

Chapter 4 - Tools to Use in Assessment

I. Role of Rubrics in Alternative Assessment

What Is a Rubric?

“Rubrics are tools which list criteria for the desired outcomes. They are descriptions of performance expectations linked to a scale for evaluating the work” (Classroom Assessment: Linking Instruction and Assessment, p. 5). They provide a measure of quality on the basis of criteria and in doing so they remove the mystery of grading. The use of rubrics is central to alternative assessment and to performance assessment since it focuses on what the student knows and is able to do with the language within a real life context.

Rubrics are not assessments in themselves, they are tools in the same way as checklists or portfolios.

What Are the Purposes for Rubrics?

Some of the reasons for incorporating the use of rubrics for assessment purposes follow.

- o To clarify the performance expectations for students, teachers, districts, and parents.
- o To serve as reference for self, peer, and teacher assessment.
- o To promote and enhance self-assessment skills.
- o To focus instruction with curriculum and assessment.

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Which Activities Are Suited for Rubrics?

Many teachers are already familiar with writing samples, projects, exhibitions, interviews, storytelling, demonstrations, portfolio. These activities are ideally suited for the use of rubrics. The activities may remain the same, but the criteria used and shared with the students from the onset will greatly influence their quality.

Who Devises the Rubric?

Rubrics can be devised by teachers, teachers and students, or students alone. They are especially effective when students are allowed to take part in their development and/or when students are responsible for creating their own rubrics.

When assigning projects to students in groups of four, a Richmond County teacher asked each specific group to develop its own rubric for its project. The following chart was given to them to complete.

Students in the group decided on the criteria, they developed each criteria by defining the different performance levels and finally they agreed on the weighing of the criteria. When this was accomplished, they used the rubric to guide and monitor their progress as they worked on the project. Upon completion of the project, each group shared its own rubric with the rest of the class and presented the project to the rest of the class who rated the project according to the criteria listed on the group's rubric. Of course, this kind of activity only takes place after students have gained some familiarity with rubrics and have observed and participated in the rubric development process.

When Are the Rubrics Shared?

It is most useful to students if rubrics are shared with them at the onset of the assignment to ensure that they understand the expectations associated with a specific task. This allows students to monitor their own work in meeting the stated criteria. The use of rubrics places the responsibility on them.

What Are the Different Kinds of Rubrics?

Rubrics can be generic and address a special skill during the school year (e.g., a rubric for speaking or a rubric for productive skills), or they can be tailored to address specific assignments (a rubric for class participation or a rubric for a specific project).

There are three kinds of rubrics:

1. Holistic rubrics,
2. Analytic rubrics, and
3. Primary trait rubrics.

1. *Holistic Scoring:*

Holistic scoring is based on the assumption that the whole is better than the sum of its parts. Holistic scoring involves a general reading or listening for the purpose of attaining a global impression of an entire piece. This type of scoring uses a variety of criteria to produce a single score. One of the pitfalls to avoid is grading a whole passage according to one of its aspects only (e.g., spelling or grammar). Holistic scoring is quick and easy to use but provides little feedback to help students improve their performance. Following are several sample rubrics using holistic scoring.

Figure 8 - General Writing Rubric

GENERAL WRITING RUBRIC	
1.	Is generally incomprehensible. Gives incomplete, mostly inaccurate or irrelevant responses. Has very little grammatical control with serious errors in all structures. Employs very little vocabulary with formulaic language used inappropriately. Is mostly incoherent with no evidence of organization.
2.	Is somewhat comprehensible. Gives a somewhat accurate/relevant response to some parts. Has limited grammatical control with many errors in basic, high frequency structures. Employs limited vocabulary. Is partly coherent or often coherent with little evidence of organization.
3.	Is comprehensible. Gives a mostly accurate/relevant response to most parts. Has moderate grammatical control with few errors in basic, high frequency structures. Employs a vocabulary adequate for most topics with word choices and usage at times idiomatic. Is generally coherent and organized.

