



Developing Effective Rubrics

Introduction

Rubrics are key to assessing student performance consistently. When shared with the students ahead of time, it can provide them with insight to performance expectations, learning outcomes, and help them self-assess their performance and depth of knowledge. Rubrics can be used to assess a wide variety of student work, including oral presentations, classroom participations, dispositions, and written papers or portfolios. Rubrics are holistic or analytic by design. Holistic rubrics evaluate the product, often leaving the student with little feedback on specific ways to improve performance. Analytic rubrics are more common and potentially more beneficial for student growth, as they assess a variety of performance aspects, at various levels, and provide multiple areas of feedback for students.

Developing rubrics can be a challenging process. Sometimes, rubrics can be confusing, vague, and unintelligible to our students resulting in work that falls below expectations. When poorly designed, the rubrics are running lists of things to include, not a description of your desired learning outcomes. No matter how many times we develop rubrics as teachers, it is always good to brush up your skills. The next time you create a new rubric or update your old ones, these tips will assist you in establishing effective assessment tools.

Writing an Analytic Rubric

At times, developing rubrics can seem more like creating a checklist than intentional identification of elements to evaluate student performance and depth of knowledge. By generating new rubrics or updating your old ones with the end in mind, you can create effective assessments for you and the students.

1. Begin the drafting process with the end in mind. What is important for your students to get out of this project? Can they provide a written explanation of a complex process? Should they apply the information in a real-world setting? Do you want them to move beyond what was discussed in lecture and develop a deeper understanding of the material? Once you have decided the purpose of your activity, rubric development becomes streamlined.
2. Identify the essential components and knowledge your students need to complete the assignment. If some of these are larger more complex topics you should break them down into smaller, easily identifiable items. It is problematic to assess performance using vague all-encompassing statements. Students need direction on how in depth you expect them to go. By identifying each component, it is easier to assess. This method increases transparency for students and faculty to determine if the key elements have been included.
3. Once you identify your key components, determine what student mastery of the information looks like. If a student were to complete this project to adequate expectations, what do you expect to see?
4. Your expectations for mastery should form the basis of your rubric descriptions and describe what it means to “meet expectations.” From there it is easier to scale up to “exceeds expectations” and down to “does not meet expectations.” Limiting a rubric to three levels of performance helps grading become more concise and focused.
5. After you have determined the performance criteria, use parallel language in each descriptor.

For example:

Analytic Style Rubric for Information Literacy

	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations
Use of Sources	Cited materials are well integrated into the paper and connections between sources are explicitly discussed.	Cited materials generally are integrated into the paper, but some important connections between sources are not discussed or explored.	Cited materials are poorly integrated into the paper and connections between sources are not noted/explored/discussed.

Citations	All citations are complete, accurate, and consistently conform to a formal style.	Most of the citations follow a consistent formal style, although occasionally citations contain minor errors or provide incomplete information.	The paper fails to cite sources using a consistent, formal, citation style.
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*Source: Allen (2004), p. 139.

6. Assign points to match the significance of the information. For example, points for grammar should not be weighted equally with your essential knowledge.
7. It is okay to embrace, insist, and score for a specific style of organization. Writing a lab or commodity report has a very specific skillset your students should know. If that is the purpose of your writing assignment, weight it accordingly.
8. Introduce your students to the rubric when you introduce the assignment. A rubric should be public, precise, and given prior to the start of work (Rutherford, 2009).
9. If possible, and with student permission, show examples of work at various levels to help students contextualize your expectations.
10. Use the rubric and provide feedback to expand students' knowledge and critical thinking abilities.

Why it Works

Assessing student performance can be subjective. It can be intimidating to dive into the process of evaluation. By using a rubric, you bring transparency to grading. Students can better understand the purpose of the assignment and what is expected of them, which produces higher quality work. A well-designed rubric, one that does more than just require students to check-off items, forces them to clarify and articulate their thinking.

Additional Resources

A useful pdf that reinforces the information shared here and includes multiple online resources.
https://www.unk.edu/academic_affairs/files/assessment/rubrics.pdf.

A paper that explores development of rubrics by Craig A. Mertler can be found at,
<http://ericae.net/pare/43~getvn.html>.

A webpage from University of West Florida that explores rubric development with multiple links to examples and other websites.
<https://uwf.edu/offices/cutla/supporting-pages/rubric-development/>

Rubistar is a free tool to help teachers create quality rubrics.
<http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php>

References

Allen, M.J. 2004. Assessing academic programs in higher education. Bolton, MA: Anker.

Mertler, C.A. 2001. Designing scoring rubrics for your classroom. <http://ericae.net/pare/43~getvn.html>. Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation 7(25).

Rutherford, P. 2009. Why didn't I learn this in college? Teaching and learning in the 21st century. Alexandria, VA: Just ASK Publications.

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