

The Right Rubric for You and Your Students:

Some Principles of Design

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What do we mean by rubric?

A rubric is an auxiliary or intermediate document used between the assignment sheet and a grade to provide feedback to the student.

It identifies and describes the traits of the students' work with varying levels of specificity and is used to evaluate students' work and prompt optional additional feedback.

A rubric is an articulation of specific expectations that promotes a level of standardization that can be helpful to instructors, individual students, classes as a whole, and even departments— if there is regular discussion of rubrics among colleagues.

Matching Rubric to Goals and Teaching Methods

There are many design elements to choose from when it comes to making a rubric.

Here are just a few options. Consider which options best suit your course goals and teaching methods.

- Minimal or detailed
- Holistic or analytic
- Generic or task-specific/trait-specific
- Grid or paragraphs (or questions)
- Pass/fail or scale system
- Adding points or subtracting points

Three Types of Rubrics (of many!)

1 | Holistic

Holistic rubrics describe the overall effectiveness of the assignment. It does not separate the parts of the assignment but views them as a whole and evaluates how well each part works together.

Holistic rubrics describe its criteria through paragraphs that describe each level of effectiveness.

2 | Generic analytic

Generic analytic rubrics are designed to be used across assignments, so they identify criteria that can appear in a variety of genres.

Generic analytic rubrics might delineate the effectiveness of ideas, organization, and use of conventions, among other foundational qualities through the use of a grid structure or questions.

3 | Task-specific

Task-specific rubrics may be formatted as holistic or analytic rubrics, but their primary purpose is to evaluate how well the student accomplishes specific tasks required of the assignment.

The tasks evaluated should provide the opportunity to demonstrate proficiency of learning goals.

Holistic Rubric

Features:

- Discusses criteria as interrelated
- Can be more efficient than other types of rubrics

EXHIBIT 14.7

Holistic Scale for Grading Physics Microthemes.

- 6, 5** Microthemes in this category will show a confident understanding of the physics concepts and will explain those concepts clearly to the intended audience. A 6 theme will be clearly written throughout; will contain almost no errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar; and will have enough development to provide a truly helpful explanation to learners. A 5 theme will still be successful in teaching the physics concepts to the intended audience but may have more errors or somewhat less development than a 6. The key to microthemes in the 6, 5 category is that they must show a correct understanding of the physics and explain the concept clearly to a new learner.
- 4, 3** Microthemes in this category will reveal to the instructor that the writer probably understands the physics concepts, but lack of clarity in the writing or lack of fully developed explanations means that the microtheme would not teach the concept to new learners. Microthemes in the 4, 3 category are usually "you know what I mean" essays: someone who already understands the concepts can tell that the writer probably does, too, but someone who does not already understand the concepts would not learn anything from the explanation. This category is also appropriate for clearly written essays that have minor misunderstandings of the physics concepts or for accurate essays full of sentence-level errors.
- 2, 1** These microthemes will be unsuccessful either because the writer fails to understand the physics concepts, because the number of errors is so high that the instructor cannot determine how much the writer understands, or because the explanations lack even minimum development. Give a score of 2 or 1 if the writer misunderstands the physics, even if the essay is otherwise well written. Also give a score of 2 or 1 to essays so poorly written that the reader can't understand them.

EXHIBIT 14.2

Generic Rubric for Summary Writing Using Holistic Method

Explanation: A summary should be directed toward imagined readers who have not read the article being summarized. The purpose of the summary is to give these persons a clear overview of the article's main points. The criteria for a summary are (1) accuracy of content, (2) comprehensiveness and balance, and (3) clarity, readability, and grammatical correctness.

Rubric

- 6** A 6 summary meets all the criteria. The writer understands the article thoroughly. The main points in the article appear in the summary with all main points proportionately developed (that is, the writer does not spend excessive time on one main point while neglecting other main points). The summary should be as comprehensive as possible and should read smoothly, with appropriate transitions between ideas. Sentences should be clear, without vagueness or ambiguity and without grammatical or mechanical errors.
- 5** A 5 summary should still be very good, but it can be weaker than a 6 summary in one area. It may have excellent accuracy and balance but show occasional problems in sentence structure or correctness. Or it may be clearly written but be somewhat unbalanced or less comprehensive than a 6 summary or show a minor misunderstanding of the article.
- 4** A score of 4 means good but not excellent. Typically, a 4 summary will reveal a generally accurate reading of the article, but it will be noticeably weaker in the quality of writing. Or it may be well written but cover only part of the essay.
- 3** A 3 summary must have strength in at least one area of competence, and it should still be good enough to convince the grader that the writer has understood the article fairly well. However, a 3 summary typically is not written well enough to convey an understanding of the article to someone who has not already read it. Typically, the sentence structure of a 3 summary is not sophisticated enough to convey the sense of hierarchy and subordination found in the essay.
- 2** A 2 summary is weak in all areas of competence, either because it is so poorly written that the reader cannot understand the content or because the content is inaccurate or seriously disorganized. However, a 2 essay convinces the grader that the writer has read the essay and is struggling to understand it.
- 1** A 1 summary fails to meet any of the areas of competence.

