The Advantages of Rubrics:
Part one in a five-part series

[What is a rubric?](#)

[Chocolate chip cookie rubric](#)
[Why use rubrics?](#)

What is a rubric?

- A rubric is a scoring guide that seeks to evaluate a student's performance based on the sum of a full range of criteria rather than a single numerical score.
- A rubric is an authentic assessment tool used to measure students' work.
  - Authentic assessment is used to evaluate students' work by measuring the product according to real-life criteria. The same criteria used to judge a published author would be used to evaluate students' writing.
  - Although the same criteria are considered, expectations vary according to one's level of expertise. The performance level of a novice is expected be lower than that of an expert and would be reflected in different standards. For example, in evaluating a story, a first-grade author may not be expected to write a coherent paragraph to earn a high evaluation. A tenth grader would need to write coherent paragraphs in order to earn high marks.
- A rubric is a working guide for students and teachers, usually handed out before the assignment begins in order to get students to think about the criteria on which their work will be judged.
- A rubric enhances the quality of direct instruction.

Rubrics can be created for any content area including math, science, history, writing, foreign languages, drama, art, music, and even cooking! Once developed, they can be modified easily for various grade levels. The following rubric was created by a group of postgraduate education students at the University of San Francisco, but could be developed easily by a group of

elementary students.

Why use rubrics?

Many experts believe that rubrics improve students' end products and therefore increase learning. When teachers evaluate papers or projects, they know implicitly what makes a good final product and why. When students receive rubrics beforehand, they understand how they will be evaluated and can prepare accordingly. Developing a grid and making it available as a tool for students' use will provide the scaffolding necessary to improve the quality of their work and increase their knowledge.

In brief:

- Prepare rubrics as guides students can use to build on current knowledge.
- Consider rubrics as part of your planning time, not as an additional time commitment to your preparation.

Once a rubric is created, it can be used for a variety of activities. Reviewing, reconceptualizing, and revisiting the same concepts from different angles improves understanding of the lesson for students. An established rubric can be used or slightly modified and applied to many activities. For example, the standards for excellence in a writing rubric remain constant throughout the school year; what *does* change is students' competence and your teaching strategy. Because the essentials remain constant, it is not necessary to create a completely new rubric for every activity.

There are many **advantages** to using rubrics:

- Teachers can increase the quality of their direct instruction by providing focus, emphasis, and attention to particular details as a model for students.
- Students have explicit guidelines regarding teacher expectations.
- Students can use rubrics as a tool to develop their abilities.
- Teachers can reuse rubrics for various activities.

Learning to create rubrics is like learning anything valuable. It takes an initial time investment. Once the task becomes second nature, it actually saves time while creating a higher quality student product. The following template will help you get started:

- Determine the concepts to be taught. What are the essential learning objectives?
- Choose the criteria to be evaluated. Name the evidence to be produced.
- Develop a grid. Plug in the concepts and criteria.
- Share the rubric with students before they begin writing.
- Evaluate the end product. Compare individual students' work with the rubric to determine whether they have mastered the content.

In the above example, the concepts include the plot, setting, and characters. The criteria are the who, what, where, when, and why parts of the story. The grid is the physical layout of the rubric. Sharing the rubric and going over it step-by-step is necessary so that students will understand the standards by which their work will be judged. The evaluation is the objective grade determined by the teacher.

The teacher determines the passing grade. For instance, if all three concepts were emphasized, a passing grade of 3 in all three concepts might be required. If any part of the story fell below a

score of 3, then that particular concept would need to be re-taught and rewritten with specific teacher feedback.

In another example, suppose a teacher emphasized only one concept, such as character development. A passing grade of "3" in character development may constitute a passing grade for the whole project. The purpose in writing all three parts of the story would be to gain writing experience and get feedback for future work.

Share the rubric with students prior to starting the project. It should be visible at all times on a bulletin board or distributed in a handout. Rubrics help focus teaching and learning time by directing attention to the key concepts and standards that students must meet.

Related Resources

Summary
Weighted rubrics are useful for explicitly describing to students and parents what concepts take priority over others for certain activities. In designing weighted rubrics, it is important not to lose sight of the purpose of an activity by getting bogged down in meaningless details, such as the number of adjectives and verbs used or the number of pages written.

The purpose of creative writing is to evoke a response from the reader. Using written words to elicit emotion effectively requires skill and understanding of the language. The concepts are the form by which good writing is judged. The important criteria become how the author uses language to achieve his or her goals.

teachervision.com

search

Go

Assessment

Print Page | Email Page

How to Weight Rubrics:

Part four in a five-part series>

What is a weighted rubric?

