



Tool #11: Developing a Rubric

A rubric is basically a list of characteristics, knowledge, and/or competencies used to assess the quality of a learning product or performance. Four to six discrete listings are developed to describe the extent to which the learning outcomes have been achieved. The listings are classified with titles ranging from “below standard” to “exemplary,” or “novice” to “expert,” or some other type of categorization that describes the student’s level of performance.

In fact, the classification titles used in this form of assessment are the basis for its name. “Rubric” is a letter or title that is written in red (ruby) to distinguish it from the rest of the text. The “red” titles provide students with important feedback on their achievement and growth; and the list of characteristics below each title tell students what they must know and be able to do to move to the next performance level.

Just as standards shift the focus on instruction from inputs to outputs, rubrics shift the focus on assessment from teaching to learning. Rubrics are tied directly to desired outcomes, allowing students to take more responsibility for their own learning. Rubrics not only help to define what grades of A, B, and C represent in “school life,” they also help young adolescents transition into the authentic forms of assessment they will experience in “real life.”

There is compelling evidence that rubrics have always existed in teachers’ heads. Remember the disappointing grade you received on a paper with teacher comments like “could have expanded on this concept” written in red in the margin? Hardly enough to help you progress on the next assignment. However, this example cannot be used without reminding the reader that this very same teacher was up until midnight four nights in a row reading and grading 149 papers besides yours!

Developing good rubrics and providing them to students gives students both control over and responsibility for their own learning. However, the student must also be provided with work or product samples that exemplify what “proficient” looks like. Ideally, students receive examples that represent the different levels of proficiency described in the rubric. Rubrics can be developed, borrowed, and/or written with the involvement of students. The purpose of this tool is to guide teachers through the steps of a developing a scoring rubric.

Step 1: Determine What The Assessment Will Encompass

A product or performance could generate a scoring rubric that could fill the largest wall in your school. To illustrate this point, think back on your teacher preparation courses and remember all the educational objectives associated with thinking (cognitive domain), feeling (affective domain), and doing (psychomotor skills).

Bound your mission! Work with other teachers in your coursework area to review the standard(s) students must master during this unit of instruction. The **nouns** used in the standards describe the **content** that must be mastered and the **verbs** describe the **level of mastery** required. Review the ESLRs you have agreed to address during the unit and include them in the selection of dimensions you will assess. Finally, look at the product/performance



and decide if skills directly associated with the assessment should be assessed. For example, should only the quality of the content be assessed during the student performance, or will organization, delivery, and language also be assessed?

Facilitate a group brainstorming session to identify specifically what will be assessed. Begin with an analysis of the standard to be met.

Example

The assessment is:

A presentation to representatives from the organizations that provided students with sample workplace documents. The purpose of the presentation is to provide the representatives with examples of how their own, as well as other organizations, use document features help them communicate expectations.

The Expected Schoolwide Learning Result is:

Students will be thoughtful and responsible risk-takers.

- Presenting an analysis of an organization's work to local representatives takes thoughtful and responsible work and a certain amount of risk taking on the part of the student.

The presentation format and demonstration of the ESLR require that the performance be assessed. Presentation dimensions might include:

- Organization
- Delivery
- Language

The standards being assessed is:

Analyze the structure and format of functional workplace documents, including the graphics and header, and explain how the authors use the features to achieve their purpose.

The nouns and verbs explicitly state what performance is expected and at what level:

- Analyze structure and format
- Explain how features are used to achieve purpose

Implied in the standard is that the student understands the purpose of the document. So the assessment must also determine if the student can:

- Explain the purpose of the document

The list of dimensions that result from this analysis would be:

- Organization
- Delivery
- Language
- Analysis of structure
- Analysis of format
- Explanation of features
- Explanation of purpose
- Explanation of how features achieve purpose



Step 2: Review Previous Student Work And/Or Other Rubrics To Identify Any Additional Assessment Criteria

Professional reflection is strengthened further when actual work samples and rubrics for similar assignments are examined. In the case of a written performance assessment, it may be helpful to sort examples of previously completed student work into three or more piles from “below standard” to “exemplary.” Articulate what factors differentiate the work and add them to the list of dimensions.

For example, the following dimensions might be expanded to include:

- Explanation of purposes
 - ✓ Persuade
 - ✓ Inform
 - ✓ Guide
 - ✓ Explain
- Explanation of features
 - ✓ Focus
 - ✓ Integration
 - ✓ Organization

Step 3: Define Each Dimension

Define the nouns and verbs. For example, explain what is meant by “analyze.” Describe the components of a “structure.”

- Analyze
 - ✓ The ability to separate material into its component parts for the purpose of understanding how it is organized. The ability to distinguish between structure and format, outline the document, and categorize the various components of the structure.
- Structure
 - ✓ How something is put together
 - ✓ The arrangement and organization of the document

Step 4: Adopt A Scale For Describing The Range Of Products/Performance And Write A Description For Each Dimension For Each Point On The Scale

Four to six points of differentiation are commonly used on a rating scale. You may choose to use the same five-point rating scale used on the California Standards Test: advanced, proficient, basic, below basic, and far below basic.

Once the rating scale is agreed upon, write a description for each dimension for each point on the scale. Some sample terms that help to describe the levels of accomplishment follow in Table 1.



