

Teaching with Writing

Creating Grading Rubrics for Writing Assignments

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Establishing and discussing specific characteristics of success when an assignment is first distributed benefits both students and instructors. Creating grading rubrics, or grids, is a typical way to do this. Having received the criteria with an assignment, students are able to write toward specific goals. Later, when they look at their grades, they can see at a glance the strengths and weaknesses of their work. Instructors are able to grade according to customized descriptive criteria that reflect the intention of a specific assignment and won't change according to the hour of night or the amount of effort a particular student is suspected of expending. Rubrics can also save on grading time, as they allow instructors to detail comments on one or two elements and simply indicate ratings on others. Finally, grading rubrics are invaluable in courses that involve more than one instructor, as in team-taught or multi-sectioned courses, because they ensure that all instructors are measuring work by the same standards.

Step One: Identifying criteria

The first step involved in creating assignment-specific rubrics is revisiting an assignment's intended outcomes. These objectives can be considered, prioritized, and reworded to create a rubric's criteria. If, for example, an instructor assigns

a literature review hoping that students might become skilled at reducing complex texts down to pithy summaries, "concise summary" can be one of the grading criteria included in the rubric. □ □ Care must be taken to keep the list of criteria from becoming unwieldy; ten ranked items is usually the upper limit. In addition, to be usefully translated and used by students, criteria should be specific and descriptive. Criteria like "clear," "organized," and "interesting" don't mean much to students when they sit down to revise.

Step Two: Weighing criteria

When criteria have been identified, decisions are made about their varying importance. Say, for example, that an essay is assigned by a geography professor who intends for students to become skilled at creating concrete and accurate observation-based descriptions, practiced in analyzing their data and in devising a land-use proposal, and able to create correctly-formatted, error-free prose. When creating a grading rubric for that assignment, the instructor will need to decide on the relative weight of each criterion. Is the error-free prose objective equal to the analysis objective?

Step Three: Describing levels of success

When the criteria have been set, decisions must be made about an assessment scale. Many instructors like to limit this section of the rubric to a three-point scale ("weak," "satisfactory," "strong"). Others may prefer to break this down into five or six levels, adding categories like "needs extensive revision," or "outstanding."

Step Four: Creating and distributing the grid:

When the specific criteria and levels of success have been named and ranked, they can be sorted into a table (see

samples below) and distributed with the assignment. Note that spaces are created for comments on each item and again at the end. □□ **Sample #1**

	weak	satisfactory	strong
Insights and ideas that are germane to the assignment			
Address of target audience			
Choices and uses of evidence			
Logic of organization and use of prescribed formats			
Integration of source materials			
Grammar and mechanics			
Comments:			
Final Grade _____			

Sample #2

1=not present 2=needs extensive revision 3=satisfactory
4=strong 5=outstanding

Insights and ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Address of target audience	1	2	3	4	5

Organization and use of prescribed formats	1	2	3	4	5
Integration of source materials	1	2	3	4	5
Grammar and mechanics	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
Final Grade _____					