

Creating Rubrics

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Teaching and Learning Services

About Rubrics

In post-secondary, a rubric usually takes the form of a table that divides “an assignment into its component parts and provides a detailed description of what constitutes acceptable or unacceptable levels of performance for each of those parts” (Stevens & Levi, 3).

Are Rubrics Effective?

As with most areas of educational research, findings regarding the effectiveness of rubrics are not conclusive. Generally, studies support the notion that rubrics that are well-designed and well-utilized will have some positive effect for most students, while rubrics that don't fit the assignment can have a detrimental effect on student performance. In short, as long as you design or tweak your rubric to fit your assignment, you'll probably be helping your students in ways they will appreciate.

Rubric Pros and Cons

Like any teaching and learning tool, rubrics have pros and cons and will work better for some instructors and students than others. Here are some pros and cons to using rubrics:

Rubric Pros

- Clarifies expectations for everyone
- Aids grading consistency
- Allows self/peer assessment
- Can speed up grading

Rubric Cons

- More work up front
- Rarely right the first time
- May not reduce grade complaints
- Don't fit every assignment or instructor

Do you need more help in creating a rubric for a new or existing assignment? One of the Educational Developers in TLS can help! Contact us at teaching@macewan.ca.

Further Reading

For more information about this topic, please see the following resources:

Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo. (n.d.). *Rubrics: Useful assessment tools*. Retrieved October 1, 2019 from <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/assessing-student-work/grading-and-feedback/rubrics-useful-assessment-tools>

Huba, M. E., & Freed, J. E. (2000). Using rubrics to provide feedback to students. In *Learner-centered assessment on college campuses*. (pp. 151-200). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Weimer, M. (February 14, 2013). Should you be using rubrics? *Faculty Focus*. Retrieved from <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/should-you-be-using-rubrics/>



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Rubric Design and Best Practices

Borrowing someone's rubric isn't a good idea. Rubrics necessarily cram and code a lot of values and standards into small amounts of text, and while borrowing someone else's code may seem easy up front, using a code you didn't create to grade student work is inevitably confusing and frustrating. An effective way to create a rubric is to:

1. In a regular document (not a table), list your pedagogical goals for this assignment. What are the 3-5 things you most want students to gain through completion of this assignment? Articulating these will always improve the clarity and purpose of the assignment for your students. These items will become the first column of your rubric but let yourself write them out before editing them to fit into small, rubric cells.
2. Decide how you want to assign grades for this assignment. Will you break grades down into letters? Ranges? A total of 10, or 100? Remember that this has nothing to do with how much the assignment contributes to each student's grade; the goal here is to create a scale that fits the scope and demands of this assignment, and your preferences for assigning values to student work. Students will adjust to the scale you create, so create one that works for you! This will form the top row of your rubric.
3. List the stand-out features of (i) the best assignment you can (realistically) imagine a student submitting, and (ii) those of an assignment that would only just pass. Having identified those, list the features of 1-3 'middle' categories. These lists fill out the cells of your table.
4. Show this draft to a colleague, your Chair, or someone at TLS. The goal here is to find out what makes sense to anyone not inside your head. Don't feel constrained to take advice, but do seek out an alternative, informed opinion before presenting a new rubric to students.

Rubric Best Practices

Distribute rubrics with assignments. This is essential if students are to benefit in any real way from all your design work. Rubrics offer students insights in how to plan and execute their work, but only if they have them in advance of that work. Make the rubric a topic for discussion by encouraging students to work in small groups to identify areas of confusion now, prior to grading.

Keep rubrics manageable for students. While rubrics most typically take up one standard (landscape) page, there are no rules about rubric size, or number of criteria or standards in a rubric. Larger rubrics can explain more but may also become overwhelming with details. Smaller rubrics are less intimidating and more flexible to use when grading, but descriptions may not unpack enough. The best rule of thumb is that the rubric should be comprehensible to the students using it. Remember that a bigger/longer rubric will, correctly or not, imply a bigger/weightier assignment to students.

At every level of performance, describe what's there rather than only what's lacking. This one is tricky, as some amount of negative language (you didn't, not enough, a lack of...) is usually unavoidable. The goal is to avoid only using descriptive language for the highest success level, and then relying solely on to increasingly negative language throughout the other levels.

For multi-faceted rows, use checkboxes within cells. If your rows collect a few elements into each cell (e.g., a row about 'Content' or 'Clarity' may be broken into multiple elements), separate those elements visually or put a checkbox next to each. This way you can easily identify the parts of each cell that were successfully completed, without additional writing – simply tick a box or circle the element.