

Rubrics for Assessment

Have your students ever asked, “Why did you grade me that way?” or stated, “You never told us that we would be graded on grammar!” As a grading tool, rubrics can address these and other issues related to assessment: they reduce grading time; they increase objectivity and reduce subjectivity; they convey timely feedback to students and they improve students’ ability to include required elements of an assignment (Stevens & Levi, 2005). A rubric is an explicit set of criteria used for assessing a particular type of work or performance (TLT Group, n.d.) and provides more details than a single grade or mark. Rubrics can help remove some biases in grading and help you grade more clearly and quickly.

Elements of a Rubric

Typically designed as a grid-type structure, a grading rubric includes criteria, levels of performance, scores, and descriptors which become unique assessment tools for any given assignment. The table below illustrates a simple grading rubric with each of the four elements for a history research paper. Below is a sample rubric demonstrating the key elements of a rubric

1. Criteria

Criteria identify the trait, feature or dimension which is to be measured and include a definition and example to clarify the meaning of each trait being assessed. Each assignment or performance will determine the number of criteria to be scored. Criteria are derived from assignments, checklists, grading sheets or colleagues.

2. Levels of performance

Levels of performance are often labeled as adjectives which describe the performance levels on the criteria. Levels of performance determine the degree of performance which has been met and provide for consistent and objective assessment and better feedback to students. These levels tell students what they are expected to do. Levels of performance can be used without descriptors, but descriptors help in achieving objectivity. Words used for levels of performance could influence a student’s interpretation of performance level (such as superior, moderate, poor or above or below average). A more positive set of level descriptors, such as "Exceeds" "Met" "Progressing" "Beginning" and "No Evidence, encourages learning and growth.

3. Scores

Scores make up the system of numbers or values used to rate each criterion and often are combined with levels of performance. Begin by asking how many points are needed to adequately describe the range of performance you expect to see in students’ work. Consider the range of possible performance level.

4. Descriptors

Descriptors are explicit descriptions of the performance and show how the score is derived and what is expected of the students. Descriptors spell out each level (gradation) of performance for each criterion and describe what performance at a particular level looks like. Descriptors describe how well students’ work is distinguished from the work of their peers and will help you to distinguish between each student’s work. Descriptors should be detailed enough to differentiate between the different level and increase the objectivity of the rater.

Types of Rubrics for Assessment

Determining which type of rubric to use depends on what and how you plan to evaluate. There are several types of rubrics including: analytical, checklist, and holistic. Each of these will be described below.

Analytical (sometimes called Descriptive) Rubric

Analytic Rubrics feature a grid of “criteria” (columns) and “levels” of achievement (rows). The instructor assigns points or weights to particular criteria, and then evaluates student performance in each area. This is useful in providing feedback on areas of strength and weakness. Because of this, analytic rubrics take more time to develop than a holistic rubric.

Analytic rubrics are particularly useful for problem-solving or application assessments because a rubric can list a different category for each component of the assessment that needs to be included, thereby accounting for the complexity of the task. For example, a rubric for a research paper could include categories for organization, writing, argument, sources cited, depth of content knowledge, and more. A rubric for a presentation could include categories related to style, organization, language, content, etc. Students benefit from receiving rubrics because they learn about their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Each criterion is assessed separately, using different descriptive ratings. Each criterion receives a separate score. Analytical rubrics take more time to score but provide more detailed feedback.

	Outstanding 5	Good 3	Unacceptable 1	Absent 0	Total
Executive Summary	Outstanding summary; clear and concise; very well organized and compelling	Good summary of the report but needs better organization and sharper focus on key points	No or incoherent summary; wordy and disjointed; missed focus	No summary	/5
Issue Identification	Excels in comprehensiveness, clarity, and presents a compelling issue set-up	Competent, well-developed arguments, but missing a few critical issues or connections	No or dismal attempt at issue identification	No issue identified	/5
Recommendations	Strong recommendations that offer an excellent and well-supported solution to the current issue, often tackling deeper or sequenced issues	Competent but marginally-articulated recommendations; may be somewhat unrealistic or incomplete	No or inappropriate recommendations; unrelated to issues or incomplete	No recommendations offered	/10
Video - content	Key aspects of case presented in full: introduction, issue, analysis, options, recommendations and summary in succinct, professional manner	Many aspects of case simply presented, but may have missed significant elements within.	Core aspects of case missing, unprofessional or disrespectful treatment of content	No video submitted	/5
					/20

Checklist (sometimes called Single-Point) Rubric

Single-point rubrics, also known as checklists, identify the success criteria for grading an assessment. Each criteria is presented in its own row. The criteria column is flanked on either side with space to provide specific feedback relating to any concerns (notes for what needs improvement) or strengths (notes on how the work exceeded expectations) observed in the work while grading. These two levels denote evidence of the criteria as present or not. They often use a concerns/strengths, Yes/No, Present/Not Present or Achieved/Not Achieved model for their two levels. Points (grades) are determined by tallying all the criteria that were denoted as present. Weighting of criteria is uncommon.

