Assessment Rubrics

A rubric is a descriptive tool for determining the level of performance or quality of a piece of work.

A rubric consists of two dimensions, pre-established performance criteria and performance levels (with or without associated grades), in which each level or grade is described to contrast it with the performance of other levels.

	Performance levels, e.g. Poor – adequate - good – excellent
Performance criteria, e.g. Structure Referencing Language	

A rubric is more than just a rating scale, because a rubric will describe the *differences* between performance at each level. Detailed examples are provided below.

Why Use Rubrics?

Rubrics help clarify the expectations you and others have for student performance by providing detailed descriptions of those expectations.

Prior to assessment submission, rubrics can be used as learning aids, informing students in advance how their work or demonstration of learning outcomes will be assessed.

When used without grades, rubrics are an excellent way to provide timely formative feedback.

Well-designed rubrics, when used for grading will help increase validity and reliability.

Guidelines for Developing Rubrics

Ideally, rubrics will be developed at the same time as the assessment.

The main components of a rubric are the criteria by which the task will be judged, the performance levels or available grades, and a description of the expected performance for each criterion in order to achieve a grade (examples with and without grades are provided below).

It can be difficult at first to describe the features of an adequate performance versus a good performance for a given criterion. There are a couple of suggestions for doing this:

1. Describe the ideal piece of work (outstanding), possibly from a model answer;
2. Identify common errors that fall short of ideal ((very) good);
3. Describe the worst case (poor);

4. Identify redeeming factors that make an example better than the worst case (adequate).

Or

1. Use samples of existing work and sort them into piles corresponding to levels of quality;
2. Pick out the key points that cause them to be in a particular pile or the common characteristics of each pile.

The level of detail given for descriptors is a matter for the designer. Considerations will include who the rubric is for, e.g. student, external/independent markers, module owner, etc., and of course, the nature of the assignment or exam. There are arguments for and against both very detailed rubrics and rubrics with little detail.

Try to write descriptors that focus on positives as opposed to negatives – i.e. what's there in the piece of work as opposed to what's missing (see example rubric below)

It is best not to use the titles with the word 'average' in them, example, 'below average'. Rubrics are not designed to compare students against each other, but to compare a student's performance to the criteria.

Consider

It can be useful to co-develop rubrics with students. You may start with a blank rubric or one that is partially developed. Discussing what different levels of achievement might look like in an assessment can be an incredibly enriching experience for both staff and students. For students, they gain a better understanding of how they can demonstrate achievement. For staff, they can better see how students can misinterpret the assessment brief or fail to see what is important in an assessment task.

Rubrics on Canvas

Canvas supports the use of assessment rubrics both for on and offline assignments.

Examples

Levels of performance (labels):

- basic-proficient-advanced;
- needs improvement-meets expectations-exceeds expectations;
- seldom-sometimes-usually-often;
- poor-good-excellent-superior;
- beginning-basic-proficient-advanced-outstanding

- inadequate – developing competence/barely adequate – acceptable/good – sophisticated/exemplary
- Very poor – poor – marginal – adequate – good – excellent

Further Guidance

For more information on using rubrics and other aspects of curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment, please contact CELT: Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching - University of Galway

Rubric Examples

Below are examples of possible rubrics for different tasks.

Simple rubric for a reflective practice task:

	Novice	*Competent*	*Proficient*
Reflection	Little or no reflection on how this relates to your own experience	Some good reflection on how this relates to your own experience	Some real insight into how this has transformed or could transform your own practice
Informed	Little or no mention of research (formal or informal)	Reference to research, online resources or current good practice	In-depth consideration of research, online resources or current good practice
Adds Value	Repeating more-or-less what was discussed in lectures	Adding something new to the discussion	Brings new insight to the topic

A rubric for communicating criteria to students for a teamwork exercise:

	Beginner	Developing	Accomplished
Task: *Students will participate effectively in teams, committees, task forces, and in other group efforts to make decisions and seek consensus.*	Joins a group cooperatively. Acknowledge members of the group. Listens attentively to members of the group. Be prepared and reliable members of the group. Contribute to the end product of the group.	Give input and/or recommendations confidently. Complete assigned tasks in a timely fashion. Respect differing points of view. Agree on group priorities, goals and procedures. Help to build a consensus.	Take an active position in group by assigning tasks and/or speaking for the group. Take responsibility for end product that reflects the minority as well as the majority conclusions of the group. Encourage and acknowledge the work of other group members.

