

Using Scoring Rubrics

Scoring rubrics are explicit schemes for classifying products or behaviors into categories that vary along a continuum. They can be used to classify virtually any product or behavior, such as essays, research reports, portfolios, works of art, recitals, oral presentations, performances, and group activities. Judgments can be self-assessments by students; or judgments can be made by others, such as faculty, other students, fieldwork supervisors, and external reviewers. Rubrics can be used to provide formative feedback to students, to grade students, and/or to assess programs.

There are two major types of scoring rubrics:

- Holistic scoring (one global, holistic score for a product or behavior).
- Primary trait analysis (separate, holistic scoring of specified characteristics of a product or behavior).

Rubrics have many strengths:

- Complex products or behaviors can be examined efficiently.
- Developing a rubric helps to precisely define faculty expectations.
- When using rubrics for grading, grades generally are criterion-referenced, rather than norm-referenced (based on how well criteria are satisfied, rather than how students perform relative to their peers). Faculty ask, “Did the student meet the criteria for level 5 of the scoring rubric?” rather than “How well did this student do compared to other students?” This is more compatible with cooperative and collaborative learning environments than competitive grading schemes.

Developing a Scoring Rubric

- Identify what you are assessing, e.g., critical thinking.
- Identify the characteristics of what you are assessing, e.g., appropriate use of evidence, recognition of logical fallacies.
- Describe the best work you could expect using these characteristics. This describes the top category.
- Describe the worst acceptable product using these characteristics. This describes the lowest acceptable category.
- Describe an unacceptable product. This describes the lowest category.
- Develop descriptions of intermediate-level products and assign them to intermediate categories. You might decide to develop a scale that runs from 1 to 5 (unacceptable, marginal, competent, very competent, outstanding), 1 to 3 (novice, competent, exemplary), or any other set that is meaningful.
- Ask colleagues who were not involved in the rubric’s development to apply it to some products or behaviors and revise as needed to eliminate ambiguities.

Primary Trait Analysis

Primary trait analysis is a process of scoring student products or behaviors by defining the primary traits that will be assessed and then developing a rubric for each trait. Primary traits are the major aspects that faculty consider when grading the product or behavior (e.g. organization, grammar, logical reasoning). When rubrics are used for program assessment, the primary traits generally are the learning objectives that are being assessed. Separate scores are given for each trait, and a summary score may be developed by combining them together. When assigning

grades, rubric categories can be equally weighted, or some may be worth more credit. For example, one trait may have categories worth 0, 2, and 3 points, and another may have categories worth 0, 5, and 10 points.

Suggestions for Using Scoring Rubrics for Grading and Program Assessment

1. Hand out the grading rubric with an assignment so students will know your expectations and how they'll be graded. This should help students master your learning objectives by guiding their work in appropriate directions.
2. Use a rubric for grading student work, including essay questions on exams, and return the rubric with the grading on it. Faculty save time writing extensive comments; they just circle or highlight relevant segments of the rubric. Each row in the rubric could have a different array of possible points, reflecting its relative importance for determining the overall grade. Points (or point ranges) possible for each cell in the rubric could be printed on the rubric, and a column for points for each row and comments section(s) could be added.
3. Develop a rubric with your students for an assignment or group project. Students can then monitor themselves and their peers using agreed-upon criteria that they helped develop. (Many faculty find that students will create higher standards for themselves than faculty would impose on them.)
4. Have students apply your rubric to some sample products (e.g., lab reports) before they create their own. Faculty report that students are quite accurate when doing this, and this process should help them evaluate their own products as they develop them.
5. Have students exchange paper drafts and give peer feedback using the rubric, then give students a few days before the final drafts are turned in to you. (You might also require that they turn in the draft and scored rubric with their final paper.)
6. Have students self-assess their products using the grading rubric and hand in the self-assessment with the product; then faculty and students can compare self- and faculty-generated evaluations.
7. Use the rubric for program assessment. Faculty can use it in classes and aggregate the data across sections, faculty can independently assess student products (e.g., portfolios) and then aggregate the data, or faculty can participate in group readings in which they review student products together and discuss what they found. Field work supervisors or community professionals also may be invited to assess student work using rubrics. A well-designed rubric should allow evaluators to efficiently focus on specific learning objectives while reviewing complex student products, such as theses, without getting bogged down in the details. Rubrics should be pilot tested, and evaluators should be “normed” before they apply the rubrics (i.e., they should agree on appropriate classifications for a set of student products that vary in quality). If two evaluators apply the rubric to each product, inter-rater reliability can be examined. Once the data are collected, faculty discuss results to identify program strengths and areas of concern, “closing the loop” by using the assessment data to make changes to improve student learning.
8. Faculty can get “double duty” out of their grading by using a common rubric that is used for grading and program assessment. Individual faculty may elect to use the common rubric in different ways, combining it with other grading components as they see fit.