Source unknown

Skills **Figure 9 - Generic Rubric for Productive**

<p>3 o Exceeds Expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Message very effectively communicatedo Rich variety of vocabularyo Highly accurate, showing no significant patterns of erroro Content supports interest levelo Self-correction increases comprehensibility
<p>2 o Meets Expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Message generally comprehensibleo Vocabulary is appropriate, with some gropingo Accuracy appropriate to stage, although some patterns of error may interfere with comprehensiono Content is predictable, but adequateo Occasional self-correction may be successful
<p>1 o Does Not Meet Expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o Message communicated with difficulty and is unclearo Vocabulary often inappropriate, leading to miscommunicationo Significant patterns of erroro Content repetitiouso Self-correction is rare and usually unsuccessful
<p>0 o Unratable Sample</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o No consistent use of target languageo Off task

Source: Rubric for holistic scoring. Reprinted with permission from Articulation & Achievement Copyright @ 1996 by College Entrance Examination Board. All rights reserved.

Figure 10 - Sample Rubric for Oral Performance

<p>(0) No response. Task is not addressed. No information is communicated by the student or it is communicated in English. The message is incoherent and cannot be understood at all.</p>
<p>(1) Communicates very little relevant information. Statements are barely coherent. Shows no evidence of organization and employs minimal vocabulary to address the task. Very few statements are structurally correct. There are many unnatural pauses, with halting and fragmentary delivery throughout. Message is barely understood.</p>
<p>(2) Communicates some relevant information with some evidence of organization and structural accuracy. Employs limited vocabulary. The delivery is halting and fragmentary with some unnatural pauses. Some parts of the message can be understood.</p>
<p>(3) Most of the information communicated is relevant with most statements being generally coherent. The information displays some evidence of organization and is generally structurally correct. Employs adequate vocabulary to address the task. There are very few unnatural pauses and most of the message can be understood.</p>
<p>(4) All information communicated is relevant with all statements being coherent, organized and structurally correct. Employs a variety of vocabulary. There are no unnatural pauses. Speech is almost effortless and the entire message can be understood.</p>

Figure 11 - Short Story Rubric

Short Story Rubric	
4	Elements of the short story, including setting, characters, plot and theme are present and well developed. Use of sentence structure and punctuation is correct and consistent throughout. Focus on assigned topic is clear and well developed.
3	Elements of the short story, including setting, characters, plot and theme are present but one or two are not well developed. May have minor errors in sentence structure and punctuation. Focus on assigned topic is clear but development is incomplete.
2	Elements of the short story, including setting, characters, plot and theme are present but more than two are not well developed. There is a pattern of error in sentence structure and punctuation. Focus on assigned topic is clear but underdeveloped.
1	Elements of the short story, including setting, characters, plot, and theme are present but not well developed. Sentence structure and punctuation are unacceptable. Focus on assigned topic is unclear and underdeveloped.

Source: Putting it Together: Planning for Social Studies.
NC Department of Public Instruction.

2. Analytic Scoring:

This type of scoring separates the different components and scores them individually. For example, for a writing task, some of the components could include content, organization, mechanics, structures, richness of vocabulary, relevance to the task, etc., and each component can be awarded a different weight.

Analytic rubrics provide teachers with a larger sense of objectivity because it forces them to consider all the specified criteria listed on the rubric. However, analytic rubrics require more time to use and may lead the scorer to lose track of the big picture. Analytic rubrics are also useful for students who need more precise suggestions for improving their language. Because the categories are rated separately, students have a better understanding of their individual strengths and weaknesses.

Following are two sample analytic rubrics. The first one is a writing rubric developed by the Duplin county teachers to assess eighth graders studying Spanish and to assess native Spanish speakers who are enrolled in the same classes. The second one is a rubric used with college students.

Figure 12 - Sample Eighth Grade Assessment
Rubric. Duplin County (1996).

