

RUBRICS

Suggestions for Developing, Using, and Revising

What is a Rubric?

A rubric articulates the expectations for an assignment by listing the criteria and describing levels of quality from excellent to poor (Andrade, 2000). Each rubric is a description of student performance that clearly articulates the requirements for each of the score points.

This document is a resource for faculty members to help them realize the full potential and value of using rubrics as part of their signature assignments. It provides tips and strategies for how to develop, use, and then interpret and refine the rubrics.

Rubrics alone do not guarantee effective assessment but, when thoughtfully designed, and used with discretion and understanding, rubrics can be among the most useful assessment tools we have as instructors. Studies by Holmes and Smith (2003) and by Orsmond, Merry, and Callaghan (2004) showed that students reported increased clarity regarding an assignment when they have "criterion referenced schemes" and students believed that rubric-referenced assessment was more fair and "valuable to their learning".

While rubrics are often dismissed as mere lists of expectations, they are much more than that.

A rubric has three parts:

- 1) The written criteria we commit to paper.
- 2) The examples that show our criteria in action and serve as models for students.
- 3) The reader who acts as an interpreter. (Spandel, 2006)

How to Create Rubrics

Creating rubrics is something that takes time, intentionality and collaboration. And once they are created, they must be maintained through regular review and revision. ***Here are some tips for developing useful rubrics:***

Alignment

Align the rubric with the appropriate SLO(s) and ensure the signature assignment is being given in the proper course where candidates should be able to demonstrate mastery. To ensure alignment, consult your program's assessment plan and curriculum map.

Criteria

Start by identifying criteria. What are the 4-7 qualities of the assignment that you will evaluate. Be sure these criteria relate to the SLO. And be careful: don't let low-level criteria dominate because agreement among faculty is more easily achieved (Mabry, 1999). Push for criteria that matter and that reflect an appropriate level of complexity. Don't focus on trivial or mechanical features at the expense of substance. If students think that good papers consist of "good spelling," "making a paper longer," or "correcting their APA formatting", they may never write a piece that is meaningful, insightful, strong, and effective (Spandel, 2006).

Levels of Achievement

Next define the levels of student achievement. The lowest level should be what a novice demonstrates when confronted with a problem. The highest level should show metacognition (Newell, Dahm, & Newell, 2002).

Collaboration

Develop your rubric in collaboration with program colleagues; this is a rubric for a program SLO. Compare your rubric to published standards, show it to a colleague or ask a colleague to co-score student work. Rubrics get better when you do this (Goodrich, 2005).

How to Use Rubrics

A fair assessment does not merely assess what has been taught, it does so with transparency: students understand clearly what is expected of them. Therefore, your instructions and expectations should be clearly stated and shared with students. When students understand what is expected of them, they are better able to monitor their progress, which allows instructors to give students clear and informative feedback on their current levels of performance. ***Here are some tips for using rubrics effectively:***

Anchor Papers

Give your students a model paper to use and to scaffold the process of generating a list of criteria for their writing assignments. Research shows that having students use model papers to generate criteria for a writing assignment and using a rubric to self-assess first drafts is positively related to the quality of their writing (Andrade, Du, & Wang, 2008). You may even go further and provide students with poor examples with your comments on the limitations of the sample paper.

Train Your Raters

Research shows more variation and less agreement for the untrained raters (Stuhlmann, Daniel, Dellinger, Denny, & Powers, 1999). Andrade, Du, & Wang (2008) suggest that coaching instructors on the rubric is also associated with higher scores on test. The higher test scores are the result of teacher incorporating operational definitions of achievement into their instruction in ways that were understood and used by students.

Let Students “Use” the Rubric

Rubrics can teach as well as evaluate. When used as part of a formative assessment or student-centered approach to assessment, rubrics have the potential to help students develop understanding and skill, as well as make dependable judgments about the quality of their own work (metacognition). Have students peer review draft of each other’s work (or their own) by using the rubric.

Guide Revisions

Rubrics should also give students and instructors a basis for conversation that ultimately serves as a guide to revision (Turley & Gallagher, 2008). Use the rubric to provide students with constructive feedback and give them a chance to revise.

How to Interpret & Improve Your Rubrics

Rubrics should be “living documents.” Once you’ve used your rubric a few times, and gotten some feedback on it from students and from data on student performance, you can reflect on ways to improve and refine the rubric to support student learning and program improvement. ***Here are some steps you can take and some questions you can ask to continue improving your rubrics:***

1. Consultations

⇒ Your interpretations of rubrics descriptions and revisions to the rubric’s categories or the descriptions to that what is expected of students is perfectly clear.

⇒ Whether students’ scores (individually and as a group) on the assignment/rubric align with or diverge from what you know about their general performance.

⇒ Whether individual criteria on the rubric reflect professional standards, faculty expectations, and the rigor of the program.

2. Comparisons

Have multiple program faculty take the rubric and one of the anchor papers at a particular level of performance (e.g., a “B”) and score the paper. Do the raters agree? Why or why not? On what criteria is there convergence or divergence?

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