All About Rubrics

Introduction to Rubrics

What is a Rubric?

A commonly accepted definition of a rubric is a document that articulates the expectations for an assignment by listing the criteria and laying out the relative levels for performance evaluation (Andrade & Du, 2005).

Most rubrics are composed of three essential components: evaluation criteria, scoring strategy, and quality definitions (Figure 1.) (Reddy, 2007).

- **Evaluation Criteria**: A breakdown of the skills/knowledge that the students must try to achieve (dimensions) through the completion of the assignment. For example, the criteria for an oral presentation could be include "Organization," "Communication," "Use of visual," and "Presentation skills."
- **Scoring Strategy:** Various scale levels of performance evaluation based solely on the quality definitions. Some instructors use the labels to describe the scale level of performance, such as "Excellent," "Competent," and "Needs Work." Others use numbers (1, 2, 3) or grades (A, B, C).
- **Quality Definitions**: A detailed explanation of what a student must do to demonstrate an evaluation criterion for specific level of performance. These definitions are also called "descriptors."

	Scale Level 1	Scale Level 2	Scale Level 3
Criterion 1	Quality Definitions: Description for criterion 1 and scale level 1		
Criterion 2			
Criterion 3			
Criterion 4			

Value of Rubrics

Some instructors wonder if they need a rubric for grading assignments. If you have experienced at least one of the following signs, as noted in "Introduction to Rubrics" by Steven and Levi (2005), the use of rubric is suitable for you.

- You feel you take much too long to grade all your students' assignments
- You have graded all your papers and worry that the scores from the last ones are slightly different from those from the first
- You work with colleagues and collaborate on designing the same assignments for program courses, yet you wonder if your grading scales are different
- You've sometimes been disappointed by whole assignments because all or most of your class turned out to be unaware of academic expectations so basic that you neglected to mention them (such as the need for citations or page numbers)

Rubrics are popular with both students and instructors because they are a means of communicating expectations for an assignment, providing focused feedback on works in progress, and grading final products. They are an effective tool in the teaching and learning process.

Both students and instructors can benefit from using rubrics. Not only will rubrics enhance the learning experience for both, but also it makes the entire process more efficient, thereby allowing for more time for

learning inside and outside the classroom. The bullet points below features the advantages of rubrics for students and instructors in more detail, and the possible synergies that may develop if implemented.

How do Rubrics Facilitate Learning?
- Increase and enhance the learning experience through better and more timely feedback
- Increase motivation to reach those higher standards because of clear expectations
- Provide an easier way to monitor own work, which in turn increases metacognition
- Enables the practice of organizational skills
- Improves communication with tutors, writing center, peers when additional help is needed

How do Rubrics Improve Instructor Teaching?
- Provide more consistency and efficiency in grading since ambiguity is mitigated through clearly defined quality definitions
- Decreases the number of student questions because of the greater clarity in the assignments
- Enables instructors to quickly and accurately pinpoint students when they are troubled with an assignment and refine instructors' teaching skills (Stevens and Levi, 2005)

How Should Rubrics be Used?
- Either include the rubric as a part of assignment information or hand it out with the assignment itself
- Return the graded rubric with the student's assignment as constructive feedback
- Use the results of the graded rubric to improve your instruction

Types of Rubrics

In general, two types of rubrics are used by instructors: holistic and analytic. With the holistic rubric, the instructors assess the student's work as a whole (support broader judgments). With the analytic rubric, the instructors assess students work based on the components of a finish product (similar to a checklist).

Holistic Rubric
A holistic rubric assigns a level of performance by assessing the assignment as a whole and often returns only one grade. Although the various evaluation criteria could be listed, the quality definitions are often brief, if there at all. Holistic rubrics are often used when the number of evaluation criteria is not relatively large and when quick judgments are needed. Also, there may be assignments where a certain evaluation criterion is dependent upon another criterion. For example, a person's communication often can be heavily influenced by the use of visual aids. Figure 1 displays the generic framework of a holistic rubric for the fiction writing content.

Points	If...
5	The plot, setting, and characters are developed fully and organized well. The who, what, where, when, and why are explained using interesting language and sufficient detail
4	Most parts of the story mentioned in a score of 5 above are developed and organized well. A couple of aspects may need to be more fully or more interestingly developed
3	Some aspects of the story are developed and organized well, but not as much detail or organization is expressed as in a score of 4.
2	A few parts of the story are developed somewhat. Organization and language usage need improvement.
1	Parts of the story are addressed without attention to detail or organization.

Figure 1. Holistic Rubric adapted from sample rubric on the TeacherVision website.