WRITING RUBRIC

Attention to the task

- 0 no relevant information communicated by student
- 1 very little relevant information communicated by student
- 2 some relevant information communicated by student
- 3 most relevant information communicated by student
- 4 all relevant information communicated by student

Grammar (Accuracy)

- 0 no statements were structurally correct
- 1 very few statements were structurally correct
- 2 some statements were structurally correct
- 3 most statements were structurally correct
- 4 all statements were structurally correct

Vocabulary

- 0 no words in Spanish
- 1 employed minimal vocabulary
- 2 employed limited vocabulary
- 3 employed adequate vocabulary
- 4 employed a variety of vocabulary

Cohesiveness of discourse

- 0 incoherent, no evidence of organization
- 1 barely coherent, no evidence of organization
- 2 partially coherent, some evidence of organization
- 3 generally coherent, some evidence of organization
- 4 always coherent and organized

Comprehensibility of Communication

- 0 could not understand anything student wrote
- 1 could barely understand what student wrote
- 2 could understand some sentences
- 3 could understand most of what student wrote
- 4 could understand everything student wrote

Total writing score (Add each circled number and divide by five):

Figure 13 - Evaluation Criteria for Beginning Language Courses at the College Level

1. Comprehensibility

Most is incomprehensible

1 2 3

Generally comprehensible but needs interpretation 4 5 6

Completely comprehensible

7 8 9

2. Cohesiveness

Composition is a series of separate sentences with no transitions

1 2

Composition is choppy or disjointed

3 4

Composition flows smoothly and has some style 5 6 7

3. Information Conveyed

Minimal information given

1 2

Info adequate for topic

3 4

Very complete info given

5 6 7

4. Vocabulary

Inadequate/repetitious/inaccurate

1 2

Adequate, but contains many errors

3 4

Quite broad in range, precise and expressive

5 6 7

Total:

Source: Evaluation of Foreign Language Learners' Writing Ability by David Paulson, Concordia College.

3. Primary Trait Scoring:

In primary trait scoring, a focus is placed on an identified feature. For example, students may be asked to demonstrate the ability to use a variety of words to describe, they may be asked to show mastery of subject-verb agreement, or they may be rated on their ability to organize their thoughts. With this kind of scoring, only the identified features are assessed. The other errors are ignored. The main advantage of primary trait scoring is that it focuses the students on one particular aspect of the oral or written task. However, this advantage can also be a disadvantage in that it ignores the other elements of speaking and writing that are important to the speaking and composing processes.

Figure 14 - Primary Trait Rubric

<i>Primary Trait: Persuading an audience</i>	
0	Fails to persuade the audience
1	Attempts to persuade but does not provide sufficient support.
2	Presents a somewhat persuasive argument but without consistent development and support.
3	Develops a persuasive argument that is well-developed and supported.

Source: Proficiency-Oriented Language Instruction and Assessment: A Curriculum Handbook for Teachers, 1998.

Creating a Rubric

The following steps provide guidelines in developing rubrics.

- ✓ Determine the criteria which are valued for the particular assignment.
- ✓ Determine how many levels of performance you wish to define and number them.
- ✓ Define each criteria according to the different levels of performance.

o Determine the criteria which are valued for the particular assignment.

At this stage, students can help determine essential criteria. Students who understand the expectations in advance can use the criteria for self-assessment. The criteria are usually the main characteristics which are valued for the specific assignment.

Some sample criteria for a skit presentation could be any of the following: quantity of language, completion of task, risk taking, variety in expression, appropriateness of expression, spelling, creativity, comprehensibility, pronunciation, amount of communication, organization, cultural appropriateness, vocabulary, effort, accuracy, personal improvement, presentation, props, completeness, neatness, appearance, information, visual aids, pace, materials, makes eye contact, asks questions, answers questions, group participation, readiness, or length.

We will select the following:

1. Vocabulary
2. Clarity of Ideas
3. Accuracy
4. Comprehensibility

- Determine how many levels of performance you wish to define and number them.
Are you going to work with a 3, 4, or 5 point rubric? Should you use 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 rather than number grades?

Teachers feel confident to identify an excellent paper, speech, or project and equally comfortable to select a poor paper, speech, or project. The difficulty lies with the paper, speech, or project in the middle. A three-point rubric does not take into account the fluctuation which exists within the average range. For this reason, it is more useful to break down the middle part in two categories and have a four-point rubric. Anything above four becomes too cumbersome to manage.

