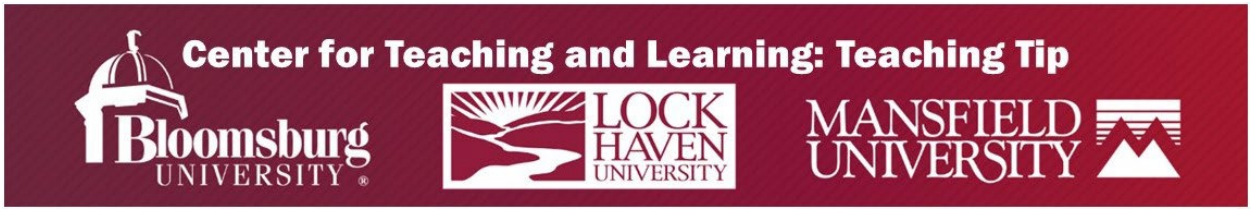

Rubric Basics

Why use rubrics?

- Grading becomes time efficient with a well-developed rubric
- Helps faculty avoid editing student work when the rubric outlines best practice
- Should make grading more consistent
- Students welcome clearly articulated criteria
- Encourages students to take responsibility for their work by setting learning standards and clarifying achievement expectations
- Stevens and Levi contend that rubrics may contribute to greater equity in the classroom

About greater equity? When we use rubrics as an opportunity to explain disciplinary standards, every student has access to this information. Whereas students, who have grown up in college-educated households, can adapt more easily when our assignments are vaguely worded, and achievement not clearly spelled out.[1]

Students desire transparency and relevancy, and well-crafted assignment guidelines and rubrics may increase student engagement. Explore Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) to learn more about creating assignments that fulfill student desires and improve outcomes.

Definitions of a Rubric

"a scoring tool that lays out the specific expectations for an assignment;" "a format in which the traits of the student's work are separately named, and each trait is evaluated according to a scale from high to low;" "articulates in writing the various criteria and standards that a faculty member uses to evaluate student work. It transforms informal professional judgment into numerical ratings on a scale."[2]

Checklist Rubrics

- List items that the assignment should have
- Could be used as a gateway standard before a student submits work[3]
- Use to give feedback for rough drafts or when the achievement can either be met or not
- Will not help students realize how to improve

Scoring Guide Rubrics

- Describes highest level of performance
- Can be more time consuming to grade than a performance-level rubric; you will need to describe areas of improvement
- Recommended for graduate-or senior-level students when you have time to write comments

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[1] Dannelle D. Stevens and Antonia J. Levi, *Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning* (Sterling, Virginia: Stylus, 2005), 27-28.
[2] Stevens and Levi, 3; Barbara E. Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson, *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment in College*, 2nd ed (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 39; Barbara E. Walvoord, *Assessment Clear and Simple* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 19.
[3] Barbara E. Walvoord, *Assessment Clear and Simple* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 56-58.

Holistic Rubrics

- Describes in short paragraph narratives or bullet points each level of performance
- Useful when general impressions are sufficient to communicate achievement
- Students rarely fit neatly into one level of performance

Rating Scales

- Only lists items in a checklist format
- 2-5 levels (e.g. exemplary-competent-beginning; proficient-intermediate-novice)
- Timesaving
- Does not describe differences between levels of the scale
- Does not provide students with sufficient insight on levels of achievement
- Criteria can be communicated separately to create "teachable moments"

Descriptive or Performance-Level Scales

- Includes elements, Levels of Mastery or Scale, and Criteria or Descriptors for each level and element
- 2-5 levels
- Facilitates communication with student about strengths and weaknesses
- Challenge to compose
- Needs to communicate professional standards to students
- See Sample A

Sample A from AACU VALUE Rubric for Critical Thinking

	Capstone	Miles
	4	3
Explanation of issues	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all relevant information necessary for full understanding.	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions.
Evidence *Selecting and using information to investigate a point of view or conclusion*	Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are questioned thoroughly.	Information is take enough interpretati a coherent analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are subject to questioning.

Levels of Mastery or Scale

Element

Criteria or Descriptors

Steps to create Criteria-Based Rubrics

1. Select an assignment and determine your student learning outcomes/objectives/goals (SLOs). This is not as easy as it sounds. As professionals, we recognize the difference between excellent-average-poor, but we struggle to articulate those differences in writing.
   A. Work backwards from your assignment guidelines. Read your assignment critically, take notes on what you are asking your students to do and why. This may help you formulate language about expectations. The process may lead you to revise your assignment guidelines.
   B. Consult your professional organization who outline disciplinary standards and articulate outcomes.
   C. Create a practice assignment following your guidelines and make note of your disciplinary expectations. These could assist you in writing SLOs and ponder if your assignment makes sense!
2. Identify elements that you expect to grade drawing from assignment guidelines. Formulate these as nouns or noun phrases. For example, elements in a research project might include: bibliographic research; content; composition; documentation.
3. Write criteria descriptions for different elements. For example, if the element is Effective Thesis:

- The criteria for excellent achievement: *Thesis is well-defined, complex and accurately reflects the content of the paragraph topic sentences*
- Competent achievement: *Thesis could be more directly related to the content of the paragraph topic sentences*
- The criteria for below average: *Thesis is non-existent or confuses a focus statement with a thesis*

4. Develop language to communicate levels of achievement. Because this can be a challenge, consider the following suggestions:
   A. Consult student work for inspiration. What makes one student's work excellent and another competent or below average?
   B. Consult sample rubrics for language. Countless rubrics are available on the internet and potentially through your professional organization. Also consult the AACU VALUE rubrics; they provide language that might help you differentiate between levels of performance.
   C. Start with only a three-level scale, such as excellent-competent-below average. It is less daunting.
   D. Work from the outside in to write criteria: write the criteria for what constitutes excellence, then what constitutes below average, followed by average.
   E. If your assignments provide students with rhetorical audiences, create criteria that refers to audience experiences. Minimally you can indicate that an insider with knowledge of the course will comprehend but an outsider will struggle. Criteria for a book review: *Ready for Publication; Publishable with Minor or Major Revision; Not Publishable*.
   F. Barbara Walvoord recommends that faculty use a four-level scale to avoid middle drift that will more likely occur with a five-level scale, especially when multiple faculty are using the rubric.
5. Compare your three levels and critique them with the following questions:
   - Do they provide sufficient differentiation?
   - Are the targets achievable, reasonable?
   - Does your language clearly mirror and articulate the goals of the assignment?
   - Will your academic language be understood by a novice in your discipline?
6. Determine if you will assign points to criteria and if and how these will be weighted. Walvoord and Anderson suggest that rubrics can be used "as a guide, not a calculator."[4] In short leave out the points to avoid creating awkward moments in which rubric points add up to passing, but the work is not passable. Though if each element is not equal in value, you can communicate approximate weight values through percentage.
7. **Caution:** Some students will not go beyond the rubric, which may leave their work "flat and uninspired" so consider creating an element that acknowledges creativity, insight, analysis, synthesis, or originality.[5]
8. Test out the rubric on some assignments, thoughtful students, and/or colleagues. Do the criteria make sense? Do students find the criteria useful for successful completion of the assignment and meeting disciplinary standards?
   A. If possible, compose and test a semester before you plan to share with students.
   B. Or present the rubric to students with the assignment guidelines and emphasize you are "test-driving." It is a draft and let them know to expect modifications during the semester. When you are launching a new rubric, let it be a conversation and not the last word.

External Sources:

- AACU VALUE Rubrics
- MERLOT (a clearing house of ideas)

[4] Walvoord and Anderson, 45.
[5] Linda Suskie, *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide*, 2nd edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 150.

Rubrics in Use: Better Practices

1. Distribute rubrics to students before the assignment is due. Use this as an opportunity to communicate assignment expectations. Students are given the opportunity to ask questions about the assignment, and you learn more about what their worries and working assumptions are. (If your rubric is still in rough draft, sharing with students in advance of an assignment will create an opportunity to revise.)
2. Provide examples of each level of criteria through class discussion, in a separate handout, or within the rubric. For example:
   Excellent Criteria: Thesis is well-defined, complex and accurately reflects the content of the paragraph topic sentences.
   > **Example of an excellent thesis:** The historians Christopher Browning, Richard Breitman, and Henry Friedlander agree that Hitler played a major role in the decision for the "final solution," that his subordinates were equally critical to its implementation, but they disagree on when a decision was made.

   Unsatisfactory Criteria: Thesis is non-existent or confuses a focus statement with a thesis.
   > **Example of Unsatisfactory:** This paper will examine what historians have said about the origins of the "final solution."
3. Use the rubric in a student peer review session during the drafting stage of an assignment.
4. Have students use the rubric to assess anonymous student samples from previous semesters or samples that you create which represent different levels of achievement.
5. Some faculty fear losing content-coverage time when they engage in discussions of assignments, rubrics, and what represents best work. However, the benefits far outweigh the drawbacks. If you frame the discussion in terms of meeting disciplinary standards, then you create an opportunity for all students to thrive and maintain a more professional tone. You might save yourself more work in the grading stage if students submit higher quality work as a result.
6. When using a rubric initially, make sure students know it's a work in progress; make notes about what parts of the rubric need revision. It's perfectly acceptable to revise a rubric and roll it out for the next assignment. You are on a learning curve when you create and use a rubric; expect several iterations.

Rubrics for Outcomes Assessment

Rubrics are not limited to grading individual assignments. They may also be used to communicate to what extent professional standards have been achieved by students in a course or program and report on course or program outcomes assessment.

Sample Rubrics: Contact the Commonwealth's University Center for Teaching and Learning Director

To learn more, you might also consult the following four-part video series:

- Rubrics for Efficient Grading and Transparency (6 min, 22 sec)
- Rubric Types (13 min, 42 sec)
- Rubrics: Building a Performance or Criteria (13 min, 10 sec)
- Best Practices: Rubrics in Use (3 min, 7 sec)

 Updated on 14 December 2022