

Creating Rubrics: Establishing Standards

What Is a Rubric?

Rubrics are assessment instruments that help instructors communicate their expectations to students and focus on important criteria as they grade. Good rubrics include three primary components:

- ✓ **Evaluative Criteria**
Criteria should reflect instruction, the essence or key attributes of a skill or body of knowledge to be mastered and all criteria must be “teachable” (students must be able to improve).
- ✓ **Gradations in Quality**
Each level should include explicit descriptions of different levels of performance, actions, or products.
- ✓ **Scoring Strategy**
Holistic scoring provides students with one cumulative grade, while analytic scoring provides separate grades for each criterion.

Rubrics describe both exemplar qualities and common errors in students work. They are informative, help students think about their work, and can increase the quality of their products.

Benefits of Rubrics

1) Easy to Use and Explain

Rubrics are a condensed version of your complex thinking about an assignment. Some students find them so useful that they request them in other learning contexts.

2) Clear Expectations

Rubrics provide a mechanism for focusing your instruction and communicating your standards for content and quality to students. Students no longer need guess what you consider “good” work. While some students (e.g. those who become professors) might speculate correctly without a rubric, most will not.

3) Specific Feedback

Rubrics provide information, not just an evaluation of students’ strengths and weaknesses. Single grades, scores, or general grading criteria provide relatively little information or guidance to students for current and future work. “The more explicit the rubric to the specific assignment, the more direction students get, and the easier it is for them to write to a target, revise a draft paper, or improve on the next assignment “ (U. Delaware, 2004: 1). Rubrics serve to highlight areas of excellence, but also provide guidance on areas that need to be improved. Rubrics can also stem complaints from students such as “I didn’t know what you wanted.”

4) Learning and Development

Evidence is mounting that when rubrics are used in the classroom as instructional tools, they help students learn material more thoroughly. Not only that, rubrics can also help students develop and retain sophisticated thinking skills such as synthesis and evaluation. When rubrics are used as instructional aids, it promotes the concept of assessment as a source of information, not just a form of reward or punishment.

5) Grading Ease and Consistency

Rubrics simplify the grading process help maintain grading consistency. Rubrics are efficient tools that may limit the necessity of lengthy written comments. They allow you the freedom to focus your written comments on important areas while still providing useful feedback to students on the whole. Rubrics provide a mechanism for early, but streamlined feedback on drafts, by you or student peer reviewers.

Creating Rubrics

One begins developing a rubric in much the same way one develops grading criteria. However, with a rubric, you take additional steps to articulate different achievement levels for each criterion.

- Look at examples
- List criteria
- Reexamine criteria (divide and combine criteria to emphasize important elements)
- Specify levels of quality
- Create a draft rubric (and test it for reliability, validity, and equity)
- Revise the rubric

Typical Challenges

- ♦ *Criteria are not instructionally relevant*—students are evaluated on skills or knowledge not directly addressed by the curriculum or they are not provided with opportunities to practice using the knowledge or developing a skill before being tested).
- ♦ *Criteria are too general*—students need specific cues about what constitutes a sufficient response. E.g., describing an A-level answer as “a superior response to the task...attentive not only to the task’s chief components, but also its nuances” (Popham 1997: 73) provides little guidance for students about how to produce an A-level product.
- ♦ *Criteria are too long and detailed*—ideally, rubrics include 4-7 criteria with 3-5 gradations in quality and a rubric should be no longer than 1-2 pages in length.
- ♦ *Equating the test of a skill with the skill*—it is easy or tempting for instructors to become so wrapped up in the rubric that they end up equating students’ *test* mastery with students’ *skill* mastery. A rubric is one of many ways to evaluate a student’s skill or topic mastery.

References

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