

Resource: Using Rubrics to Guide Student Work and Assessment

This resource includes:

- Information on using rubrics
- Tips for creating and using rubrics
- Sample rubrics

Information on Using Rubrics

Rubrics help students to:

- Identify the most important aspects of an assignment
- Take the mystery out of what teachers expect, clarifying what is needed to successfully complete an assignment
- Understand specific strengths and weaknesses of their work—they receive not an isolated score, but a holistic assessment of their performance on multiple tasks

Rubrics help teachers prioritize their goals and determine which skills they need to work on with their students. Many teachers develop their rubrics in consultation with students and give them to students before the final draft of an assignment so that they can learn to assess their own writing. In this way, an evaluation instrument becomes a teaching and learning tool.

Although all writers benefit from specific comments on their work, rubrics are especially useful for ELLs, whose skills often develop unevenly. For example, their papers may be very strong in content but weak in grammar, or strong in vocabulary but weak in organization. Rubrics allow teachers to:

- Identify weak areas for students to focus on in revisions and future assignments
- Point out strengths in work, thereby helping ELLs gain confidence
- Note errors in mechanics without losing focus on the content of a student's work

Tips for Creating and Using Rubrics

Rubrics help students understand the expectations for an assignment. The following is a list of suggestions for how to use rubrics in your classroom:

Teach the micro-skills you will expect students to demonstrate in a final assignment.

Before teaching a unit, think carefully about what you expect the final assignment to look like. In your lesson planning, include explicit instruction on the different micro-skills you expect students to demonstrate in the final assignment.

Elicit ideas from students about what qualities they need to demonstrate to complete the assignment successfully.

Once you have explained the assignment, ask students about the skills they think they must demonstrate to successfully complete it. Write their ideas on an overhead or chart paper and discuss the ones that are most important for an assignment. If students forget a critical skill, make sure you highlight it for them.

Make sure your expectations are fair and realistic.

When writing the rubric, be sure your expectations are fair and realistic. Focus on skills and content knowledge that have been emphasized during classes leading up to the assignment.

Write rubrics in clear and familiar language.

Use language that is familiar and comprehensible to students. For each rubric category, try to list the most important micro-skills that belong to it. For example: in a rubric assessing oral presentations, a category might be "Presentation Skills," which might be followed by a list of micro-skills such as maintaining eye contact, projecting the voice, speaking clearly, and speaking with feeling and energy.

Minimize the number of categories you describe in the rubric.

Think carefully about the points you most want to emphasize with your students. Listing every skill you want students to demonstrate will distract them from the most important ones.

Give students a chance to practice using the rubric.

In order to better understand expectations for an assignment, students should have the opportunity to assess sample assignments using the rubric. It is useful for teachers to provide students with samples that are below standard as well as those that meet or exceed the standards. Asking students to use the rubric and then discuss their assessment of the assignments is an excellent way to ensure their understanding of what the standards are and what steps they can take to meet them.

Limit your assessment of errors to the categories described in the rubric.

By sticking to the rubric when correcting your students' completed assignments, you avoid overwhelming yourself or your students.

Use an even number for scores.

In creating your scoring system, always use an even number in order to avoid ranking students in the middle. The most common scoring is 1–4 with 1 meaning below standard, 2 meaning approaching standard, 3 meaning meeting the standard, and 4 meaning exceeding the standard. Using an even number of scores is particularly important when asking students to use rubrics—if given the option, most students tend to score down the middle.

Use rubrics only for major assignments.

It is not necessary to use a rubric for every assignment. They can be time consuming, and their use should be limited to assignments that require students to have a detailed understanding of how their work was assessed.

Sample Rubrics

Reading Skills Rubric: This is an example of a rubric based on the TESOL Standards: Goal 2, Standard 3: “To use English to achieve academically in all content areas: Students will use appropriate learning strategies to construct and apply academic knowledge.” (This rubric is for students at an intermediate level of English proficiency in grades 3–5, with subskills based on the SFUSD ELD curriculum guide.)

Reading Subskills	1 Poor	2 Needs Improvement	3 Very Good	4 Excellent
Locates basic text features (e.g., title, table of contents, chapter headings, charts, etc.) 1 2 3 4	Rarely able to locate text features	Sometimes able to locate text features	Able to locate text features most of the time	Consistently able to locate text features
Summarizes information in correct sequence 1 2 3 4	Rarely summarizes information in correct sequence	Sometimes summarizes information in correct sequence	Summarizes information in correct sequence most of the time	Consistently summarizes information in correct sequence
Applies knowledge of content-related vocabulary to reading 1 2 3 4	Rarely applies knowledge of content-related vocabulary to reading	Sometimes applies knowledge of content-related vocabulary to reading	Applies knowledge of content-related vocabulary to reading most of the time	Consistently applies knowledge of content-related vocabulary to reading
Answers questions in some detail 1 2 3 4	Rarely answers questions in some detail	Sometimes answers questions in some detail	Answers questions in some detail most of the time	Consistently answers questions in some detail
Ability to locate library books 1 2 3 4	Rarely able to locate library books	Sometimes able to locate library books	Able to locate library books most of the time	Consistently able to locate library books

Writing Rubric: This is an example of a rubric developed for an autobiography writing assignment for beginning level ELLs, grades 9–12.

When I Was Young in . . . Autobiography Project

Based on class discussion of expectations for an autobiography project, the teacher created the following rubric to assess what the students wrote.

Criterion	Scoring Rubric			
	1 Below standard	2 Approaching standard	3 Meets standard	4 Exceeds standard
<p>Accuracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing is clear and makes sense • Illustrations reflect the meaning of the sentences • Student follows directions for the activity • All pieces of book are included (title page, copyright, dedication, illustrations, chapter titles) 	Score:	Explanation:		
<p>Creativity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing includes a range of adjectives that appeal to the five senses • Includes detailed descriptions of student’s experiences • Detailed illustrations are included 	Score:	Explanation:		
<p>Grammar/Mechanics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correctly uses the grammatical constructions we have covered in class (past tense, 	Score:	Explanation:		

When I Was Young in . . . Autobiography Project

Based on class discussion of expectations for an autobiography project, the teacher created the following rubric to assess what the students wrote.

Criterion	Scoring Rubric			
	1 Below standard	2 Approaching standard	3 Meets standard	4 Exceeds standard
complete sentences, adjectives, adverbs) • Correctly follows spelling, punctuation, and other basic mechanics rules				
Self-discipline • Completed the different chapters on time • Worked hard during class • Gave and received constructive feedback in class during peer-editing process	Score:	Explanation:		
Final Score	1 Below standard	2 Approaching standard	3 Meets standard	4 Exceeds standard
Explanation				
Additional Comments				