Designing Grading Rubrics

Rubrics can help instructors communicate their expectations to students and assess student work fairly and efficiently. Rubrics can also provide students with informative feedback on their strengths and weaknesses, and prompt students to reflect on their own work. This handout describes how to create and use a grading rubric, and includes a list of resources to help you learn more about rubrics and develop your own.

HOW TO CREATE A GRADING RUBRIC¹

1. Define the purpose of the assignment/assessment for which you are creating a rubric. Consider the following:
   - What exactly is the assigned task?
     Does it break down into a variety of different tasks? Are these tasks equally important?
     What are the learning objectives for this assignment/task? What do you want students to demonstrate in their completed assignments/performances?
   - What might an exemplary student product/performance look like?
     How might you describe an acceptable student product/performance? How might you describe work that falls below expectations?
   - What kind of feedback do you want to give students on their work/performances?
     Do you want/need to give them a grade? Do you want to give them a single overall grade? Do you want to give them detailed feedback on a variety of criteria? Do you want to give them specific feedback that will help them improve their future work?

2. Decide what kind of rubric you will use.
   Holistic rubric
   - Emphasis on what the learner can demonstrate (rather than what she cannot)
   - Saves time by minimizing the number of decisions made
   - Can be used consistently across raters, provided there has been training
   Disadvantages
   - Does not provide specific feedback for improvement
   - Can be difficult to choose a score when student work is at varying levels across the criteria
   - Criteria cannot be weighted
   Analytic rubric
   - Provides feedback on areas of strength or weakness
   - Each criterion can be weighted to reflect its relative importance
   Disadvantages
   - More time consuming to create and use than a holistic rubric
   - May not be used consistently across raters, unless extremely well defined

3. Define the criteria.
   Ask yourself: what knowledge and skills are required for the assignment/assessment?
   Make a list of these, group and label them, and eliminate any that are not critical.
   The list should contain no more than 6-7 criteria, but need not include that many.

¹This section of the handout draws heavily from Assessment; What is a Rubric? from DePaul University’s Office for Teaching, Learning and Assessment; Creating a Rubric: an Online Tutorial for Faculty from the Center for Faculty Development at the University of Colorado Denver; and Dannelle D. Stevens & Antonia J. Levi, An Introduction to Rubrics (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2005). The first two of these are in the Online Resources section of this handout, while the third is available in the Center’s library.
Helpful strategies for defining grading criteria:

- Review the learning objectives for the course; use the assignment prompt, existing grading checklists, peer response sheets, comments on previous work, past examples of student work, etc.
- Try describing A/B/C work
- Work with co-teachers/TAs
- Talk with colleagues
- Brainstorm and discuss with students

Consider the effectiveness of the criteria:

- Can they be observed and measured?
- Are they important and essential?
- Are they distinct from other criteria?
- Are they phrased in precise, unambiguous language?

Revise the criteria as needed.
Consider how you will weight them relative to each other.

4. Design the rating scale.
Most ratings scales include 3-5 levels.
Consider the following:

- Given what students are able to demonstrate in this assignment/assessment, what are the possible levels of achievement?
- Will you use numbers or descriptive labels for these levels?
- If you choose descriptive labels, what labels are most appropriate? Will you assign a number to those labels?
- In what order will you list these levels – from lowest to highest or vice versa?

5. Write descriptions for each level of the rating scale.
Create statements of expected performance at each level of the rubric. For an analytic rubric do this for each particular criterion of the rubric.
These descriptions help students understand your expectations and their performance in regard to those expectations.

Well-written descriptions…
…describe observable and measurable behavior.
…use parallel language across the scale.
…indicate the degree to which the standards are met.

6. Create your rubric
Develop the criteria, rating scale and descriptions for each level of the rating scale into a rubric.

Space permitting, include the assignment at the top of the rubric.
For reading and grading ease, limit the rubric to a single page, if possible.
Consider the effectiveness of your rubric and revise accordingly.

- Get collegial feedback.
- Ask your TA for feedback
- Ask your students for feedback
- Try it out on a sample of student work.

After you use the rubric, analyze the results and consider its effectiveness, then revise accordingly.

How to Use a Grading Rubric
In addition to using the rubric to grade an assignment/assessment, you may wish to:

- distribute the rubric with the assignment.
- ask students to use the rubric to evaluate their own work.
- ask students to use the rubric for peer review.
ONLINE RESOURCES

Learn More about Grading Rubrics

Assessment: What is a Rubric?
This page from the website of DePaul University’s Office for Teaching, Learning and Assessment provides an excellent introduction to rubrics. It addresses types of rubrics, creating a rubric, modifying an existing rubric and evaluating a rubric, and includes links to helpful additional resources such as rubric banks.
http://condor.depaul.edu/tla/Assessment/AssessmentRubrics.html

Creating a Rubric: An Online Tutorial for Faculty
This tutorial from the University of Colorado – Denver’s Center for Faculty Development contains an superb overview of rubrics. It describes how to create a rubric and to judge its quality, and includes a variety of sample rubrics.
http://www.ucdenver.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/center-for-faculty-development/Documents/Tutorials/Rubrics/index.htm

Rubric Collections

Rubrics for Essential Learning Outcomes
As part of the VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) project of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), teams of faculty and other academic/student affairs professionals from a range of institutions created institutional-level rubrics (and related materials) for the AAC&U’s Essential Learning Outcomes. There are rubrics for the following kinds of learning:

- Intellectual and Practical Skills
  (Inquiry and analysis, Critical thinking, Creative thinking, Written communication, Oral communication, Reading, Quantitative literacy, Information literacy, Teamwork, Problem solving)

- Personal and Social Responsibility
  (Civic knowledge and engagement—local and global, Intercultural knowledge and competence, Ethical reasoning, Foundations and skills for lifelong learning)

- Integrative and Applied Learning
  Each rubric contains the most broadly shared criteria or core characteristics considered to be critical for judging the quality of student work in a particular outcome area, and can be useful to consult as you develop a rubric to assess student learning in that area.
http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/

Sample Rubrics from a Variety of Disciplines and Kinds of Assignments
This site from the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education contains an extensive collection of rubrics.
http://course1.winona.edu/shatfield/air/rubrics.htm

Online Rubrics Generators
Tools for rubric development, assessment & sharing

RubiStar
Includes a rubric you can use to analyze the results of using a rubric you create and create a printable report
http://rubistar.4teachers.org/

iRubrics
http://www.rcampus.com/indexrubric.cfm