How to Create a Rubric

- An important key to assessment based on classroom work is making criteria very clear and explicit in writing.

- A rubric articulates in writing the criteria and standards that an instructor uses to evaluate student work. It translates informed professional judgment into ratings on a scale; these ratings can be numerical or qualitative. Something is always lost in the translation, but the advantage is that these ratings can now be communicated and compared while also compelling instructors to carefully consider what makes an “A” paper different from a “B” paper, etc.

- Designing a rubric at the beginning of a semester forces instructors to redesign assignments in order to help students accomplish goals outlined in their syllabi.

As Barbara Walvoord says, constructing a rubric may seem difficult at first, but it gets easier as you gain practice. Here are six steps to construct a rubric:

1. Choose a test or assignment that tests what you want to evaluate. Make clear your objectives for the assignment.

2. Collect any grading criteria you have handed out to students in the past as well as sample student papers with your comments, if you have them. These will be useful in the steps that follow.

3. Identify the “traits” that will count in the evaluation. These are nouns or noun phrases without any implication of judgment: for example, “thesis,” “eye contact with client,” “costume design,” or “control of variables.”

4. For each trait, construct a scale describing each level of student performance from the least skillful to the most skillful. You may use three levels for basic distinctions between poor, competent, and excellent, or use four or five levels for finer distinctions, depending on what you need. The scales use descriptive statements. For example, a thesis that receives a score of “5” is limited enough for the writer to support within the scope of the essay and is clear to the reader; it intelligently enters the dialogue of the discipline as reflected in the students’ sources, and it does so at a level that shows synthesis and original thought; it neither exactly repeats any of the student’s sources nor states the obvious.

5. Try out the scale with actual student work. Revise the scale as needed.

6. Have a colleague in your discipline use your scale to evaluate actual student work. Revise the scale as needed.

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