Rubrics

What Is It?

What is a Rubric?

Rubrics are assessment tools, that, when well constructed, make grading easier and faster and assessment of student learning outcomes visual and quantifiable.

Rubrics are used to provide feedback on (and to grade) an array of student products, including concept maps, literature reviews, reflective writings, bibliographies, oral presentations, student journals, portfolios, projects and oral and written communication skills. (Reddy and Andrade, 2010)

How Does it Work?

Rubrics identify or present specific components of an assignment and provide categories for evaluation based on identified competencies or qualified definitions/criteria of each component.

In other words, the rubric breaks an assignment into its most basic pieces. It allows you to look at progress on each dimension of the skill you are assessing. It helps you look at the "big picture" of an assignment, while still assuring that individual parts get the attention they may need for overall mastery of a topic.

Student Involvement Tip:
As you begin to formulate your rubric, ask students to submit possible criteria or expectations they feel would be appropriate for the assignment at hand. This involves them more cognitively in their own learning process.

Why Use It?

When we create assignments, we typically have in mind what the finished product should look like. Unfortunately, that picture doesn't readily translate to our students. This scenario ends in frustration on both sides. Rubrics create a very detailed

map of *exactly* where we are headed.

They serve the purpose of dispelling the confusion and conflicts surrounding assessment.

A well-constructed rubric informs students of the exact criteria they will be assessed by for the work they produce. It allows the "guess work" to go away and more time to be spent on practicing/gaining the skills necessary to succeed in not only your **specific** course, but the discipline as a **whole**.

That seems like a lot of work! Why would I want that?

While it is true that rubric creation takes considerable time, it is well worth the investment. It is a reusable resource. Once you have it, you can rework it for other assignments and simply reuse it for the same projects. Of course, as the course or content you require evolves, you will revise periodically. Still, it's better than "reinventing the wheel" at every turn.

Rubrics not only clearly identify the expectations of the instructor , but they also serve as a learning tool for students who can easily spot their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the skill being assessed. This knowledge also informs the instructor as to exactly where students are struggling, both individually and as a whole. This allows us to make any needed adjustments to our course design for the next semester, or perhaps, even the next project.

As a result, the final product that students create will be better, and you will not have to spend as much time explaining to individual students *exactly* what it is you are wanting them to accomplish. They will know the criteria, and hopefully, with a well-equipped rubric "road map," they can more successfully reach their destination.

Where Do I Start?

"You eat an elephant one bite at a time." You construct a rubric the same way. In their book, *Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback and Promote Student Learning*, (Stevens and Levi, 2013), the authors illustrate a four stage process for rubric creation.

- **Stage 1: Reflecting**: In this step, you give thought to why you created an assignment in the first place, what you hope the benefit of the assignment is to students, the results from previous semesters and your expectations for students now.

- **Stage 2: Listing**: This is the place where you begin to define the very specific details of the assignment. You might even allow students to present to you *their* ideas of what they should be learning from the task at hand. You also identify what the highest level of achievement (descriptors) would be for each category. Write all of these on sticky notes, on per note. This way, at the end of Stage 2, you have a group of the learning objectives for the project as well as clearly defined descriptions of what the "best" product would look like. If you use sticky notes to compile your list and descriptors, Stage 3 will be easier.

- **Stage 3: Grouping and Labeling**: At this point, you may begin to group related learning objectives together. This will help you identify "Labels." Having written the learning objectives (your list from Stage 2) on sticky notes will allow you to move them around more readily than writing and rewriting Labels. For example, things like: "makes good eye contact" and "speaks clearly" might be grouped under the label- "Presentation". By the end of Stage 3 (and revisions) you should have a workable list of "Labels" to populate your rubric. They will lead back to your learning objectives and be topics such as "Presentation", "Organization," "Content," "Thesis," etc. The lists of details delineating the highest competency levels are your top level descriptors. You will have to determine lower levels based on these.

- **Stage 4: Application**: Now that you have a nice, clean list of "Labels", you are ready to go. The Labels become the Dimensions/Categories along which student work is assessed. Some of the very specific things you wrote in Stage 2 will become the Descriptors which are assigned to the various levels of competency you have identified.

- On Page 3, you will find detailed examples of both a writing and lab activity rubric.

What Can I Use it For?

Rubrics can be used for many purposes. They aid in grading all sorts of projects from research papers to oral presentations to capstone projects such as portfolios.

They can also be used **with** students to allow them to evaluate the work of their peers, or even their own work.

A rubric may not only serve to give your students the feedback they need to become better scholars but also to inform you about your own teaching. When you compile the results, if you notice that few students did well (performed to your criteria) on a particular dimension, you can revise your instruction of that portion of the skill set you want them to exhibit.

While rubrics are very good for students in terms of providing structure and clarifying expectations, and for instructors in terms of identifying improvements to the teaching process, another advantage is that, by their use, it may be possible to help students create their **own** standards for performance. Thus, over the course of a class, faculty generated rubrics could be employed first, and as the class evolves, student generated rubrics with faculty guidance could follow. This way, students begin to learn how to set their own standards of excellence.

