

Rubrics for Assessment

A rubric is an explicit set of criteria used for assessing a particular type of work or performance (TLT Group, n.d.) and provides more details than a single grade or mark. Rubrics, therefore, will help you grade more objectively.

Have your students ever asked, “Why did you grade me that way?” or stated, “You never told us that we would be graded on grammar!” As a grading tool, rubrics can address these and other issues related to assessment: they reduce grading time; they increase objectivity and reduce subjectivity; they convey timely feedback to students and they improve students’ ability to include required elements of an assignment (Stevens & Levi, 2005). Grading rubrics can be used to assess a range of activities in any subject area:

Assignments	Homework	Participation	Projects
Essay exams	In-class activities	Performances	Self-assessment
Group work	Lab reports	portfolios	Term papers

Elements of a Rubric

Typically designed as a grid-type structure, a grading rubric includes criteria, levels of performance, scores, and descriptors which become unique assessment tools for any given assignment. Figure 1 illustrates a simple grading rubric with each of the four elements for a history research paper.

Figure 1
Simple Grading Rubric

Criterion	Task	Level of Performance			Score
History Research Paper Rubric					
Criteria	Level of Performance			Score	
	Excellent	Good	Poor		
	3	2	1		
<i>Number of sources</i>	Ten to twelve	Five to nine	One to four		
<i>Historical accuracy</i>	No apparent inaccuracies	Few inaccuracies	Lots of historical inaccuracies		
<i>Organization</i>	Can easily tell from which sources information was drawn	Can tell with difficulty from where information came	Cannot tell from which source information came		
<i>Bibliography</i>	All relevant bibliographic information is included	Bibliography contains most relevant information	Bibliography contains very little information		
	Descriptor				

When developing a rubric, begin with a task description which is the actual assignment or performance.

- *Task example:* Writing an Effective History Research Paper

1. **Criteria** identify the trait, feature or dimension which is to be measured and include a definition and example to clarify the meaning of each trait being assessed. Each assignment or performance will determine the number of criteria to be scored. Criteria are derived from assignments, checklists, grading sheets or colleagues.

Criteria example for a term paper:

Introduction
 Thesis
 Arguments/analysis
 Grammar and punctuation
 Spelling
 Internal citations
 Conclusion
 References

Levels of performance determine the degree of performance which has been met and will provide for consistent and objective assessment and better feedback to students.

2. **Levels of performance** are often labeled as adjectives which describe the performance levels. Levels of performance determine the degree of performance which has been met and will provide for consistent and objective assessment and better feedback to students. These levels tell students what they are expected to do. Levels of performance can be used without descriptors but descriptors help in achieving objectivity. Words used for levels of performance could influence a student's interpretation of performance level (such as superior, moderate, poor or above or below average).

Levels of performance example:

Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor
 Master, Apprentice, Beginner
 Exemplary, Accomplished, Developing, Beginning, Undeveloped
 Complete, Incomplete
 Yes, No

Descriptors describe how well students' work is distinguished from the work of their peers...

3. **Scores** make up the system of numbers or values used to rate each criterion and often are combined with levels of performance. Begin by asking how many points are needed to adequately describe the range of performance you expect to see in students' work. Consider the range of possible performance level.

Score example: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 2, 4, 6, 8

4. **Descriptors** are explicit descriptions of the performance and show how the score is derived and what is expected of the students. Descriptors spell out each level (gradation) of performance for each criterion and describe what performance at a particular level looks like. Descriptors describe how well students' work is distinguished from the work of their peers and will help you to distinguish between each student's work. Finally, the

same descriptors can be used for different criteria within one rubric. For example, the three level of performance: Excellent, Good, Fair and Poor can be used for the separate criteria of Accuracy, Organization, Punctuation & Grammar, and Spelling. Descriptors should be detailed enough to differentiate between the different level and increase the objectivity of the rater.

		Level of Performance			
Criterion	<i>Descriptor example in italics</i>				
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	
Spelling	No spelling errors.	<i>One or two spelling errors, but not of the type to make meaning obscure, and not of basic or common words. The error may be the result of the writer taking risks and trying new vocabulary. Or it may be a common error that is not always recognized as such (for example "thru" for "through").</i>	<i>A few minor spelling errors (more than two) but not enough to harm the writer's ethos seriously or impede the reader's comprehension.</i>	<i>A major misspelling of important or common words, or a number of minor errors which interfere with easy reading or comprehension.</i>	

Developing a Grading Rubric

First, consider using any of a number of existing rubrics available online. Many rubrics can be used “as is.” Or, you could modify a rubric by adding or deleting elements or combining others for one that will suit your needs. Finally, you could create a completely customized rubric using specifically designed rubric software or just by creating a table with the rubric elements. The following steps will help you develop a rubric no matter which option you choose.

Begin with a performance or assignment which may be difficult to grade and where you want to reduce subjectivity.

1. **Select a performance/assignment to be assessed.** Begin with a performance or assignment which may be difficult to grade and where you want to reduce subjectivity. Is the performance/assignment an authentic task related to learning goals and/or objectives? Are students replicating meaningful tasks found in the real world? Are you encouraging students to problem solve and apply knowledge? Answer these questions as you begin to develop the criteria for your rubric.

