

Developing Clear Criteria for the Evaluation of Student Learning:

Creating and Using Basic Rubrics

Strong and clear criteria serve to:

- Save time when grading
- Provide for consistent and fair evaluation
- Provide clear and precise explanations of expectations
- Foster student participation in and responsibility for their own learning
- Help students engage in peer review and evaluation of learning assignments
- Help instructors in sequenced courses communicate about standards, criteria and student performance
- Serve as a basis for departmental and institutional assessment efforts
(adapted from Walvoord, B and Anderson, J (1998). Effective Grading. Jones-Bassey: San Fransisco)

Common tools employed include*:

- Traditional Rubrics
- Primary Trait Analysis (essentially a rubric)
- Scoring Guide

Basic Elements of Rubrics/Primary Trait Analysis and Scoring Guides:

Part 1: The task or assignment description

This is a brief statement that describes the assignment or expectation. It may apply to a very specific assignment, a set of assignments or a behavioral expectation such as participation in discussion. Often this statement is pulled right from an instructor's syllabus.

Part 2: The scale

The scale provides the levels of performance for the task. Most often in *rubrics* the scale consists of three, four or five levels. Each level may be given a descriptive label and/or a point value. Commonly employed descriptive levels for scaling rubrics include:

Exemplary, Acceptable, Emerging

Sophisticated, competent, partly competent, not yet competent

Exemplary, proficient, marginal, unacceptable

Advanced, intermediate high, intermediate low, novice

Exemplary, Above Average, Acceptable, Below Average, Emerging

Level 5, Level 4, Level 3, Level 2, Level 1

Primary Trait Analysis is a form of a rubric that typically uses levels identified by number only (which may or may not reflect points earned).

A *Scoring Guide* typically only provides one scale that represents the highest level of performance, and includes space for individual comments.

Part 3: The dimensions or traits

This portion of the rubric, primary trait analysis or scoring guide lays out the parts of a task simply and clearly. These are the ‘things’ the students are expected to do, produce etc. as part of the task.

Part 4: The descriptions of each dimension for each level of the scale

This part of the rubric contains the specific explanations/descriptions for each level of performance on each of the dimensions or traits. Each description should explain the highest level of performance expected for the given level.

Part 1	Rubric Task Description: Each student will make a 5 minute presentation on the changes in one Portland community over the past thirty years....			
Part 2				
Part 3	Knowledge/Understanding 20%	Excellent The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail to support the student’s thesis. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.	Competent The presentation uses knowledge that is generally accurate with only minor inaccuracies and that is generally relevant to the student’s thesis. Research is adequate but does not go much beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned text.	Needs Work The presentation uses little relevant or accurate information, not even that which was presented in class or in the assigned texts. Little or no research is apparent.
Part 4		Thinking/Inquiry 30%	The presentation is centered around a thesis, which shows a highly developed awareness of historiographic or social issues and a high level of conceptual ability.	The presentation shows an analytical structure and central thesis, but the analysis is not always fully developed or linked to the thesis.

Steps for Constructing a Rubric

Step 1 – Choose an assignment or learning outcome you want to evaluate.

Step 2 – Reflect on the assignment or desired outcome to establish expectations. Create a list of all outcomes and expectations.

If using an assignment, make sure your outcomes for the assignment are clearly articulated.

Consider:

Why did you create the assignment or outcome?

Have you given this or a similar assignment before? What happened when you gave it before? Can you recall areas of confusion for students or poor or strong performance?

Or, Have you assessed this outcome before? What happened?

How does the assignment relate to the rest of what you are teaching? Are elements of the task critical to success in future assignments?

What skills need to be developed or applied in this assignment?

What exactly is the task? Is it one discrete task or a series of developmental tasks?

What are the highest expectations you have for student achievement on the task?

What is the worst execution of the assignment you could imagine from your students (short of non-completion)?

What are the critical pieces or components of the assignment?

Step 3 – Group and label the performance expectations you have identified for the assignment or outcome. These will likely become the dimensions of your rubric.

Dimensions	Criteria
Knowledge/Understanding	
Thinking/Inquiry	
Communication	
Use of Visual Aids	
Presentation Skills	


Step 4 – Construct a three to five level rubric.

- Identify how many levels you wish to use and label each level with a descriptive term (such as exemplary, acceptable, emerging etc)


Level	Excellent	Competent	Needs Work
Knowledge/Understanding			

Step 5 – Contextualize the rubric with descriptions of performance expectations for each dimension at each level.