Additional Resources

California State University, Bakersfield, TLC

Hatfield, Susan R. (2012). Sample rubrics. Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education. Retrieved 19 April 2013 from http://course1.winona.edu/shatfield/air/rubrics.htm

Mueller, J. (2012). Authentic assessment toolbox Retrieved 10, May, 2013, 2013, from http://jfmueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/index.htm

Stevens, D. D., & Levi, A. J. (2013). Introduction to rubrics: An assessment tool to save grading time, convey effective feedback, and promote student learning. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Beth White Bigler (2013)

Example Rubrics

Labels
Descriptors

Quality Criteria	No/Limited Proficiency	Some Proficiency	Proficiency	High Proficiency	(Rating)
1. Thesis/Focus: (a) Originality	Thesis is missing	Thesis may be obvious or unimaginative	Thesis is somewhat original	Develops fresh insight that challenges the reader's thinking;	
2. Thesis/Focus: (b) Clarity	Reader cannot determine thesis & purpose OR thesis has no relation to the writing task	Thesis and purpose are somewhat vague OR only loosely related to the writing task	Thesis and purpose are fairly clear and match the writing task	Thesis and purpose are clear to the reader; closely match the writing task	
3. Organization	Unclear organization OR organizational plan is inappropriate to thesis. No transitions	Some signs of logical organization. May have abrupt or illogical shifts & ineffective flow of ideas	Organization supports thesis and purpose. Transitions are mostly appropriate. Sequence of ideas could be improved	Fully & imaginatively supports thesis & purpose. Sequence of ideas is effective. Transitions are effective	
4. Support/ Reasoning (a) Ideas (b) Details	Offers simplistic, undeveloped, or cryptic support for the ideas. Inappropriate or off-topic generalizations, faulty assumptions, errors of fact	Offers somewhat obvious support that may be too broad. Details are too general, not interpreted, irrelevant to thesis, or inappropriately repetitive	Offers solid but less original reasoning. Assumptions are not always recognized or made explicit. Contains some appropriate details or examples	Substantial, logical, & concrete development of ideas. Assumptions are made explicit. Details are germane, original, and convincingly interpreted	
5. Use of sources/ Documentation	Neglects important sources. Overuse of quotations or paraphrase to substitute writer's own ideas. (Possibly uses source material without acknowledgement.)	Uses relevant sources but lacks in variety of sources and/or the skillful combination of sources. Quotations & paraphrases may be too long and/or inconsistently referenced	Uses sources to support, extend, and inform, but not substitute writer's own development of idea. Doesn't overuse quotes, but may not always conform to required style manual	Uses sources to support, extend, and inform, but not substitute writer's own development of idea. Combines material from a variety of sources, incl. pers. observation, scientific data, authoritative testimony. Doesn't overuse quotes.	

This rubric example is from the TLC at CSU, Bakersfield and originated at Northeastern Illinois University(adapted from: Barbara Walvoord, Winthrop Univ., Virginia Community College System, Univ. of Washington)

Lab Report

	Exceeds Standard	Meets Standard	Nearly Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	No Evidence	Score
Title Page	Contains: Title Your Name, Teacher's Name, Course Period, Date, Neatly finished-no errors	Missing 1 component	Missing 2 – 4 components	Missing more than 4 components		
Question	Clear and concise problem stated that is testable.	Identifies the question in an unclear manner, but is still testable.	Identifies only part of the question, but is still testable	The question is not testable no matter how clear and concise the question is.		
Hypothesis	Follows "if…then… because" format. Is related to the question. Clearly defines controls vs. variables in "if" portion. Predicts with correct facts.	Follows "if…then… because" format. Is related to the question. Defines controls vs. variables in "if" portion in an unclear manner. Predicts with correct facts	Follows "if…then… because" format. Is related to the question. Defines controls vs. variables in "if" portion in an unclear manner. Predicts with some facts.	Follows "if…then… because" format. Is related to the question. Defines controls vs. variables in "if" portion in an unclear manner. Predicts with no facts		
Materials	Lists all materials and equipment.	Lists most materials and equipment.	Lists some of the materials & equipment.	Lists wrong materials or equipment.		
Procedure	Lists all steps in a detailed, sequential order that are easily followed. All safety precautions and warnings are provided. Provides diagrams of all set ups.	Lists all steps in a sequential order that are not easily followed. All safety precautions and warnings are provided. Provides diagrams of all set ups.	Lists all steps in a sequential order that are not easily followed. All safety precautions and warnings are missing. Provides some diagrams of set ups.	Lists steps in an order that are not sequential, not easily followed, or incomplete. Some safety precautions and warnings are not provided. Provides some diagrams of set ups.		
Results	All data is recorded and organized in a clear manner. All visible observations are provided. Complete and correct analysis of data is provided. Errors of Experimentation are provided.	All data is recorded and organized in a clear manner. All visible observations are provided. Analysis of data is provided with a few errors. Errors of experimentation are provided.	All data is recorded and organized in a clear manner. Visible observations are missing. Analysis of data is provided with a few errors. Errors of experimentation are provided.	Incorrect data is provided regardless of inclusion or presentation of all other criteria.		
Conclusion	Restates the hypothesis, supports or refutes it and explains the role of the test in making the decision	Restates the hypothesis and supports or refutes it	Supports or refutes the hypothesis without restating it	Does not address the hypothesis		
Mechanics	No errors in punctuation, capitalization and spelling.	Almost no errors in punctuation, capitalization and spelling.	Many errors in punctuation, capitalization and spelling.	Numerous and distracting errors in punctuation, capitalization and spelling.		
Usage	No errors sentence structure and word usage.	Almost no errors in sentence structure and word usage.	Many errors in sentence structure and word usage.	Numerous and distracting errors in sentence structure and word usage.		

Hatfield, Susan R. (2012). Sample rubrics. Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education Science Rubrics. Retrieved 19 April 2013 from http://course1.winona.edu/shatfield/air/rubrics.htm