

Rubrics

Rubrics are scoring guides, usually in chart form, that outline explicit sets of criteria at progressive levels of learning performance. They provide effective means of communicating expectations to students. When rubrics are well constructed, they have the additional benefit of helping students identify where and how they can improve.

Most often elements of an assignment or project are listed vertically down the left side of the chart and levels of achievement run across the top.

Creating Rubrics

If you're preparing to create a rubric from scratch, there are a couple of ways you might approach the task.

1) If you have ready access to a set of reports, projects or assignments that you've already graded:

- Select and set aside all the projects that earned a passing grade
- Create three categories for those projects: low but passing grades; middle range scores; and high grades
- For each set of projects or assignments, record the characteristics of each project that enabled you to make the judgments you did.
- As much as possible, use positive language to describe levels of achievement at each level
- Describe each level in terms of the learning in evidence, not in terms of what was missing that prevented the work from being awarded a higher grade

2) If you don't have ready access to already graded reports, projects or assignments:

- Begin by recording your bottom line by Listing the basic minimum characteristics of an assignment that you would be willing to award a passing grade to
- Describe the additional characteristics that would allow you to award a middle range grade
- Describe what an ideal report, project or assignment would look like

3) Create rubrics collaboratively with students by:

- Begin by sharing samples of completed work with students. Together, decide which of the samples are of superior quality and what characteristics set them apart from the others. Continue through the samples, differentiating the characteristics of each that set them into qualitatively different categories.
- Describe the assignment or project you are asking them to undertake; include the purpose of the task and the learning you are intending to target. Ask students to describe the

characteristics that should earn a passing grade. Work from there to describe the characteristics at increasingly levels of complexity.

- Decide what your bottom line is for successful completion of the assignment/project you have planned. Use those characteristics as the descriptors for the Ideas cells of a rubric and invite students to collaborate to finish the rubric.

There are times when rubrics are inappropriate. When inclusion of content, steps or facts is the focus of an assignment, a checklist may be indicated rather than a rubric.

* Based on: Fostaty Young, S., & Wilson, R.J. (2000), Assessment and learning: The ICE approach. Winnipeg, MB. Portage & Main Press.

Examples

Additional examples are available online by searching your particular assignment, discipline and the word "rubric".

- **For University-level papers, projects, oral presentations, class participation** <http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/rubrics.html>
- **For Composing Emails** http://www.thinkinggear.com/tools/rubrics_about.cfm
- **For written assignments/essays** <http://post.queensu.ca/~rsa/assessment.htm>
- **For a Research Paper:**

	Ideas	Connections	Extensions
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduces the issue(s) and why it is significant • Identifies the stakeholders • Terminology is used accurately; any definitions provided are accurate • Gathers, and accurately represents at least 5 primary sources of information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes the complexity/impact of the issue in terms of its medical, societal and personal risk elements • Interprets discrepancies, similarities and contradictions among the resources • Connects topics within the paper • As new ideas and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examines the assumptions underlying the issues that currently influence practice and may be preventing alternative thinking • Outlines the implications of the data • Evaluates the resources' contributions to the discussion/resolution of the issue(s)

		resources are introduced they are critiqued, indicating how the material is shaping their learning & understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extrapolates from the primary sources to real-life applications • Explanations are included as to the usefulness of the resources in understanding, and possibly solving the issue(s) presented
Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggests at least one feasible approach toward resolving the issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course material is integrated into the paper to strengthen/augment the argument(s) • Takes a personal stand on the issue that is based on findings and experience • Supports the stance with a logical argument, supported by references 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considers what 'trade-offs' (if any) may result from the adopted stance
References	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a complete reference list • In-text sources are identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reference list is in APA style 	
Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any minor spelling or grammar errors do not distract the reader's attention from the argument 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A variety of sentence structures adds to the readability of the paper • Titles and sub-titles guide the reader's attention 	

Note some of the characteristics of the rubric.

- Only positive language is used to describe the demonstrations of learning at Ideas, Connections and Extensions.
- The descriptors are of what is in evidence rather than what was lacking.
- The focus is on the processes of learning not on content to be included
- Not all cells are filled. There are times when (a) defining Extensions may inadvertently restrict students' potential for creativity or (b) no Extensions can be identified or are expected
- Because the rubric reflects the intentions for learning that have been selected by this particular teacher it is unlikely that you agree entirely with what has been included. That's great and means that you now have a little more clarity about what it is that you do expect in the research papers you assign.