## Rubrics 101

Rubrics are usually discussed as an evaluation tool, and they will help you move from **unstated criteria** (“It feels like a B”) to more **explicit criteria** and from **norm-referenced** (grading on a curve) to **criterion-referenced** scoring (grading based on defined standards and characteristics) scoring. Clarifying standards and expectations will save you time during the grading (and complaining) process, but it is also an important way to enhance learning.

When a rubric is made part of the instructions for an assignment, it provides a guide to the student. A good rubric should show your students both your criteria and your standards, and putting them into a table ensures that you provide both. Note that with a detailed and specific rubric, the assignment is apparent almost without further instructions (see reverse)

Your criteria (the first column on the left) should indicate your priorities and weights. If a creative thesis is more important than a bibliography, then it should be worth more points. If you do not care about voice, eliminate it from the rubric. Across the top are the standards for each criterion: these can be A, B, C, D, and F, descriptive levels, or percentages. Start by writing standards for the highest level of performance, and keep them high: that gives students a target.

Rubrics are personal and they will get better as you use and adjust them, but they will immediately improve the quality of your instructions to students. Students often complain that it takes half the semester to discover what individual faculty want. One of the most common complaints is that a student will use the format, style, or type of writing they learned in an earlier class, and then get a poor grade on the first paper for doing what they thought was rewarded previously. A rubric can give students guidance for the first writing assignment, without having to wait for the grade.

Rubrics are also essential part of creating a progressive curriculum—i.e. one that focuses on development rather than simply content. Look, for example, at the AACU VALUE Rubrics:

<http://www.aacu.org/value/abouttherubrics.cfm>. A very good tool is iRubric (<http://www.rcampus.com/indexrubric.cfm>). You can probably create a rubric in your LMS, and maybe even use it for speedy online grading.

Example 7.1 College Writing Rubric

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Absent (0%) | Poor (40%) | Average (70%) | Good (90%) | Great (100%) |
| Thesis, Ideas and Analysis (20%) | There is no thesis or focus. | The thesis is split or unclear. The paper wanders off-topic | The essay is focused around a single thesis or idea | The thesis is interesting and there is at least one original perspective in one of the points | The thesis is original and there are compelling ideas throughout. |
| Evidence (30%) | There is almost no detailed evidence to support the thesis. | There is some evidence, but in key places evidence is vague or missing | There is supporting evidence for most of the claims but some evidence may be unrelated or vague. | There is supporting evidence for all claims, but it is not as strong or complete in some areas. | There is a variety of support for every claim and it is strong, concrete and appropriate. |
| Organization (20%) | There is little or no organization. | There is some organization, but the paper is “jumpy” without a clear introduction and conclusion and paragraphs are not focused or out of order | There is a clear introduction, body and conclusion, but some paragraphs may need to be focused and/or moved. | Each part of the paper is engaging, but better transitions, more/fewer paragraphs, stronger conclusion are needed. | Each paragraph is focused and in the proper order. Introduction and conclusion are complementary and there are excellent transitions. |
| Language Maturity (10%) | Frequent and serious grammatical mistakes make the meaning unclear. | Grammatical mistakes slightly interfere with the meaning of the paper | Writing is clear but sentence structures are simple or repetitive. There are repeated grammar errors. | The language is clear with complex sentence structure, but contains minor grammatical errors | Creative word choice and sentence structure enhance the meaning and focus of the paper. |
| Style/Voice (10%) | Writing is very general with no sense of either the writer or audience. | Writing is general with little sense of the audience or communication of the writer’s voice or passion. | Essay addresses the audience appropriately with some examples of creative expression. | The essay addresses the audience appropriately and is engaging with a strong sense of voice and | There is a keen sense of the intended audience, the author’s voice and the writing conveys passion. |
| Citations (10%) | Material is presented almost entirely without citations | Some citations but either incomplete or inappropriate | Good citations but not enough of them | All evidence is cited, but with minor format errors | All evidence is well cited in appropriate format |

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