- Describe the highest level of exemplary performance you could reasonably expect for each of the dimensions you’ve identified from above. Write the description in the highest scale box for each dimension.

	Excellent 
Knowledge/Understanding	The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail to support the student’s thesis. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.

- Move to the lowest scale box for each dimension and describe the lowest level of performance reasonably expected. This is often the antithesis of the step above.


	Excellent	Competent	Needs Work 
Knowledge/Understanding	The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail to support the student’s thesis. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.		The presentation uses little relevant or accurate information, not even that which was presented in class or in the assigned texts. Little or no research is apparent.
Thinking/Inquiry	The presentation is centered around a thesis, which shows a highly developed awareness of historiographic or social issues and a high level of conceptual ability.		The presentation shows no analytical structure and no central thesis.

- Finish the mid-section(s) of the rubric by describing the mid-level performance relative to the highest and lowest level descriptions already established.

	Excellent	Competent 	Needs Work
Knowledge/Understanding 20%	The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail to support the student's thesis. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.	The presentation uses knowledge that is generally accurate with only minor inaccuracies and that is generally relevant to the student's thesis. Research is adequate but does not go much beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned text.	The presentation uses little relevant or accurate information, not even that which was presented in class or in the assigned texts. Little or no research is apparent.

Step 4 – Try the rubric on a few sample assignments and refine it as necessary. Add in weighted scores for each dimension if desired.

Knowledge/Understanding 20% (or point value)
Thinking/Inquiry 30%
Communication 20%
Use of Visual Aids 20%
Presentation Skills 10%



Example of a 3 Level Rubric

Task Description: Each student will make a 5 minute presentation on the changes in one Portland community over the past thirty years. The student may focus the presentation any way he/she wishes, but there needs to be a thesis of some sort, not just a chronological exposition. The presentation should include appropriate photographs, maps, graphs, and other visual aids for the audience.

	Excellent	Competent	Needs Work
Knowledge/Understanding 20%	The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail to support the student's thesis. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.	The presentation uses knowledge that is generally accurate with only minor inaccuracies and that is generally relevant to the student's thesis. Research is adequate but does not go much beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned text.	The presentation uses little relevant or accurate information, not even that which was presented in class or in the assigned texts. Little or no research is apparent.
Thinking/Inquiry 30%	The presentation is centered around a thesis, which shows a highly developed awareness of historiographic or social issues and a high level of conceptual ability.	The presentation shows an analytical structure and central thesis, but the analysis is not always fully developed or linked to the thesis.	The presentation shows no analytical structure and no central thesis.
Communication 20%	The presentation is imaginative and effective in conveying ideas to the audience. The presenter responds effectively to audience reactions and questions.	Presentation techniques used are effective in conveying main ideas, but they are a bit unimaginative. Some questions from the audience remain unanswered.	The presentation fails to capture the interest of the audience and/or is confusing in what is to be communicated.
Use of Visual Aids 20%	The presentation includes appropriate and easily understood visual aids, which the presenter refers to and explains at appropriate moments in the presentation.	The presentation includes appropriate visual aids, but these are too few, are in a format that makes them difficult to use or understand, or the presenter does not refer to or explain them in the presentation.	The presentation includes no visual aids or includes visual aids that are inappropriate or too small or messy to be understood. The presenter makes no mention of them in the presentation.
Presentation Skills 10%	The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard, using eye contact, a lively tone, gestures, and body language to engage the audience.	The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard but tends to drone or fails to use eye contact, gestures, and body language consistently or effectively at times.	The presenter cannot be heard or speaks so unclearly that she or he cannot be understood. There is no attempt to engage the audience through eye contact, gestures, or body language.

from Portland State University as cited in Stevens, D. & Levi, A. (2005) Introduction to Rubrics. p13. Stylus: Sterling Virginia.

Example of a Scoring Guide

Task Description: Each student will make a 5 minute presentation on the changes in one Portland community over the past thirty years. The student may focus the presentation any way he/she wishes, but there needs to be a thesis of some sort, not just a chronological exposition. The presentation should include appropriate photographs, maps, graphs, and other visual aids for the audience.