Analytic Rubric

Features:

- Evaluates criteria separately
- Easier to show weight assigned to each criterion by point value

EXHIBIT 14.5

Analytic Rubric with Non-Grid Design: Argument Assignment

1. Does the introduction effectively present the issue and the thesis, while evoking reader interest? (10 points)
2. Are the ideas sufficiently complex? Are there good reasons in support of the thesis? Is the argument logical? (30 points)
3. Are opposing or alternative views adequately and fairly summarized? Are the responses to the opposing views effective? (20 points)
4. Is there appropriate and sufficient evidence? Is the argument well-developed, with appropriate details? (20 points)
5. Is the essay well organized into a unified whole? Are there good transitions? Do paragraphs have topic sentences? (20 points)
6. Is language style effective? Is language well chosen for the intended audience? Is the tone appropriate? (10 points)
7. Are sentences well constructed? Is the paper carefully edited? (20 points)

EXHIBIT 14.1

Generic Writing Rubric Using Analytic Method

Author's Name	Title of Piece					
	1 Does Not Meet	2 Partially Meets	3 Does Not Fully Meet	4 Meets	5 More Than Meets	6 Exceeds
Content/Ideas	Writing is extremely limited in communicating knowledge, with no central theme.	Writing is limited in communicating knowledge. Length is not adequate for development.	Writing does not clearly communicate knowledge. The reader is left with questions.	Writes related, quality paragraphs, with little or no details.	Writing is purposeful and focused. Piece contains some details.	Writing is confident and clearly focused. It holds the reader's attention. Relevant details enrich writing.
Organization	Writing is disorganized and underdeveloped with no transitions or closure.	Writing is brief and underdeveloped with very weak transitions and closure.	Writing is confused and loosely organized. Transitions are weak and closure is ineffective.	Uses correct writing format. Incorporates a coherent closure.	Writing includes a strong beginning, middle, and end, with some transitions and good closure.	Writing includes a strong beginning, middle, and end, with clear transitions and a focused closure.
Vocabulary/ Word Choice	Careless or inaccurate word choice, which obscures meaning.	Language is trite, vague, or flat.	Shows some use of varied word choice.	Uses a variety of word choices to make writing interesting.	Purposeful use of word choice.	Effective and engaging use of word choice.
Voice	Writer's voice/point of view shows no sense of audience.	Writer's voice/point of view shows little sense of audience.	Writer's voice/point of view shows a vague sense of audience.	Writer uses voice/point of view. Writes with an understanding of a specific audience.	Writer has strong voice/point of view. Writing engages the audience.	Writes with a distinct, unique voice/point of view. Writing is skillfully adapted to the audience.
Sentence Fluency	Frequent run-ons or fragments, with no variety in sentence structure.	Many run-ons or fragments. Little variety in sentence structure.	Some run-ons or fragments. Limited variety in sentence structure.	Uses simple, compound, and complex sentences.	Frequently varied sentence structure.	Consistent variety of sentence structure throughout.
Conventions	Parts of speech show lack of agreement. Frequent errors in mechanics. Little or no evidence of spelling strategies.	Inconsistent agreement between parts of speech. Many errors in mechanics. Little evidence of spelling strategies.	Occasional errors in agreement between parts of speech. Some errors in mechanics. Some evidence of spelling strategies.	Maintains agreement between parts of speech. Few errors in mechanics. Applies basic grade-level spelling.	Consistent agreement between parts of speech. Uses correct punctuation, capitalization, and so on. Consistent use of spelling strategies.	Uses consistent agreement between parts of speech. No errors in mechanics. Creative and effective use of spelling strategies.

This rubric is provided by ReadWriteThink.org, a Thinkfinity website developed by the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and in partnership with the Verizon Foundation.

Task-specific Rubric or Primary Trait Analysis

Features:

- Delineates between specific tasks or traits specific to the assignment
- Can aid in explaining assignment learning goals

EXHIBIT 4.6

Rubric with Full Descriptions of Each Scoring Level

Assignment: Design and conduct an original scientific experiment and write a report using scientific format.

