



# EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

## Rubric Basics

### What are rubrics?

Rubrics are an assessment tool for communicating expectations of quality. They include the criteria that will be evaluated, describe various levels of quality, and are typically linked to learning targets. Rubrics are used to communicate about and assess complex products, performances, or process tasks. They provide a basis for self-assessment, reflection, peer assessment, and teacher assessment.

### What sets a rubric apart?

Rubrics are often confused with checklists, scoring guides, and criteria lists. Below are definitions that help clarify the differences between these tools.

#### Checklists

Checklists generally include only the factors that will be evaluated. For example, a checklist may indicate that a product needs to exhibit originality, neatness, use of multiple sources, use of vocabulary words, and an illustration. Another example is a statement like, “Your product needs to include a thesis and 3 supporting pieces of evidence, 5 paragraphs, a chart, and a graph.” A student could have checks in every box but still end up with a low-quality product because there is no description of quality.

#### Scoring Guides

Scoring guides include how each criterion is weighted – whether in points, percentages, or another approach. For example, a scoring guide based on percentages might indicate that Ideas are worth 50%, Organization, 30%, Word Choice, 20%.

#### Criteria Lists

Criteria lists include both the criteria and a descriptor of proficiency; in other words, the “accomplished” or “proficient” section of a rubric. Criteria lists describe what factors matter and what they look like when done with quality. They don’t spell out all the levels of quality; they just describes expected quality.

#### Rubrics

Rubrics include the criteria that will be evaluated and describe various levels of quality. The levels of quality are often labeled with the language of “beginning, developing, accomplished, exemplary” and associated with the numbers “1, 2, 3, 4”. Rubrics are typically more useful for students when assessing their own work, because they can match the work to the language of the rubric description and determine where their work falls in regard to each criterion. Rubrics give students language to describe the different levels of quality so they can better describe their work and take incremental steps toward achieving quality.

#### Common Features

Rubrics can be created in a variety of forms and levels of complexity; however, they all contain three common **features**:

1. They focus on measuring one or more stated **learning targets** (content, skills, character, and/or craftsmanship).
2. They use a **range** to rate performance.
3. They contain specific performance characteristics arranged in levels indicating the **degree** to which a learning target has been met. (Pickett and Dodge, 2001)

## Advantages of Rubrics

Rubrics offer several advantages. Most importantly, many experts believe that rubrics improve students' end products/performances and therefore increase learning. When students receive rubrics beforehand, they understand what they will be assessed on and what level of quality is expected, allowing them to prepare accordingly and take ownership over their own learning. Additional advantages include:

- Rubrics improve student performance by clearly showing the student how their work will be evaluated and what is expected.
- Rubrics help students become better judges of the quality of their own work.
- Rubrics allow assessment to be more objective and consistent.
- Rubrics force the teacher to clarify his/her criteria in specific terms.
- Rubrics reduce the amount of time teachers spend evaluating student work.
- Rubrics promote student awareness about the criteria to use in assessing peer performance.
- Rubrics provide useful feedback to the teacher regarding the effectiveness of the instruction.
- Rubrics provide students with more informative feedback about their strengths and areas in need of improvement.
- Rubrics accommodate heterogeneous classes by offering a range of quality levels.
- Rubrics are easy to use and easy to explain.

## Creating and Using Rubrics

Here is a suggested seven-step method for creating and using rubrics:

1. Invite students to **analyze models of work** that range from strong to weak.
2. **Identify criteria** to be used in the rubric, allowing for discussion of what matters most.
3. **Articulate gradations of quality.** These categories should concisely describe the levels of quality (ranging from novice to expert/ beginning to exemplary) based on the range of work samples. Using a conservative number of gradations keeps the rubric user-friendly while allowing for fluctuations that exist within an average range.
4. **Practice applying the rubric with models.** Students can test the rubrics on sample work provided by the teacher. This practice can build students' confidence by showing how the teacher would apply the rubric to their own work. It can also facilitate student/teacher agreement on the reliability of the rubric.
5. **Provide opportunities for self- and peer assessment** along the way.
6. **Revise the work** based on the feedback from self- assessment, peer assessment, and/or teacher assessment
7. **Use the rubric for summative assessment.** (Goodrich, 1996)

## References

Dodge, B. and Pickett, N. (2001, October 22). Rubrics for Web Lessons. Retrieved from <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest/rubrics/weblessons.htm>.

Goodrich, H. (1996). "Understanding Rubrics." *Educational Leadership*, 54 (4), 14-18.