Table 1
Sample Terms that Describe Levels of Performance

Sample Terms that Describe Lower Levels of Performance	Sample Terms That Describe Higher Levels of Performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No evidence • No effort • Minimal response • No participation • Resistant • Inadequate • Severe misconceptions • Inconsistent • Infrequently • Seldom • Neutral • No Evidence • Incomplete • Lacks • Adequate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete • Accurate • Commendable • Some Consistency • Occasionally • Positively responds • Generally works toward • Exemplary • Consistently • Thorough Understanding • Frequently • Always

- A. Begin by defining the highest point on your rating scale for each of the dimensions. The highest point is sometimes referred to as an “advanced” or “exemplary” rating. Develop a short statement of what the best possible performance or product looks like. For example, *exemplary* on the “analyze structure” dimension might read:

Questions or criterion have been formulated to help identify the document structure. The questions/criterion show that a review of appropriate outside resources was used to help identify the core elements of document structure. A clear outline of the document’s structure and the components are categorized in language common to the field of graphic layout and design. The explanation includes a discussion of the differences between the structure and the format and how structure can influence the effectiveness of the format.

- B. Next, define the lowest point on your rating scale for each of the dimensions. For example, *far below-basic performance* on the dimension of “analyze structure” might read:

No basis is provided to support the reported structural elements of the document. The outline is incomplete and/or incorrect and the categories are vague and/or incorrect. Elements of structure and format are interwoven and demonstrate a lack of understanding of the difference between the two.

- C. Finally, define the mid-point of the rating scale for each of the dimensions. The *basic level of performance* on the dimension of “analyze structure” might read:



A criterion has been developed to help separate the material and develop an outline, but the basis for the criteria is not readily apparent. The outline of the document structure is clear, but is not categorized in language common to the field of graphic layout and design. The explanation includes a discussion of the difference between structure and format, but does explain how structure can influence format.

Step 5: Develop A Draft Rubric

Combine the verbiage developed for each of the dimensions into a single document. There are a couple of formats that can help with this. You can use “bullet points” or a “table.” For example, a bullet point layout would list descriptors of what is required for each level of performance. A bullet point layout is preferred when there are a large number of dimensions being assessed and/or the descriptions of the dimensions are long. In a bullet point layout, begin with the highest level of performance. A table layout uses a table to describe the assessment ratings and criteria. A landscape layout can be used when the dimensions being assessed are few and/or the descriptions are short. Samples are provided below.

Bullet Point Layout

Level 5 – Advanced

- **Questions or criterion based on outside resources have been formulated** to help identify the document’s structure.
- **A clear outline** of the structural components has been developed.
- The structural components are **categorized in language common to the field** of graphic layout and design.
- **The differences between the structure and the format and how structure can influence the effectiveness of the format** are included in the explanation.

Continue this format with levels 4-1.

Table Layout

Level 1 Far Below Basic	Level 3 Basic	Level 5 Advanced
A criterion has been developed to help separate the material and develop an outline, but the basis for the criteria is not readily apparent. The outline of the document structure is clear, but is not categorized in language common to the field of graphic layout and design. The explanation includes a discussion of the difference between structure and format, but does explain how structure can influence format.	No basis is provided to support the reported structural elements of the document. The outline is incomplete and/or incorrect and the categories are vague and/or incorrect. Elements of structure and format are interwoven and demonstrate a lack of understanding of the difference between the two.	Questions or criterion have been formulated to help identify the document structure. They show that a review of appropriate outside resources was used to help identify the core elements of document structure. A clear outline of the document’s structure and the components are categorized in language common to the field of graphic layout and design. The explanation includes a discussion of the differences



		between the structure and the format and how structure can influence the effectiveness of the format.
--	--	---

Step 6: Evaluate The Rubric

Both an informal and a formal method can be used to evaluate the rubric. The informal method is a reflective exercise and the formal method is a test for Interrater reliability.

Reflective Evaluation (Informal)

Answer the following questions:

1. Does the rubric measure all of the required and desired outcomes?
2. Does the rubric go beyond the required and desired outcomes and hold students accountable for material that is not being taught?
3. Does the rubric cover all of the important dimensions of student performance?
4. What evidence do you have that the selected criteria reflect current conceptions of “excellence” in the field?
5. Is the rating scale clear and the categories well defined?
6. Are the rating criteria clear enough to easily explain the basis for different scores at each scale point?
7. Are there enough categories to measure all of the differences in student performance?
8. Can both students and parents understand the rubric?
9. Is the rubric available in the native language of the students and parents?
10. Is the rubric fair and free from bias?
11. Is the rubric manageable and practical?

Test for Interrater Reliability (Formal)

A test for interrater reliability answers the question #8, above (Can the rubric be applied consistently by different scorers and by scorers external to the school system?). Following are the simple steps to following in testing the rubric for interrater reliability.

1. The teachers on the rubric development team identify individuals outside of the team to act as independent assessors. Identify at least one assessor for each level of performance category listed on the rubric.
2. Each teacher on the rubric development team is assigned a “role” at one of the levels of the completed rubric. Each teacher performs, writes a paper, develops a model, etc. at one of the rubric’s performance levels. Assessors use the rubric to rate all of the teacher performances, papers, etc.
3. Assessor’s scores are compared to the actual role level.
4. Interrater reliability is established if at least 80% of the ratings match the teachers’ assigned roles **and** fewer than 20% are more than one point or more discrepant.

If the 80%/20% standard is not reached, the team may want to use the assessor feedback to edit the rubric.



Step 7: Pilot Test, Revise, And Try The Rubric Again

If the rubric has been developed to score written work, it may be possible to find previous assignments to determine if the rubric is practical for use and if everyone agrees on the scores that would be assigned to existing pieces of student work.

Performances may not provide the same opportunity for pre-work. However, if the unit has value, it is likely that the assessment will be repeated during the next semester or the next year. Don't pass up the opportunity to revise the rubric and strengthen it following each assessment.

Step 8: Share The Rubric With Students And Their Parents

The research is replete with examples of how clear expectations help students perform better. Training students to use the rubric to score their own work helps them become independent learners. Finally, sharing the rubric with parents helps them understand expectations and how they can support student learning.

