Designing Effective Rubrics

Purpose of Rubrics

If created thoughtfully, rubrics should:

1. save you time when grading
2. encourage grading consistency
3. clarify expectations and feedback for students

Each decision you make when designing a rubric should work toward one of these three goals.

Anatomy of a Rubric

Criteria (rows)
Evaluative criteria make up the *rows* in a rubric and describe the components on which the work will be evaluated

Achievement Levels (columns)
Achievement levels make up the *columns* in a rubric and connect each criterion to a point value

Achievement Level Descriptors (cells)
Descriptors appear in the middle of the rubric at each intersection of criterion and achievement level. Descriptors should name specific, achievable characteristics that can be objectively observed in student work. Ideally, language for descriptors is borrowed from the assignment prompt.

Types of Rubrics

Analytic – multiple *Criteria*, multiple *Achievement Levels*

- Detailed feedback on multiple criteria
- Slightly more time-intensive than holistic rubrics
- Accounts for mixed levels of achievement (e.g., a student's work exceeds expectations in one criterion but needs improvement in others)

Holistic – one *Criterion*, multiple *Achievement Levels*

- Less detailed feedback
- Quick grading
- Does not account for mixed levels of achievement (e.g., a student's work exceeds expectations in one element of the criterion but needs improvement in other elements)

Best Practices for Analytic Rubrics

- Aim for **5-7 criteria** (rows) and **3-5 achievement levels** (columns).[1] Exceeding these numbers can reduce clarity for students and increase grading time.

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[1] American Association of Colleges & Universities VALUE Rubric system and Brown University's Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning

- Group similar criteria into one criterion when possible.
  - For example, combine the three criteria *Punctuation*, *Grammar*, and *Spelling* into a single criterion, such as *Mechanics*.
- For consistency and clarity, use language from the assignment prompt in the rubric's Criteria and Achievement Level Descriptors.
- Create each rubric with your Learning Outcomes in mind. What skills should a student demonstrate in order to meet the learning outcomes associated with the assignment?
- Ask for feedback from another instructor or ICaP staff after drafting a new rubric.

Analytic Rubric Checklist[2]

Rows and Columns

☐ There are 5-7 distinct Criteria (rows)

☐ There are 3-5 Achievement Levels (columns)

Achievement Level Descriptors

☐ Each cell in the rubric (at the intersections of Criteria and Achievement Levels) contains a clear Achievement Level Description of specific, achievable characteristics

☐ Descriptors use language from the assignment prompt

☐ Descriptors use parallel language across the levels of each Criterion

Overall

☐ Criteria reflect progress toward the course Learning Outcomes related to the assignment

Additional Resources

General information on rubric design: Yale's Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning

Examples of rubric criteria for a range of assignment types: Brown University's Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, Grading Rubrics

Sample rubrics to download and modify for your course: AAC&U VALUE Rubrics

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[2] Adapted from Arizona State University's Analytic Rubric Checklist