Source: http://www.palomar.edu/alp/benchmarks_for_core_skills.htm#com

Generic marking scheme for an essay:

	Knowledge & understanding	Analysis	Reading & referencing	Essay structure	Use of language
80-100% AA	As for A, plus demonstrates exceptional comprehension of topic	As for A, plus sophisticated analysis using ideas and principles beyond those introduced in the module	Essay fully supported by reference to relevant up to date material. Accurate use of Harvard referencing technique.	Clear structure which enriches the discussion and argument	Essay displays an excellent use of standard written English
70-79% A	Shows thorough knowledge and understanding of the topic, with evidence of reading beyond the key texts	Essay shows a resourceful and imaginative analysis using ideas and principles beyond those introduced in the module	Clear evidence of wide and relevant reading. Accurate use of Harvard referencing technique	Clear structure which enhances the discussion and argument	Essay displays an excellent use of standard written English
60-69% B	Shows evidence of relevant and sound knowledge and understanding of the topic	Shows evidence of analysis using ideas and principles introduced in the module	Essay well informed by reading which goes beyond key texts. Accurate use of Harvard referencing technique	Structure is clear and supports coherent discussion and argument	Essay displays a very good standard written English with all statements clearly expressed
50-59% C	Shows relevant knowledge of the topic	The essay is largely descriptive with some discussion using ideas and principles introduced in the module	Effective use of key reading. Accurate use of Harvard referencing system	Structure supports the discussion and argument	Essay displays a very standard written English with few, if any, grammatical or spelling errors. Written in an appropriately academic style.
40-49% D	Shows basic knowledge of the topic	The essay is limited to description and includes frequent unsupported facts and opinions	Appropriate use made of a limited range of reading. Largely accurate use of Harvard system	Evidence of structure relevant to the title	The work is written to an acceptable standard of English. There may be some grammatical errors and the work ma need more careful editing.
35-39% Fail	Signs of emerging knowledge of the topic but insufficient for progression to level 2	Essay is generally descriptive and uncritical. Some inaccuracy in the material	Some use of very limited reading, although fairly superficial. Inaccurate use of Harvard referencing system	Some structure although key issues may be omitted. Some repetition	More care needs to be taken with elements of grammar, spelling and sentence construction
Under 35% Fail	Shows inadequate knowledge of the topic to meet learning outcomes	Descriptive and uncritical. Some discussion irrelevant to the title	Poor use of reading. Poor or incorrect using of Harvard system	Little evidence of planning the essay	Poor standard of written English. Inappropriate register

Example from Bloxham & Boyd (2007). Developing Effective Assessment in Higher Education, p.91, Table 6.2

Rubric for an oral presentation: Content:

Indicators of Effective Content	Beginning	Developing	Competent	Accomplished
Introduction: gains attention, connects to topic, establishes credibility	No attention getting strategy was evident. No clear or relevant connection to topic or speech purpose. No credibility was established.	Use of attention getting strategy, but did not seem to adequately capture audience attention and/ or lead to desired outcome. Credibility was implied.	Effective strategy to capture listeners' attention. Adequate introduction of the topic. Credibility was established by the speaker.	Creative attention getting strategy captures listeners' attention to introduce the topic. It is relevant to the topic and clearly gains the desired response from the audience. Credibility was established by speaker.
Thesis - Statement: explicit, identifies topic, previews main points	No thesis statement. Main points are not clearly identified, audience unsure of the direction of the message.	Thesis is implied, although not explicitly stated. Topic is clearly identified, but main points are not clearly previewed.	Thesis statement identifies topic and lists/previews main points.	Speaker clearly stated a well formulated thesis statement during the speech introduction. Thesis statement identifies topic and lists/previews main points.
Connection to Audience: needs & interest, demonstrates understanding	Topic seems irrelevant to audience needs and interests. No attempt made to connect topic to audience.	Topic seems somewhat relevant to audience. Vague reference to audience needs and or interests. Identifies target audience.	Clearly stated the relevance of topic to audience needs and interests. Expresses an understanding of their target audience.	Connection of topic to audience needs and interests is stated with sophistication. Identifies and expresses a deep understanding of their target audience.
Subject - Knowledge: depth of content, relevant support, clear explanation	Provides irrelevant or no support. Explanation of concepts is inaccurate or incomplete.	Provides some support for main points, but needed to elaborate further with explanations, examples, descriptions, etc. Support is relevant, but not timely.	Main points adequately substantiated with timely, relevant and sufficient support. Accurate explanation of key concepts.	Depth of content reflects thorough understanding of topic. Main points well supported with timely, relevant and sufficient support. Provided precise explanation of key concepts.
Organization: main points distinct from support, transitions, coherence	Lack of structure. Ideas are not coherent. No transitions. Difficult to identify introduction, body, and conclusion.	General structure/organization seems adequate. Difference between main points and supporting details is blurred. Logical flow, but no clear signposts for transitions.	Clear organizational pattern. Main points are distinct from supporting details. Smooth transitions differentiate key points.	Effective organization well suited to purpose. Main points are clearly distinct from supporting details. Graceful transitions create coherent progress toward conclusion.

Example from the Valenica Community College: The Learning Evidence Team