One of the advantages behind using 1, 2, 3, and 4 for the range rather than number grades is that it is easier to explain why something is a 1, 2, 3, or 4 rather than explaining why something is a 93 and something else is a 90.

Instead of the 1, 2, 3, 4 headings, some teachers prefer to use titles representative of the task and of the level of performance. For example one teacher participating in the project used the following headings in her rubric: 4 = Oscar; 3 = Golden Globe; 2 = Just Happy to Be Nominated; 1 = Still Auditioning.

- Define each criteria according to the different levels of performance.
At this stage, each criteria is expanded to address the spectrum of performance. Each level of performance is defined by a brief description of what students need to do to perform at that particular level. When possible choose verbs which demonstrate an active participation on the student's part and make sure that the criteria are defined clearly.

Once again, students can be involved to help define the different levels of performance.

Figure 15 - Sample Rubric

Criteria	1 (15 pts.)	2 (19 pts.)	3 (22 pts.)	4 (25 pts.)
Vocabulary	Little or none	Very limited	Adequate	Varied and precise
Clarity of Ideas	Meaning not clear	At times unclear	Meaning conveyed	Meaning conveyed effectively
Accuracy	Very limited control of grammar	Limited control of grammar	Few errors in basic structures	Good control of grammar
Comprehensibility	Very difficult to understand and follow	Can be understood with some effort from the reader or listener	Comprehensible but not always clearly stated	Clearly stated and comprehensible

Converting the Rubric to Grades - A Thorny Issue

Invariably students, parents, and teachers want to know how the rubric converts to grades. As stated in the above rubric, components are awarded a point system. Teachers can choose the value of each category. Each 4 can be worth 25 points for a total of 100, each 3 can be allotted 22 pts for a total

of 88, each 2 can be 19 pts for a total of 76 , all 1's are 15 points for a total of 60. A student's grade could vary if he/she got a 3 (22 pts.) on vocabulary, 4 (25 pts.) on meaning, 3 (22 pts.) on structure, and a 3 (22 pts.) on comprehensibility. The grade would then be 91.

22 for vocabulary
25 for clarity of ideas
22 for accuracy
22 for comprehensibility
91 Total

However, the same emphasis may not always be placed on each criteria, in this case, the criteria can be weighed. For example, comprehensibility may be valued above vocabulary. Therefore, comprehensibility would be awarded more points than the other criteria. The following is an example of the same rubric with weighed criteria.

Figure 16 - Sample Rubric with Weighed Criteria

Criteria	1	2	3	4
Vocabulary	Little or none (11 pts.)	Very limited (14 pts.)	Adequate (17 pts.)	Varied and precise (20 pts.)
Clarity of Ideas	Meaning not clear (16 pts.)	At times unclear (19 pts.)	Meaning conveyed (22 pts.)	Meaning conveyed effectively (25 pts.)
Accuracy	Very	Limited	Few errors	Good

	limited control of grammar (11 pts.)	control of grammar (14 pts.)	in basic structures (17 pts.)	control of grammar (20 pts.)
Comprehensibility	Very difficult to understand and follow (26 pts.)	Can be understood with some effort from the reader or listener (29 pts.)	Comprehensible but not always clearly stated (32 pts.)	Clearly stated and comprehensible (35 pts.)

Characteristics of Scoring Criteria

According to the Fairfax County Public Schools document, A.S.A.P Alternative Strategies for Assessing Performance, scoring criteria should:

- o define expectations for student performance;
- o give students and their parents clear feedback with respect to their progress in language proficiency;
- o adequately reflect the range of levels at which students may actually perform given tasks;
- o clearly describe the characteristics of each performance level;
- o include a scale to rate how well students perform;
- o provide teachers with well-defined standards for use in developing instructional activities which will allow students to attain set performance levels; and
- o help ensure that scoring and evaluation are accurate, unbiased, and consistent. Criteria should also be so clear that

several evaluators using them would all score a student's performance within the same range.

Figure 17 - Blank Rubric

Criteria	4	3	2	1