These rubrics are easy and quick to analyze. They are often used in performance evaluations (processes) and in peer evaluations. The grading tends to be fairly consistent over multiple uses. However, depending on how they are designed, single-point rubrics may require more detailed feedback from the instructor to indicate any concerns or strengths noted in observing the assessment item.

Strengths evidence of exceeding standards	Criteria standards to be observed	Concerns areas that need improvement
	Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • topic clearly identified • development of topic logically formed • conclusion provides high-level summary and notes new ideas 	
	Mechanics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paper properly formatted, as per specifications • good word choice; absence of clichés and jargon. • grammar and sentence structure free from errors 	
	Content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • writers opinion clearly articulated • several relevant, supporting examples provided • arguments stay on target (avoid digressions) 	

Holistic Rubric

A holistic scoring guide describes performance at different levels (e.g., A-level performance, B-level performance) holistically without analyzing the assignment into several different scales. This kind of rubric is particularly useful when there are many assignments to grade and a moderate to a high degree of subjectivity in the assessment of quality. They are more useful than analytic rubrics for summative assessments where only the grade is pertinent. Choosing one score can be challenging when you are considering multiple criteria at one time. It can be difficult to have consistency across scores, and holistic scoring guides are most helpful when making decisions quickly rather than providing detailed feedback to students.

Point	Characteristics
4	Content is clearly organized, questions are clearly answered and contain original thought, ideas are fully developed, and references and in-text citations are appropriately applied.
3	Content is well organized, questions are mostly answered with clarity and contain some original thought, ideas are well, but not fully, developed, and references and in-text citations are generally well applied.
2	Content is somewhat organized, question answers are not always clearly presented and lack sufficient original thought, ideas are not developed, references and in-text citations are inconsistently applied.
1	Content is disorganized, question answers are attempted but contain little original thought, ideas undeveloped, references and in-text citations are inappropriately applied.
Comments:	

Steps for Developing a Rubric

You might consider using any of the existing rubrics available online. Many rubrics can be used “as is” or, you could modify a rubric by adding or deleting elements or combining others for one that will suit your needs. You could create a completely customized rubric using specifically designed rubric software or just by creating a table with the rubric elements. The following set of questions will help you develop a rubric no matter which option you choose.

1. **Select a performance/assignment to be assessed.** Begin with a performance or assignment which may be difficult to grade and where you want to reduce subjectivity. Is the performance/assignment an authentic task related to learning goals and/or objectives? Are students replicating meaningful tasks found in the real world? Are you encouraging students to problem solve and apply knowledge? Answer these questions as you begin to develop the criteria for your rubric. Begin with a performance or assignment which may be difficult to grade and where you want to reduce subjectivity.
2. **Determine the type of rubric you want to use (see types of rubrics above), and then:**
 - **List criteria.** Begin by brainstorming a list of all criteria, traits or dimensions associated task. Reduce the list by chunking similar criteria and eliminating others until you produce a range of appropriate criteria. A rubric designed for formative and diagnostic assessments might have more criteria than those rubrics rating summative performances (Dodge, 2001). Keep the list of criteria manageable and reasonable.
 - **Write criteria descriptions.** Keep criteria descriptions brief, understandable, and in a logical order for students to follow as they work on the task.
 - **Determine level of performance adjectives.** Select words or phrases that will explain what performance looks like at each level, making sure they are discrete enough to show real differences. Levels of performance should match the related criterion.
3. **Write the descriptors.** Determine what achievement of each level of performance on a criteria looks like. Begin with what it would mean for a student to meet the criteria and then work in other directions. For example, if you have a criteria for use of sources, how many and what type of sources for the assignment is considered the target. Then describe what you want to see and adjust for levels that fall below that target and those that rise above it. As a student is judged to move up the performance continuum, previous level descriptions are considered achieved in subsequent description levels. Therefore, it is not necessary to include “beginning level” descriptors in the same box where new skills are introduced.
4. **Develop scores.** The scores will determine the ranges of performance in numerical value. Make sure the values make sense in terms of the total points possible: What is the difference between getting 10 points versus 100 points versus 1,000 points? The best and worst performance scores are placed at the ends of the continuum and the other scores are placed appropriately in between. It is suggested to start with fewer levels and to distinguish between work that does not meet the criteria. Also, it is difficult to make fine distinctions using qualitative levels such as never, sometimes, usually or limited acceptance, proficient or NA, poor, fair, good, very good, excellent. How will you make the distinctions? It is suggested to start with fewer [score] levels and to distinguish between work that does not meet the criteria.
5. **Evaluate the rubric.** As with any instructional tool, evaluate the rubric each time it is used to ensure it matches instructional goals and objectives. Be sure students understand each criterion and how they can use the rubric to their advantage. Consider providing more details about each of the rubric’s areas to further clarify these sections to students. Pilot test new rubrics, if possible, review the rubric with a colleague, and solicit students’ feedback for further refinements.