

Four Stages to Making a Rubric for an Assignment

● Stage 1: Reflecting through use of eight questions:

1) *Why did you create this assignment?* Examples: absorb a specific body of content; develop a skill, synthesize previous learning experiences?

2) *Have you ever given this assignment before?*

How did that go? What questions did students ask before and after they completed it? Were there satisfactory results? Disappointing results? Will you change anything about the assignment this time?

3) *How does this assignment relate to other assignments?*

How will student success with future assignments depend on success with this one? How important is it or in what ways is it important that students do well on this assignment?

4) *What skills will students need to successfully complete this assignment?*

Do they have these skills? Are they developing them? Are they starting from scratch? What range of skills is found in the class? Are any of these skills more important than other skills?

5) *What is the task?*

Break down the task into component tasks. Write a description of each component task for your students.

6) *What evidence can students provide in this assignment that will show they have accomplished your goals for them on the assignment? Are there different kinds of evidence?*

7) *What will an exemplary instance of this assignment look like?*

8) *Short of not turning in the assignment, what will falling short on this assignment look like? What are pitfalls the students may encounter?*

Recommendation: actually write answers to these questions. They really do help with rubric construction that is high quality. They also help you see if you need a new rubric or can use elements of a previously created rubric.

● Stage 2: Listing

What are the learning outcomes we hope to see in the completed assignment? Questions 4-6 above will help you identify skills and knowledge required, the exact nature of the task, and types of evidence of learning that you expect from the assignment. After you get your list, add a description of the highest level of performance for each learning outcome you have listed.

Some persons put items for their lists on post-it notes in preparation for Stage 3. More virtually inclined persons will be prepared to use the cut-and-paste feature of their word processing program for Stage 3.

After you write your first paragraph of the highest level, circle the words in that paragraph that **can vary**. These words will be the ones that you will change as you write the less than top level performances.

Concept words that convey various degrees of performance

- Depth...Breadth...Quality...Scope...Extent...Complexity...Degrees...Accuracy
- Presence to absence
- Complete to incomplete
- Many to some to none
- Major to minor
- Consistent to inconsistent
- Frequency: always to generally to sometimes to rarely

● **Stage 3: Refining your statements of goals and outcomes**

Are your statements concise?

Example:

Students will gather factual information and apply it to a given problem in a manner that is relevant, clear, comprehensive, and conscious of possible bias in the information selected.

Better: Students will be able to apply factual information to a problem.

The remaining content can be addressed when creating subcategories for the scoring rubric: Relevant application? Clear? Comprehensive? Conscious of bias?

Are your statements neither too broad nor too specific?

Example:

Too vague: Students will demonstrate information literacy skills.

Too specific: Students will be able to use institutional online services to retrieve information.

Better: Students will locate information and critically evaluate it. (put criteria for critical evaluation elsewhere in a rubric).

Do your statements contain fuzzy terms?

Fuzzy terms include: *critical* thinking, *proficient* writing, *understanding* a concept, *knowing*, and *appreciating* a viewpoint.

Use handouts (especially verb chart) to delineate fuzzy terms.

● Stage 4: Grouping and Labeling

- Rubrics can be outcome-specific. For example, you may assess students using a critical thinking skills rubric, a reading rubric, or an oral presentation rubric.
- A single rubric may be used to assess multiple outcomes for one goal. In this case, place similar outcomes together to comprise dimensions of a rubric. Create labels for the similar outcomes. A rubric for a research project exemplifies this approach.
- A single rubric may be used to assess all program goals. This is more likely going to be the case for the assessment of portfolios or capstone experiences or for graduate program assessment.
- Orphan outcomes: if they are important, consider making the outcome a goal and unpacking the new goal with a list of related outcomes.

See attached pages for underlined examples.

Checklist for Stage 4:

- 1) Are you building your rubric from the top, starting with a description of exemplary performance?
- 2) Did you write your descriptors as if you were writing for knowledgeable judges of performance, not novices? You can edit later for audience or you may choose to make a parallel student version of the rubric later.
- 3) Are you crafting the language for the lowest sector on the scale in order to make very clear what the performer must do for minimal success? Suggestion: resist the urge to describe the lowest points on the scale in deficit terms only. What *is* accomplished even at the lowest levels?
- 4) Do your criteria reflect all key components of high quality work/? If a student can achieve a high score on your rubric and still not perform well on the task, key criteria are missing from your rubric. For example, if you've addressed organization, mechanics, and accuracy on your rubric but not insight and creativity (and these are key components of high quality work) think about your rubric some more.

- 5) Does your rubric suggest only that poor or mediocre work has “less of X” than strong work? Look for unique features of poor, mediocre, or excellent work (this may take several iterations of a rubric over months or even years).

Sample: “practicing ethical standards of the profession” does not rubric into “highly ethical,” “somewhat ethical,” etc. because the profession wants its members to always act ethically.

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| Exemplary: | Acts congruently with and advocates for ethical standards of the profession. |
| Proficient: | Acts congruently with ethical standards of the profession. |
| Marginal: | Acts within ethical standards. Any violations are minor. |
| Unacceptable: | Violates standards of the profession. Violations are major. |

● Stage 5: Application

Form the actual rubric by deploying dimensions and levels along each side of the rubric.

- Sophisticated, competent, partly competent, not yet competent.
- Exemplary, proficient, marginal, unacceptable.
- Advanced, Intermediate, Novice.
- Distinguished, proficient, intermediate, novice.
- Accomplished, developing, beginning.

Sources: http://edweb.sdsu.edu/triton/july/rubrics/Rubric_Guidelines.html

http://www.relearning.org/resources/PDF/rubric_sampler.pdf

From *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide*, by Linda Suskie. Anker, 2004, p.79

Introduction to Rubrics, by Dannelle D. Stevens and Antonia J. Levi. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publications, pp. 29-41)

Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses by Mary E. Huba and Jann E. Freed. Allyn and Bacon, 2000, pp. 178-87.