2. **List criteria.** Begin by brainstorming a list of all criteria, traits or dimensions associated task. Reduce the list by chunking similar criteria and eliminating others until you produce a range of appropriate criteria. A rubric designed for formative and diagnostic assessments might have more criteria than those rubrics rating summative performances (Dodge, 2001). Keep the list of criteria manageable and reasonable.
3. **Write criteria descriptions.** Keep criteria descriptions brief, understandable, and in a logical order for students to follow as they work on the task.
4. **Determine level of performance adjectives.** Select words or phrases that will explain what performance looks like at each level, making sure they are discrete enough to show real differences. Levels of performance should match the related criterion.
5. **Develop scores.** The scores will determine the ranges of performance in numerical value. Make sure the values make sense in terms of the total points possible: What is the difference between getting 10 points versus 100 points versus 1,000 points? The best and worst performance scores are placed at the ends of the continuum and the other scores are placed appropriately in between. It is suggested to start with fewer levels and to distinguish between work that does not meet the criteria. Also, it is difficult to make fine distinctions using qualitative levels such as never, sometimes, usually or limited acceptance, proficient or NA, poor, fair, good, very good, excellent. How will you make the distinctions?
6. **Write the descriptors.** As a student is judged to move up the performance continuum, previous level descriptions are considered achieved in subsequent description levels. Therefore, it is not necessary to include “beginning level” descriptors in the same box where new skills are introduced.
7. **Evaluate the rubric.** As with any instructional tool, evaluate the rubric each time it is used to ensure it matches instructional goals and objectives. Be sure students understand each criterion and how they can use the rubric to their advantage. Consider providing more details about each of the rubric’s areas to further clarify these sections to students. Pilot test new rubrics if possible, review the rubric with a colleague, and solicit students’ feedback for further refinements.

It is suggested to start with fewer [score] levels and to distinguish between work that does not meet the criteria.

Types of Rubrics

Determining which type of rubric to use depends on what and how you plan to evaluate. There are several types of rubrics including holistic, analytical, general, and task-specific. Each of these will be described below.

- **Holistic**—all criteria are assessed as a single score. Holistic rubrics are good for evaluating overall performance on a task. Because only one score is given, holistic rubrics tend to be easier to score. However, holistic rubrics do

not provide detailed information on student performance for each criterion; the levels of performance are treated as a whole.

- “Use for simple tasks and performances such as reading fluency or response to an essay question . . .
- Getting a quick snapshot of overall quality or achievement
- Judging the impact of a product or performance” (Arter & McTighe, 2001, p 21)

- **Analytical**—each criterion is assessed separately, using different descriptive ratings. Each criterion receives a separate score. Analytical rubrics take more time to score but provide more detailed feedback.
 - “Judging complex performances . . . involving several significant [criteria] . . .
 - Providing more specific information or feedback to students . . .” (Arter & McTighe, 2001, p 22)
- **Generic**—contains criteria that are general across tasks and can be used for similar tasks or performances. Criteria are assessed separately, as in an analytical rubric.
 - “[Use] when students will not all be doing exactly the same task; when students have a choice as to what evidence will be chosen to show competence on a particular skill or product.
 - [Use] when instructors are trying to judge consistently in different course sections” (Arter & McTighe, 2001, p 30)
- **Task-specific**—assesses a specific task. Unique criteria are assessed separately. However, it may not be possible to account for each and every criterion involved in a particular task which could overlook a student’s unique solution (Arter & McTighe, 2001).
 - “It’s easier and faster to get consistent scoring
 - [Use] in large-scale and “high-stakes” contexts, such as state-level accountability assessments
 - [Use when] you want to know whether students know particular facts, equations, methods, or procedures” (Arter & McTighe, 2001, p 28)

Rubrics can help clarify your expectations and will show students how to meet them, making students accountable for their performance in an easy-to-follow format.

Summary

Grading rubrics are effective and efficient tools which allow for objective and consistent assessment of a range of performances, assignments, and activities. Rubrics can help clarify your expectations and will show students how to meet them, making students accountable for their performance in an easy-to-follow format. The feedback that students receive through a grading rubric can help them improve their performance on revised or subsequent work. Rubrics can help to rationalize grades when students ask about your method of assessment. Rubrics also allow for consistency in grading for those who team teach the same course, for TAs assigned to the task of grading, and serve as good documentation for accreditation purposes. Several online sources exist which can be used in the creation of customized grading rubrics; a few of these are listed below.

References

Arter, J., & McTighe, J. (2001). *Scoring rubrics in the classroom: Using performance criteria for assessing and improving student performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Stevens, D. D., & Levi, A. J. (2005). *Introduction to rubrics: An assessment tool to save grading time, convey effective feedback, and promote student learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

The Teaching, Learning, and Technology Group (n.d.). *Rubrics: Definition, tools, examples, references*.

<http://www.tltgroup.org/resources/flashlight/rubrics.htm>

Suggested Resources

Dodge, B. (2001). *Creating a rubric on a given task*.
<http://webquest.sdsu.edu/rubrics/rubrics.html>

Wilson, M. (2006). *Rethinking rubrics in writing assessment*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Rubric Builders and Generators

eMints.org (2011). *Rubric/scoring guide*.

<http://www.emints.org/webquest/rubric.shtml>

General Rubric Generator.

http://www.teach-nology.com/web_tools/rubrics/general/

RubiStar (2008). *Create rubrics for your project-based learning activities*.

<http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php>