

Introduction to Rubrics

What does a rubric do? It articulates the expected outcome of a learning task, either holistically or specifically. A rubric can be used for any assignment or exam that is assessed.

In its basic form, a rubric has at least the criteria (general or specific) and the measure of performance, which can be categorized in many ways. For instance:

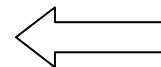
| Criteria | Excellent | Good | Fair | Poor |
|----------------------------|-----------|------|------|------|
| Mastery of grammar | | | X | |
| Mastery of research skills | | X | | |
| Mastery of written style | | X | | |

You can categorize the performance level any way that is appropriate and effective for you, but do try to have at least four levels of performance. Three is okay but four gives you more flexibility in assessing student achievement.

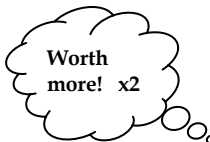
Not only can you categorize the performance level any way you want, you can also add value to the categories as you see fit. For example, you can score points:

| <u>Criteria</u> | Excellent 5 | Good 4 | Fair 3 | Poor 2 |
|----------------------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Mastery of grammar | | | X | |
| Mastery of research skills | | X | | |
| Mastery of written style | | X | | |

Total: 11/15=73%

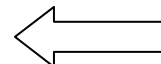


This makes it possible to apply a standard weight to the different aspects of the assignment. You can also factor in variable weights, so that mastery of one criterion is weighted more heavily than others:



| <u>Criteria</u> | Excellent 5 | Good 4 | Fair 3 | Poor 2 |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Mastery of grammar | | | X | |
| Mastery of research skills x2 | | X | | |
| Mastery of written style | | X | | |

Total: 16/20=80%



That basic rubric is the place to begin in rubric construction because it forces you to consider a) what criteria you really need to apply to the learning outcome, and b) then it gets you to think about the most important elements in those criteria.

After the basic form is done, you have three options: 1) use only that, 2) reflect on how you might fill out descriptors for each level of each criterion (yes, it takes time, but in the long run, it also saves more time than the basic model and keeps you honest), 3) discuss with your students what the descriptors will be. This last option goes the furthest in helping the students take responsibility for learning and does the most to eliminate student frustrations about what is expected on assignments and the grades they earn. This method keeps everyone honest.

A rubric doesn't have to be a box or grid; it can take any form you want, even a narrative form, which involves providing descriptors for your levels of performance.

Mastery of grammar:

Excellent

This paper has no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.

Good

This paper has some errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.

Fair

This paper has multiple errors in grammar or spelling that seriously interrupt the flow of the essay.

Poor

This paper has errors in grammar or spelling that make it impossible for the reader to become engaged with the content.

Of course, you can build these descriptors into the grid:

| <u>Criteria</u> | Excellent 5 | Good 4 | Fair 3 | Poor 2 | Score |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|---|--------------|
| Mastery of grammar | This paper has no errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content. | This paper has some errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content | This paper has multiple errors in grammar or spelling that seriously interrupt the flow of the essay. | This paper has errors in grammar or spelling that make it impossible for the reader to become engaged with the content. | 3 |
| Mastery of research skills x2 | | | | | 8 |
| Mastery of written style | | | | | 4 |

Another way to conceptualize rubrics is between criterion-specific (also called analytic) and holistic. The criterion specific is what you see above. The holistic measures the level of performance across all criteria:

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Excellent | Paper is very successful in communicating an argument and offering support for it; the grammar and spelling is clean; the research is well-done: there is a range of sources that are appropriate to the discipline, the research material is effectively integrated into the paper, and citations follow guidebook standards; writing style is original and engaging. |
| Good | Paper is somewhat successful in communicating an argument and offering support for it; the grammar and spelling are fairly clean, with some errors; source used are generally appropriate, and the research material is integrated into the paper, although with occasional awkwardness, and citations follow reference standards with some few errors. |
| Fair | Paper is only marginally successful in communicating an argument and offering support for it; there are multiple mistakes in grammar and spelling; research is inconsistent in quality and not well integrated into the paper, and adherence to rules for citation is sketchy. |
| Poor | Paper is not successful in communicating an argument and offering support for it; there are serious and distracting mistakes in grammar and spelling; research is weak: sources are few and/or inappropriate to the discipline, research material is not integrated into the paper, and citations do not follow reference standards. |

If you really feel that your assessment has a holistic basis, then the holistic rubric might be best for you. The criterion specific rubric really breaks down the outcomes for detailed analysis.

Steps to creating a rubric:

1. When creating the assignment, be clear in your mind about what the learning and assessment objectives are for the assignment. For instance, a rubric will change in characteristics you only wish to use the assessment as a summation or test of knowledge rather than a formative learning experience.
2. When you know what those objectives are, then consider what elements of that assignment can be measured to determine success in the objective. If there are very specific criteria that require individual analysis, then you will want to design an analytical rubric and not a holistic one.
3. Choose how you are going to rate attainment of the learning objectives.
4. Add descriptors that are clear and directly explain how the criteria fit into the performance rating.