Choosing the Right Assessment Method: Rubrics

The rubric is one of three assessment tools that is strongly recommended for use by faculty because it is a concise and effective direct evaluation that brings about reasonable dialogue to improve student learning.

Definition:

Rubrics are the most flexible type of direct assessment and can be used to score any product or performance measure such as essays, portfolios, skill performances, oral exams, debates, project/product creation, oral speeches, etc. When using a rubric for assessment purposes, faculty must agree on a detailed scoring system that delineates criteria used to discriminate among levels. Faculty should use information from the course outline’s assignment and evaluation pages to fill in the categories of the rubric.

For assessment, it is recommended that faculty use standardized rubrics across all sections of a course. This practice affords all faculty with clear guidelines about departmental standards/expectations, what content to emphasize, and the level of difficulty expected for each topic.

Advantages:

- Defines clear faculty expectations of students.
- Allows students to better understand the scores they earn.
- Can be used to score many kinds of assignments or exams.
- Faculty define standards and criteria and how they will be applied.
- Complex products or behaviors can be examined efficiently.

Disadvantages:

- Not useful for multiple choice or short answer tests.
- Faculty must agree on how to define standards and criteria.
- Faculty must agree on how they will apply the criteria when grading.

Developing a Scoring Rubric

- Identify what you are assessing (e.g., critical thinking, professional skills, etc.).
- Identify how to assess the learning (e.g., paper, project, portfolio, speech, etc.).
- Identify the characteristics of what you are assessing (e.g., appropriate use of evidence, recognition of logical fallacies, etc.).
- Describe the best work you could expect using these characteristics. This describes the top category.

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• Describe the worst acceptable or unacceptable work using these characteristics. This describes the lowest acceptable category.

• Develop descriptions of intermediate-level work and assign them to intermediate categories. You might decide to develop a scale that runs from one to five (e.g., unacceptable, marginal, competent, very competent, outstanding), one to three (e.g., novice, competent, mastery), or any other set that is meaningful.

• To assess student learning outcomes, the use of a 4- or 5-point/level rubric is recommended. In this way, data collection and analysis of student learning can be aggregated easily. Nevertheless, a scoring rubric will require the faculty of a course to design an agreed upon assignment and confirm the evaluation criteria for each point or level of the rubric.

• Sometimes during the scoring process, instructors realize that they hold implicit criteria that are not stated in the scoring rubric. Identifying implicit criteria can help the instructor refine the scoring rubric for future assessments.

Suggestions for Using Scoring Rubrics for Outcomes Assessment

• Faculty can use scoring rubrics in a variety of ways for outcomes assessment at the course or program level.
  o Faculty can use a scoring rubric in courses and aggregate the data across sections.
  o Faculty can individually assess student products (e.g., portfolios) and then aggregate the data.
  o Faculty can participate in group readings in which they review student products together and discuss what they found.
  o Field work supervisors or community professionals may also be invited to assess student work using rubrics.

• A well-designed rubric should allow evaluators to efficiently focus on defined student learning outcomes while reviewing complex student work, such as a cumulative project, without getting bogged down in the details.

• Clarifying the scoring rubric is likely to improve both inter-rater reliability (i.e., all faculty will score student work the same) and intra-rater reliability (e.g., one faculty member will score student work in the same way across semesters). A scoring rubric with well-defined categories should assist in maintaining consistent scoring regardless of who the rater is or when the rating is completed.

• Rubrics should be pilot tested and evaluators should agree on appropriate classifications for a set of student products that vary in quality. If two evaluators apply the rubric to each product, inter-rater reliability should be examined. Once the data are collected, faculty discuss results to identify program strengths and areas of concern, “closing the loop” by using assessment data to make changes to improve student learning.

• One method of further clarifying a scoring rubric is through the use of anchor papers. Anchor papers are a set of scored responses that illustrate the nuances

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of the rubric. A given rater may refer to the anchor papers throughout the scoring process to illuminate the differences between the score levels.

- Faculty can get “double duty” out of their grading by using a common rubric that is used for grading and course SLO assessment purposes. Individual faculty may elect to use the common rubric in different ways, combining it with other grading components as they see fit.

**Suggestions for Using Scoring Rubrics for Grading**

- Hand out the scoring rubric with the assignment so students will know your expectations and how they will be graded. This should help students master the stated student learning outcomes and course objectives for the course by guiding their work in appropriate directions.

- Use a rubric for grading student work, including essay questions on exams, and return the rubric with the grading on it. Faculty save time by not writing extensive comments and instead, just circle or highlight relevant categories of the rubric. Points or point ranges for each possible cell in the rubric should be printed on the rubric, along with a column for the points a student earned in each row. A column should also be included for comments from the faculty member who scores the student’s work.

- Consider developing a rubric with your students for an assignment or group project. Students can then monitor themselves and their peers using agreed-upon criteria that they helped develop. Note: Many faculty will find that students will create higher standards for themselves than faculty would impose on them.
  - Have students apply your rubric to some sample products (e.g., lab reports) before they create their own. This process should help them evaluate their own work as they develop it.
  - Have students exchange paper drafts and give peer feedback using the rubric, then give students a few days before the final products are turned into you. You might also require that they turn in the draft and scored rubric with their final paper.
  - Have students self-assess their work using the grading rubric and hand in the self-assessment with the product. Then faculty and students can compare self- and faculty-generated evaluations.