Trait: Title

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Level 5 | Is appropriate in tone and structure to a science journal; contains all necessary descriptors for placement in a scientific database; contains necessary brand names; identifies functions of experimentation; allows reader to anticipate design. |
| Level 4 | Is appropriate in tone and structure to science journal; contains most descriptors; identifies function and brand names; suggests aspects of design. |
| Level 3 | Identifies function and brand name but does not allow reader to anticipate design. |
| Level 2 | Identifies function or brand name, but not both; lacks design information or is misleading. |
| Level 1 | Is patterned after another discipline or missing. |

Trait: Methods and Materials Section

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Level 5 | Contains appropriate, quantifiable, concisely organized information that allows the experiment to be replicated. All information in the report can be related back to this section. Identifies sources of data. Sequences information appropriately. No wordiness. |
| Level 4 | As above, but contains unnecessary information or wordiness. |
| Level 3 | Experiment could be replicated from the information given. All information in the report can be related back to this section. However, fails to identify some data sources or has problematic sequencing. |
| Level 2 | Marginally replicable. Parts of basic design must be inferred. Procedures not quantitatively described. Some information in Results or Conclusions sections cannot be anticipated by reading this section. |
| Level 1 | Describes experiment so poorly it cannot be replicated. |

EXHIBIT 14.3

Task-Specific Rubric for a Genre: Practical Proposal

Letter of Transmittal and Document Design	10 9 8	7 6 5 4	3 2 1 0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has an effective letter of transmittal (addressed to appropriate decision maker; serves as executive summary; briefly explains problem, describes proposed solution, and summarizes supporting reasons) Has professional appearance; good document design with clear headings and appropriately labeled diagrams (if needed); conveys strong ethos 	Meets all criteria at high level	Meets some criteria; uneven	Meets few criteria
Presentation of the Problem	10 9 8	7 6 5 4	3 2 1 0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly describes the problem without presupposing the solution Gives problem "presence" (chooses appropriate methods for motivating reader to care about problem) Adequately develops the problem (shows who is affected, what is at stake); anticipates objections of a skeptical reader who dismisses the problem 	Meets all criteria at high level; clear and developed	Meets some criteria; uneven; occasionally thin; some lapses in clarity	Meets few criteria; often unclear or undeveloped
Description of the Proposed Solution	10 9 8	7 6 5 4	3 2 1 0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describes proposed solution clearly Explains costs; pays attention to practical details; convinces reader that writer has done his or her homework Solution is made to seem doable If writer proposes a planning committee to develop details of solution, writer clearly points out the details of a successful solution 	Meets all criteria at high level; clear, easy to follow	Meets some criteria; uneven or has some lapses in clarity or development	Meets few criteria; often unclear or undeveloped
Justification for Proposed Solution	10 9 8	7 6 5 4	3 2 1 0
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strongly motivates reader to act on the proposal; designs justification section by imagining chief reasons for audience resistance States clear, effective reasons in support of proposal Supports reasons with effective evidence Effectively ties into values and beliefs of audience 	Meets all criteria at high level; clear, easy to follow	Meets some criteria; uneven or has some lapses in clarity or development	Meets few criteria; often unclear or undeveloped

How to Design a Rubric

1. Choose an assignment.
2. Identify the criteria to evaluate.
3. Explain this criteria either as a whole or individually along an axis of “exceptional” to “needs work” (or whichever evaluative language you prefer).
4. Choose how to present this information and what values to assign.
5. Get feedback — either from a colleague or from your students.
6. Continue revising this rubric over time!

How to Design a Trait-Based Rubric

EXHIBIT 4.7

Steps for Constructing a Rubric

1. Choose a test or assignment that tests what you want to evaluate. Make clear your objectives for the assignment—what you want students to learn and do.
2. Identify the criteria, or “traits,” that will count in the evaluation. These are nouns or noun phrases, such as “thesis,” “eye contact with client,” “use of color,” or “control of variables.”
3. For each trait, construct a two- to five-point scale. These are descriptive statements. For example, the trait may be “thesis.” The scale for “thesis” will have several levels, each with a description of the performance for that level. For example, a thesis that scores a 5 does X, Y, and Z. A thesis that scores a 4 does X and Y. And so on.
4. Try out the scale with a sample of student work or review with colleagues and revise.

Works Cited

“[Using Rubrics to Develop and Apply Grading Criteria](#),” John Bean,
Engaging Ideas

“[Establishing Criteria and Standards for Grading](#),” Barbara Walvoord and
Virginia Anderson, *Effective Grading*