

Getting Started with Rubrics

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What is a Rubric?

Rubrics are “*formally defined as scoring guides, consisting of specific pre-established performance criteria, used in evaluating student work on performance assessments.*” (Mertler, 2001).

Faculty often struggle to assign the right score to assignments, while at the same time, students struggle to understand the reasons behind their grade. Effective faculty want to provide detailed feedback, but unfortunately other teaching demands (course load, student count, preparation, research, etc.) limit the time for grading that students need to know how to improve for the next assignment.

If this scenario sounds familiar, rubrics can help! A rubric is a tool faculty use to improve the assessment process for everyone. Creating a rubric help both faculty and students in several ways.

What can a rubric do?

- *Provide consistency*
- *Spell out criteria*
- *Identify the most important criteria*
- *Create clarity for students*
- *Offer detailed feedback*
- *Reduce grade complaints*
- *Save time grading*

In short, rubrics make assessing student learning better for you and your students.

In their book *Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning*, Dannelle Stevens and Antonia Levi offer these reasons for using rubrics:

1. Provide Timely Feedback - You can get information back to students more quickly
2. Prepare Students to Use Detailed Feedback - Students can use feedback to improve
3. Encourage Critical Thinking - Students think more deeply about their work
4. Facilitate Communication - Students have a better understanding of what you want
5. Help us Refine our Teaching Skills - We think critically about our assessment criteria
6. Level the Playing Field - All students are graded on the same criteria

Why use a rubric? Rubrics can help faculty and students

Teachers

- Rubrics serve as justification for grades
- Rubrics break down grading criteria to make grading easier for faculty

Students

- Rubrics explain faculty expectations for the assignment
- Rubrics provide feedback to the student

(Moskal, 2000)

Source:

Stevens, D. & Levi, A. (2013) *Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning*. Stylus Publishing, Virginia. p. 17-28

Types of Rubrics



Holistic Rubric – Cleaning the House

Score	Description
4	All rooms are free of clutter. All exposed surfaces are dusted. Floors are mopped or vacuumed. Items are put in their proper place.
3	All rooms have reduced clutter. Dust and dirt are not evident on visible surfaces. Floors are free of obvious dirt and debris. Items in room are organized in an orderly fashion.
2	Most rooms have eliminated or reduced clutter. Dust and dirt are rarely present. Floors are not entirely clear of debris and dirt. Items are put away but not organized.
1	Many or all rooms remain cluttered. Dust and dirt are evident on surfaces. Floors show dirt and debris. Items are not put away.
0	No attempt was made to clean rooms.

Holistic Rubrics

List 3 to 5 levels of a single activity or performance with a ranking or score.

Analytic Rubrics

Break down individual criteria, describing detailed characteristics and definitions for more nuanced scoring and detailed feedback.

Analytic Rubric – Cleaning the House

	4	3	2	1	0
Clutter	All rooms free of clutter	All rooms have reduced clutter	Most rooms eliminated or reduced clutter	Many or all rooms remain cluttered	No attempt made
Dusting	All exposed surfaces dusted	Dust and dirt not evident on visible surfaces	Dust and dirt rarely present	Dust and dirt are evident on surfaces	No attempt made
Floors	Floors mopped or vacuumed	Floors free of obvious dirt and debris	Floors not entirely clear of debris and dirt	Floors show dirt and debris	No attempt made
Organization	Items put up and organized	Items put up but not organized	Items not put up, but organized	Items left out	No attempt made

Single Point Rubric – Cleaning the House

Does not meet standards	Criteria for Performance	Meets Standards
	Clutter: All rooms are free of clutter	
	Dusting: All exposed surfaces are dusted	
	Floors: Floors are mopped or vacuumed	
	Organization: Items are put away and organized	

Single Point Rubrics

Focus on proficiency rather than ranking. Useful when a criteria must be achieved or not achieved to move forward.



Creating Your Rubric



Know Your Outcomes

Before you write your rubric, it's important to take time thinking about the outcome you would like to see from your students. Ideally, you want to have these written **before you create the assignment**. For example, if you have an essay, what are the elements that you expect to find in your students' work?

