

Rubrics: The Pedagogical and the Practical

1 Objectives

The purpose of this session is to

- identify features of effective rubrics
- determine in what contexts rubrics are best used
- evaluate the costs and benefits of using rubrics
- be equipped to design your own rubric

Do you use rubrics in your classes? Why or why not?

What are some of the advantages of using rubrics? Some of the disadvantages?

2 Rubrics

What: A rubric is a form or grid that identifies the criteria that will be used to evaluate student performance. Rubrics indicate what will be evaluated in a specific assignment and what distinguishes levels of achievement.

Who: You and your students will use the rubric. You define expectations and assess performance, and students know how they will be evaluated and receive feedback.

When: A rubric is best shared with students when a task is assigned and returned to students after evaluation.

Why: Rubrics can be used to clarify expectations and provide a consistent framework for evaluation. They can also make your grading more efficient and communicate holistic and discrete feedback to students.

3 The Pedagogical

- Students' benefits:
 - clear, explicit expectations
 - seeing distinctions between levels of achievement in advance
 - structured self and peer assessment
 - specific, targeted feedback
- Instructors' benefits
 - matching student assessment to course objectives
 - consistent, less subjective grading
 - feedback on student performance individually and as a class
 - reduces time spent justifying individual grades

4 The Practical

The most practical benefit of using rubrics is increased consistency and efficiency in evaluation. While you will likely spend more time upfront, creating an effective rubric, you will save time in the long run.

In addition, students experience the practical benefit of having clear expectations and evaluation standards.

Making a rubric:

1. Identify student learning outcomes
2. Identify an assessment that would be apt for grading with a rubric
 - papers
 - speeches
 - online discussion boards
 - presentations
 - projects
 - repeated or consistent assessments
 - assessments that tend to produce similar shortcomings or successes
3. Identify criteria for evaluation
 - Accuracy
 - Originality
 - Organization
 - Grammar
 - Presentation style
 - Formatting
 - Style
 - Audience Appropriateness
 - Thoroughness
 - Discipline-specific criteria
 - (Bloom's Taxonomy)
4. Identify levels of achievement
 - Complete/Incomplete
 - Strong/Satisfactory/Weak
 - Accomplished/Good/Satisfactory/Needs Improvement
 - Exceeds Expectations/Meets Expectations/Needs Improvement/Inadequate
 - Master/Distinguished/Proficient/Intermediate/Novice
 - Excellent/Good/Satisfactory/Poor/Unacceptable
 - Exemplary/Accomplished/Acceptable/Minimally Acceptable/Emerging/Unacceptable
5. Identify relative importance of criteria
6. Design a prototype
 - This will likely take a few tries and a good amount of time
7. Evaluate the prototype
 - Grade some imaginary papers to see what the rubric yields
 - Share with a colleague
 - Determine whether your rubric is appropriately targeted for the assessment and for the students
 - Ensure that the rubric makes your expectations clear to students
8. Use the rubric
 - A well-designed rubric reduces the need for individualized commentary
 - Supplement the rubric with a general, overall comment, and add criteria-specific details if necessary
9. Evaluate and polish your rubric
 - This is likely to be an ongoing process
 - In most cases, keep rubrics consistent across the same assessment in the same semester
 - Use the rubric to evaluate your own effectiveness

Disadvantages of Rubrics

- time
- flexibility in assessment
- most readily applied to quantitative characteristics (but most effective when tailored to qualitative characteristics)
- an ineffective rubric is likely to make assessment and feedback worse

5 Rubrics on Brightspace

Rubrics on Brightspace are interactive and can be used to automatically tally points and record scores in the gradebook if you choose. They can also be used to communicate qualitative expectations and feedback if you do not want to use numerical scores.

Instructor Tools → Course Admin → Rubrics (under Assessment)

Rubric types:

- Analytic: An analytic rubric breaks performance into multiple criteria. You assess each criterion separately, resulting in an overall assessment based on the combination of criteria.
- Holistic: Holistic rubrics do not break performance into separate criteria; you make one overall performance assessment.

Scoring options:

- Text only: Assessment is communicated by text; no numerical score is associated with the rubric.
- Points: Assessment is communicated by text and by an associated numerical score. Each criterion is given equal weight, and points are consistent across achievement levels.
- Custom Points: Assessment is communicated by text and by an associated numerical score. You can assign different point values to each criterion and achievement level. (This would allow you to, for instance, give 50 points for the highest achievement level on Accuracy and give 10 points for the highest achievement level on Format.)

Quirks I've run into on Brightspace:

- If you want the option of giving no credit for a criterion, you must make a box that earns 0 points. Failing to select a level of achievement for a criterion will result in the rubric failing to calculate an overall score.
- If you're using a points-based rubric and change the initial point values, then you must update the "Overall Score" point levels at the bottom of the rubric. There's no way to remove this row, as far as I know.
- The rubric must be "published" before applied to an assessment.
- Once the rubric is used to assess something, it cannot be changed without deleting the associated scores and feedback for whatever you assessed.
- A beneficial quirk: Regardless of how you set up a points-based rubric, it can be applied to assessments of varying points. So a 20-point rubric can be applied to a 50-point assessment and will automatically recalculate the grade accordingly.

6 Give it a try!

1. Identify student learning outcomes
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2. Identify an assessment that would be apt for grading with a rubric
 - Pick an assessment that is used frequently in your classes, or an assessment that is time-intensive to grade
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3. Identify criteria for evaluation
 - 3-5 criteria is a good place to start. Make sure the criteria you choose are independent of each other.
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4. Identify levels of achievement
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5. Identify relative importance of criteria
 - Indicate relative weights on the criteria you listed above in item 3
6. Design a prototype
7. Evaluate the prototype
8. Use the rubric
9. Evaluate and polish your rubric