Think twice before publishing the point distribution on the test. If you don't include points, then you can redistribute points during the grading process if you find that is useful.
3. Try to enumerate the steps that students will earn points for (e.g. 1 point for grouping the first two terms together, 1 point for factoring out the leading coefficient correctly, etc.)
4. Use a well-refined scale. A problem that involves several steps should be worth several points.
5. Take off an appropriate percentage of points for small algebraic errors.
6. Give points, instead of taking them away. Think of this as the students earning points for various steps accomplished in the problem.
7. Mark points as a number out of a total (e.g. +2/3), rather than just giving a score (e.g. +2) or a number of points missed (e.g. -1). This helps students to understand how much of the problem they missed, and will help avoid complaints.
8. Grade exams page by page, or even problem by problem, to ensure fairness in the distribution of partial credit. Do not attempt to grade one test at a time.
9. Try going through 3 tests before you really start to grade in earnest – one from a very strong student, one from an average student, and one from a weak student. This will give you a good idea whether your rubric works for the vast majority of students in the class, and will also help you to gauge the partial credit you assign.
10. Write lots of constructive comments on exams/homework. Try to create a grading rubric for homework that enables you to focus more of your time and attention on the feedback, rather than on the assignment of points.
11. Mark up the paper enough so that you could recreate your thought process for the students, if it were necessary. Think of what your write on a student's paper as a sort of code, and use markings that are consistent from paper to paper. Some examples:
    - Circle or X out mistakes, put a check mark by steps done correctly.

- If a problem is blank, put an X through the space. This prevents students from writing in answers after the fact and trying to get points for them.

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