Analytic Rubric

An analytic rubric assigns a level of performance by assessing the assignment using segmentation, often returning one grade for each of the segments. Each evaluation criterion has various levels of performance evaluations that are then detailed with the quality definitions that much be accomplished to obtain that specific level. The structure of an analytic rubric consists of a grid with the criterion for a student product listed in the leftmost column and with levels of performance listed across the top row. The cells within the center of the rubric may or may not contain the quality descriptions for a specific level of performance in that evaluation criterion. When scoring with an analytic rubric, each of the evaluation criteria is scored individually.

Criteria	4	3	2	1
PLOT: "What" and "Why"	Both plot parts are fully developed	One of the plot parts is fully developed and the less developed part is at least addressed.	Both plot parts are addressed but not fully developed.	Neither plot parts are fully developed.
SETTING: "When" and "Where"	Both setting parts are fully developed	One of the setting parts is fully developed and the less developed part is at least addressed.	Both setting parts of the story are addressed but not fully developed.	Neither setting parts are developed.
CHARACTERS: "Who" described by behavior, appearance, personality, and traits	Main characters are fully developed with much descriptive detail; reader has vivid image of characters	The main characters are developed with some descriptive detail. The reader has a vague idea of the characters.	The main characters are identified by name only.	None of the characters are developed or named.

Figure 2. Analytic Rubric adapted from sample rubric on the TeacherVision website.

Create a Rubric

Although creating a rubric may seem like a daunting task at first, knowing the right procedures will ease your frustration and hasten the process. At the end, you will be able to produce a final product that is both effective and concise. You can create rubrics in many different ways: starting from scratch, adapting existing rubrics, and online rubric generators. When you plan to create rubrics from the scratch, apply the following general structure.

Step 1
Map out the learning objectives (criteria) that you want the students to achieve.

- Think about the purposes of the assignment. Let us say a student has to create and present a PowerPoint presentation. Some objectives could be the quality of Power Point, eye contact, gestures, and preparedness.
- Analyze which objectives are directly correlated with one another. Can these objectives be combined into just a generalized one? For example eye contact and gestures can be combined into the objective of nonverbal communication.

Step 2
Figure out a scale that you want to use (either numerical or qualitative, or a combination of both) and the range associated with it.

- Make the scale based on the grading scheme for the course. Experts advise to have a strict number or letter at each performance level rather than a range of 90-100 or A- to A+ as the latter could bring about ambiguity when grading.

Step 3
Construct a table that provides an intersection between the learning objectives and the performance scale.

- Put the learning objectives down the left most column and put each level of the performance scale across the topmost row. This table will provide students with a clear and concise structure for each assignment.

Step 4
Input characteristics (quality definitions) at each intersection to clarify the expectations.

- These quality definitions are similar to a check sheet. For example, the learning objective of preparedness at the performance level of A. Were there fewer than three awkward pauses during the presentation? Were there fewer than 10 filler words? During the presentation was the student able to answer all the questions from their peers correctly? If the student was able to accomplish all these tasks, he/she gets that performance level for that objective.

Adapt Existing Rubrics
Constructing rubrics from scratch is time consuming so you might prefer to use or adapt an existing rubric. In the next section Examples of Rubrics, you will find rubric banks that can be accessed online. The steps for adapting existing rubrics are similar to the creating rubrics. After listing the learning objectives for the specific assignment and finding a potential rubric, you examine the criteria of existing rubrics to determine if they reflect the skills you want. Then, check the levels of performance as well as the quality of description and make sure that they clearly describe the different levels of ability for each criterion. You can revise, remove, and add criteria, levels of performance, and description as needed.

Online Rubric Generator
Rather than using pen and paper to create rubrics, some instructors have used technology to create and share rubrics quickly and easily. You can use one of the following software to create rubrics from the scratch or from the template provided with the program.

RubiStar: http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php
- Registered users can save and edit rubrics online. Registration and use of the tool is free.

Rubric Builder: http://www.rubricbuilder.com/app/login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fapp%2fdefault.aspx
- For a small annual charge, you can start with a blank rubric, modify an existing one you have previously developed, or start from one of the templates.

Since creating a rubric has quite a bit of flexibility, the most important aspect is not the structure but the quality. As noted on DePaul University's website (http://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching-guides/feedback-grading/rubrics/Pages/evaluating-rubrics.aspx), regardless of creating a rubric from scratch or modifying an existing one, you should ask these five questions in order to evaluate the quality of a rubric both before and after using the rubric.

- Does the rubric relate to the outcome(s) being measured?

- Does it cover important criteria for student performance?
- Does the top end of the rubric reflect excellence?
- Are the criteria and level of performance evaluations well defined?
- Can the rubric be applied consistently by different scorers?

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