

The Report Card Decoder

Eight report-card phrases decoded. Surface reading vs working meaning.

Read the phrase, glance at the surface reading, act on the working meaning.

"Making steady progress"

DECODED

SURFACE READING

The student is doing well.

WORKING MEANING

Meeting expectations, no acceleration and no concern. In Year 10 or 11 before IGCSE mocks, this can be a soft warning that the student is not yet at the level required for a strong final grade.

"Would benefit from ..."

DECODED

SURFACE READING

A gentle suggestion.

WORKING MEANING

The most polite way a UAE teacher tells you something is missing. "Would benefit from consistent homework" means homework is being missed. Read every "would benefit from" as "currently is not, and needs to".

"Encouraged to ..."

DECODED

SURFACE READING

A friendly nudge.

WORKING MEANING

Similar to "would benefit from", slightly softer. A coaching prompt the teacher wants recorded without formally flagging a concern. "Encouraged to review notes daily" usually means last-minute revision.

"Has shown improvement in ..."

DECODED

SURFACE READING

Something got better.

WORKING MEANING

The reverse tell. When a teacher singles out improvement in one area, that area was often the problem. "Improvement in showing full working" means earlier reports likely flagged missing working.

"Works well when focused"

DECODED

SURFACE READING

The student works well.

WORKING MEANING

Watch the conditional. "When focused". "When engaged". The teacher is saying your child has ability but is not consistently applying it. Common on Year 9 and 10 capable students.

"A pleasure to teach"

DECODED

SURFACE READING

The teacher likes the student.

WORKING MEANING

Genuinely positive. But when it appears alone with no academic observation, the teacher may be avoiding writing anything critical. If it fills the whole box, look at the grade instead.

"Silence in the comment box"

DECODED

SURFACE READING

The teacher was busy.

WORKING MEANING

A teacher who used to write two or three lines and this term writes only "good work" is signalling a shift. There may be a specific concern they chose to raise in a meeting rather than in writing.

Subject-specific tells

DECODED

SURFACE READING

Just a technical note.

WORKING MEANING

In chemistry: any comment on the mole, stoichiometry or practical work is worth taking seriously. In biology: "more precise terminology" or "link structure to function" flags marks being lost on definition and detail.