	Criteria	Comments	Points
Knowledge/Understanding 20%	The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail to support the student's thesis. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.		
Thinking/Inquiry 30%	The presentation is centered around a thesis, which shows a highly developed awareness of historiographic or social issues and a high level of conceptual ability.		
Communication 20%	The presentation is imaginative and effective in conveying ideas to the audience. The presenter responds effectively to audience reactions and questions.		
Use of Visual Aids 20%	The presentation includes appropriate and easily understood visual aids, which the presenter refers to and explains at appropriate moments in the presentation.		
Presentation Skills 10%	The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard, using eye contact, a lively tone, gestures, and body language to engage the audience.		

from Portland State University as cited in Stevens, D. & Levi, A. (2005) Introduction to Rubrics. p12. Stylus: Sterling Virginia.

Primary Trait Analysis (partial example)

Task Description: Each student will make a 5 minute presentation on the changes in one Portland community over the past thirty years. The student may focus the presentation any way he/she wishes, but there needs to be a thesis of some sort, not just a chronological exposition. The presentation should include appropriate photographs, maps, graphs, and other visual aids for the audience.

Trait: Knowledge/Understanding

Level 3 - The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail to support the student's thesis. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.

Level 2 - The presentation uses knowledge that is generally accurate with only minor inaccuracies and that is generally relevant to the student's thesis. Research is adequate but does not go much beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned text.

Level 1 - The presentation uses little relevant or accurate information, not even that which was presented in class or in the assigned texts. Little or no research is apparent.

Trait: Thinking/Inquiry

Level 1 - The presentation is centered around a thesis, which shows a highly developed awareness of historiographic or social issues and a high level of conceptual ability.

Level 2 - The presentation shows an analytical structure and central thesis, but the analysis is not always fully developed or linked to the thesis.

Level 3 - The presentation shows no analytical structure and no central thesis.

Trait: Communication

Level 1 - The presentation is imaginative and effective in conveying ideas to the audience. The presenter responds effectively to audience reactions and questions.

Level 2 - Presentation techniques used are effective in conveying main ideas, but they are a bit unimaginative. Some questions from the audience remain unanswered.

Level 3 - The presentation fails to capture the interest of the audience and/or is confusing in what is to be communicated.

Example of a 3 Level Rubric with Mark-ups

Task Description: Each student will make a 5 minute presentation on the changes in one Portland community over the past thirty years. The student may focus the presentation any way he/she wishes, but there needs to be a thesis of some sort, not just a chronological exposition. The presentation should include appropriate photographs, maps, graphs, and other visual aids for the audience.

	Excellent	Competent	Needs Work
Knowledge/Understanding 20% 18	<p>The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail to support the student's thesis.</p> <p>Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.</p>	<p>The presentation uses knowledge that is generally accurate with <u>only minor inaccuracies</u> and that is generally relevant to the student's thesis.</p> <p>Research is adequate but does not go much beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned text.</p>	<p>The presentation uses little relevant or accurate information, not even that which was presented in class or in the assigned texts.</p> <p>Little or no research is apparent.</p>
Thinking/Inquiry 30% 20	<p>The presentation is centered around a thesis, which shows a highly developed awareness of historiographic or social issues and a high level of conceptual ability.</p>	<p>The presentation shows an analytical structure and central thesis, but the analysis is not always fully developed or linked to the thesis.</p>	<p>The presentation shows no analytical structure and no central thesis.</p>
Communication 20% 18	<p>The presentation is imaginative and effective in conveying ideas to the audience.</p> <p>The presenter <u>responds effectively</u> to audience reactions and questions.</p>	<p>Presentation techniques used are effective in conveying main ideas, but they are <u>a bit unimaginative</u>.</p> <p>Some questions from the audience remain unanswered.</p>	<p>The presentation fails to capture the interest of the audience and/or is confusing in what is to be communicated.</p>
Use of Visual Aids 20% 12	<p>The presentation includes appropriate and easily understood visual aids, which the presenter refers to and explains at appropriate moments in the presentation.</p>	<p>The presentation includes appropriate visual aids, but these are too few, are in a format that makes them difficult to use or understand, or the presenter does not refer to or explain them in the presentation.</p>	<p>The presentation includes no visual aids or <u>includes visual aids that are inappropriate</u> or too small or messy to be understood.</p> <p>The presenter makes no mention of them in the presentation.</p>
Presentation Skills 10% 10	<p>The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard, using eye contact, a lively tone, gestures, and body language to engage the audience.</p>	<p>The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard but tends to drone or fails to use eye contact, gestures, and body language consistently or effectively at times.</p>	<p>The presenter cannot be heard or speaks so unclearly that she or he cannot be understood.</p> <p>There is no attempt to engage the audience through eye contact, gestures, or body language.</p>

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