- Will you be looking for information about a specific topic?
- Will you be asking them to use sources?
- Do they need to have an argument?
- Will you be grading the quality of their writing?

A list like this can act as the foundation for your outcomes. Now you can write them as 4 **outcome statements**:

1. Students will demonstrate knowledge about {specific topic}.
2. Students will provide 5 academic sources to support their essay.
3. Students will present a clear and persuasive argument for or against {topic}.
4. Student writing will be free of grammatical, punctuation, or other errors.

As you can see, each statement contains a verb of what the student will do in the assignment. The outcomes are also specific enough to help you and the student determine the **criteria for success**.

Once you have clear outcomes, you can use them to **create the criteria** by which you will judge student work.

- Criteria 1: Knowledge
- Criteria 2: Sources
- Criteria 3: Persuasive Argument
- Criteria 4: Quality of Writing

Setting the Targets

Once you have your criteria, it's time to set the targets for success. Just like in archery, students won't hit the bulls-eye every time. They need to know how close they came, and where they missed the mark.

The **more specific** you are about your targets, **the easier it is** for students to determine if they are meeting your expectations.



For example:

Criteria 4: Quality of Writing

- Writing is error free
- Writing has minimal errors that do not distract from readability
- Writing has several errors
- Writing has numerous errors that distract from readability

You can **add point values** to each description to make scoring easy.

Criteria 4: Quality of Writing with Scoring

- Writing is error free **(4 points)**
- Writing has minimal errors that do not distract from readability **(3 points)**
- Writing has several errors **(2 points)**
- Writing has numerous errors that distract from readability **(1 points)**

Formatting Your Rubric

Rubrics can be a simple list, as shown above, or they can be a grid with rows of criteria and columns of ratings. Which format you use is entirely up to you.

You can also add additional **descriptive statements** to offer more **specific feedback**. By checking the specific mistake, students can better understand where they missed the mark, and improve their work for the next time.

Criteria 4: Quality of Writing with Scoring and Details

- Writing is error free **(4 points)**
- Writing has minimal errors that do not distract from readability **(3 points)**
 - Grammatical errors
 - Word choice
 - Punctuation
 - Spelling
- Writing has several errors **(2 points)**
 - Grammatical errors
 - Word choice
 - Punctuation
 - Spelling
- Writing has numerous errors that distract from readability **(1 points)**
 - Grammatical errors
 - Word choice
 - Punctuation
 - Spelling



How to Weight Rubrics

More often than not, there are assignments in which certain criteria are more important than other criteria or should have a higher score assigned than others. Rarely is each criterion weighted equally.

For this section, we will revisit the cleaning rubric shown earlier. This example allows for the inclusion of all criteria, but awards more points for successfully completing some tasks and less for others. In the example, we've multiplied the percentage by the score to create the appropriate **Weighted Score** for each of the criteria. As you can see, this rubric indicates that a clean floor is less important than a clutter-free room. As student who knows this in advance can dedicate their tie on the areas that are most important.

	4	3	2	1	0	Weighted Score
Clutter 30%	All rooms free of clutter ✓ .30 x 4 = 1.2	All rooms have reduced clutter .30 x 3 = .90	Most rooms eliminated or reduced clutter .30 x 2 = .60	Many or all rooms remain cluttered .30 x 1 = .30	No attempt 0 points	1.2
Dusting 25%	All exposed surfaces dusted .25 x 4 = 1.0	Dust and dirt not evident on visible surfaces ✓ .25 x 3 = .75	Dust and dirt rarely present .25 x 2 = .5	Dust and dirt are evident on surfaces .25 x 1 = .25	No attempt 0 points	.75
Floors 20%	Floors mopped or vacuumed .20 x 4 = .80	Floors free of obvious dirt and debris .20 x 3 = .60	Floors not entirely clear of debris and dirt ✓ .20 x 2 = .40	Floors show dirt and debris .20 x 1 = .20	No attempt 0 points	.40
Organization 25%	Items put up and organized .25 x 4 = 1.0	Items put up but not organized ✓ .25 x 3 = .75	Items not put up, but organized .25 x 2 = .50	Items left out .25 x 1 = .25	No attempt 0 points	.75
	Total Score					3.1/4

Example of a Weighted Rubric