- A weighted rubric is an analytic rubric in which certain concepts are judged more heavily than others. If, in a creative writing assignment, a teacher stresses character development, he or she might consider weighing the characters part of the rubric more heavily than the plot or setting.
- Remember that the purpose of creative writing is to evoke emotion from the reader. The writing needs to be interesting, sad, exciting,

mysterious, or whatever the author decides. One way to develop the intended emotion is to focus on each concept separately within the context of creative writing.

Advantages

A weighted rubric **clearly communicates** to the students and their parents which parts of the project are more important to learn for a particular activity. Weights can be changed to stress different aspects of a project. One week a teacher may focus on character development. In the next week or two, plot may take precedence.

A weighted rubric **focuses** attention on specific aspects of a project. When learning something new, it is difficult to assimilate all of the necessary details into a coherent final product. Likewise, it is difficult to learn new things in isolation or out of context. A weighted rubric devised from quality projects will allow new learners to focus on what is being taught, while providing meaningful context to support the entire experience.

Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio approaches to assessing literacy have been described in a wide variety of publications (Flood & Lapp, 1989; Lamme & Hysmith, 1991; Matthews, 1990; Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991; Valencia, 1990; Wolf, 1989) so that many descriptions of portfolios exist. Generally speaking, a literacy portfolio is a systematic collection of a variety of teacher observations and student products, collected over time, that reflect a student's developmental status and progress made in literacy.

Instructional Outcomes

A portfolio is not a random collection of observations or student products; it is systematic in that the observations that are noted and the student products that are included relate to major instructional goals. For example, book logs that are kept by students over the year can serve as a reflection of the degree to which students are building positive attitudes and habits with respect to reading. A series of comprehension measures will reflect the extent to which a student can construct meaning from text. Developing positive attitudes and habits and increasing the ability to construct meaning are often seen as major goals for a reading program.

Multiple Products Collected over Time

Portfolios are multifaceted and begin to reflect the complex nature of reading and writing. Because they are collected over time, they can serve as a record of growth and progress. By asking students to construct meaning from books and other selections that are designed for use at various grade levels, a student's level of development can be assessed. Teachers are encouraged to set standards or expectations in order to then determine a student's developmental level in relation to those standards (Lamme & Hysmith, 1991).

Variety of Materials

Portfolios can consist of a wide variety of materials: teacher notes, teacher-completed checklists, student self- reflections, reading logs, sample journal pages, written summaries, audiotapes of retellings or oral readings, videotapes of group projects, and so forth (Valencia, 1990). All of these items are not used all of the time.

Student Involvement

An important dimension of portfolio assessment is that it should actively involve the students in the process of assessment (Tierney, Carter, & Desai, 1991).

Effective Means of Evaluating Reading and Writing

There are many ways in which portfolios have proven effective. They provide teachers with a wealth of information upon which to base instructional decisions and from which to evaluate student progress (Gomez, Grau, & Block, 1991). They are also an effective means of communicating students' developmental status and progress in reading and writing to parents (Flood & Lapp, 1989). Teachers can use their record of observations and the collection of student work to support the conclusions they draw when reporting to parents. Portfolios can also serve to motivate students and promote student self-assessment and self-understanding (Frazier & Paulson, 1992).

Linn, Baker, and Dunbar (1991) indicate that major dimensions of an expanded concept of validity are consequences, fairness, transfer and generalizability, cognitive complexity, content quality, content coverage, meaningfulness, and cost efficiency. Portfolios are an especially promising approach to addressing all of these criteria.

Brings Assessment in Line with Instruction

Portfolios are an effective way to bring assessment into harmony with instructional goals. Portfolios can be thought of as a form of "embedded assessment"; that is, the assessment tasks are a part of instruction. Teachers determine important instructional goals and how they might be achieved. Through observation during instruction and collecting some of the artifacts of instruction, assessment flows directly from the instruction (Shavelson, 1992).

Portfolios can contextualize and provide a basis for challenging formal test results based on testing that is not authentic or reliable. All too often students are judged on the basis of a single test score from a test of questionable worth (Darling-Hammong & Wise, 1985; Haney & Madaus, 1989). Student performance on such tests can show day-to-day variation. However, such scores diminish in importance when contrasted with the multiple measures of reading and writing that are part of a literacy portfolio.

Valid Measures of Literacy

Portfolios are extremely valid measures of literacy. A new and exciting approach to validity, known as consequential validity, maintains that a major determinant of the validity of an assessment measure is the consequence that the measure has upon the student, the instruction, and the curriculum (Linn, Baker, & Dunbar, 1991). There is evidence that portfolios inform students, as well as teachers and parents, and that the results can be used to improve instruction, another major dimension of good assessment (Gomez, Grau, & Block, 1991).