

Creating and Using Rubrics

Yale Center for Teaching and Learning
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A rubric describes the criteria that will be used to evaluate a specific task, such as a student writing assignment, poster, oral presentation, or other project. Rubrics allow instructors to communicate expectations to students, allow students to check in on their progress mid-assignment, and can increase the reliability of scores. Research suggests that when rubrics are used on an instructional basis (for instance, included with an assignment prompt for reference), students tend to utilize and appreciate them (Reddy and Andrade, 2010).

Rubrics generally exist in tabular form and are composed of:

- A description of the task that is being evaluated,
- The criteria that is being evaluated (row headings),
- A rating scale that demonstrates different levels of performance (column headings), and
- A description of each level of performance for each criterion (within each box of the table).

When multiple individuals are grading, rubrics also help improve the consistency of scoring across all graders. Instructors should insure that the structure, presentation, consistency, and use of their rubrics pass rigorous standards of validity, reliability, and fairness (Andrade, 2005).

Examples

Major Types of Rubrics

There are two major categories of rubrics:

- **Holistic:** In this type of rubric, a single score is provided based on raters' overall perception of the quality of the performance. Holistic rubrics are useful when only one attribute is being evaluated, as they detail different levels of performance within a single attribute. This category of rubric is designed for quick scoring but does not provide detailed feedback. For these rubrics, the criteria may be the same as the description of the task.
- **Analytic:** In this type of rubric, scores are provided for several different criteria that are being evaluated. Analytic rubrics provide more detailed feedback to students and instructors about their performance. Scoring is usually more consistent across students and graders with analytic rubrics.

Rubrics utilize a scale that denotes level of success with a particular assignment, usually a 3-, 4-, or 5- category grid:

Poor.....Minimal.....Sufficient.....Above Average.....Excellent
Novice.....Intermediate.....Proficient.....Distinguished.....Master
Unacceptable.....Poor.....Satisfactory.....Good.....Excellent

Figure 1: Grading Rubrics: Sample Scales (Brown Sheridan Center)

Sample Rubrics

Instructors can consider a sample holistic rubric developed for an English Writing Seminar course at Yale. The Association of American Colleges and Universities also has several free (non-invasive free account required) analytic rubrics that can be downloaded and modified by instructors. These 16 VALUE rubrics enable instructors to measure items such as inquiry and analysis, critical thinking, written communication, oral communication, quantitative literacy, teamwork, problem-solving, and more.

Recommendations

The following provides a procedure for developing a rubric, adapted from Brown's Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning):

- **Define the goal and purpose of the task that is being evaluated** - Before constructing a rubric, instructors should review their learning outcomes associated with a given assignment. Are skills, content, and deeper conceptual knowledge clearly defined in the syllabus, and do class activities and assignments work towards intended outcomes? The rubric can only function effectively if goals are clear and student work progresses towards them.
- **Decide what kind of rubric to use** - The kind of rubric used may depend on the nature of the assignment, intended learning outcomes (for instance, does the task require the demonstration of several different skills?), and the amount and kind of feedback students will receive (for instance, is the task a formative or a summative assessment?). Instructors can read the above, or consider "Additional Resources" for kinds of rubrics.
- **Define the criteria** - Instructors can review their learning outcomes and assessment parameters to determine specific criteria for the rubric to cover. Instructors should consider what knowledge and skills are required for successful completion, and create a list of criteria that assess outcomes across different vectors (comprehensiveness, maturity of thought, revisions, presentation, timeliness, etc.). Criteria should be distinct and clearly described, and ideally, not surpass seven in number.
- **Define the rating scale to measure levels of performance** - Whatever rating scale instructors choose, they should insure that it is clear, and review it in-class to field student question and concerns. Instructors can consider if the scale will include descriptors or only be numerical, and might include prompts on the rubric for achieving higher achievement levels. Rubrics typically include 3-5 levels in their rating scales (see Figure 1 above).
- **Write descriptions for each performance level of the rating scale** - Each level should be accompanied by a descriptive paragraph that outlines ideals for each level, lists or names all performance expectations within the level, and if possible, provides a detail or example of ideal performance within each level. Across the rubric, descriptions should be parallel, observable, and measurable.

- **Test and revise the rubric** - The rubric can be tested before implementation, by arranging for writing or testing conditions with several graders or TFs who can use the rubric together. After grading with the rubric, graders might grade a similar set of materials without the rubric to assure consistency. Instructors can consider discrepancies, share the rubric and results with faculty colleagues for further opinions, and revise the rubric for use in class. Instructors might also seek out colleagues' rubrics as well, for comparison. Regarding course implementation, instructors might consider passing rubrics out during the first class, to make grading expectations clear as early as possible. Rubrics should fit on one page, so that descriptions and criteria are viewable quickly and simultaneously. During and after a class or course, instructors can collect feedback on the rubric's clarity and effectiveness from TFs and even students through anonymous surveys. Comparing scores and quality of assignments with parallel or previous assignments that did not include a rubric can reveal effectiveness as well. Instructors should feel free to revise a rubric following a course too, based on student performance and areas of confusion.

Additional Resources

Andrade, H. (2005). Teaching with Rubrics: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. *College Teaching* 53(1):27-30.

Cox, G. C., Brathwaite, B. H., & Morrison, J. (2015). The Rubric: An assessment tool to guide students and markers. *Advances in Higher Education*, 149-163.

Moskal, B. M. (2000). Scoring rubrics: What, when and how? *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation* 7(3).

Quinlan A. M., (2011) *A Complete Guide to Rubrics: Assessment Made Easy for Teachers of K-college* 2nd edition, Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Reddy, Y. M., & Andrade, H. (2010). A review of rubric use in higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35(4), 435-448.