Rubrics

When one hears the word, "rubric," one normally has one of two reactions.

If the listener is a student, the normal reaction is one of relief. The grading for the assignment, and the expectations, are transparent. The student normally knows what is expected of him or her, and how he or she will be graded. The student also knows how to plan for the assignment, both in required depth, breadth, and time resources.

If the listener is an instructor, there are two normal reactions:

One is disdain. Some instructors hate rubrics, because they feel hemmed in by them, trapped into grading in a certain way, and that students will not engage in the full experience of the assignment by being allowed to "work to the rubric" and do the minimum required for the grade they want.

The other is, again, relief. Some instructors love rubrics, because they give those instructors a way to grade fairly, and to give feedback easily and consistently to students. They also like the fact that rubrics will sometimes point out problem areas - - if most students are low in a particular criterion, it will often show up when employing and analyzing the results of grading by rubrics.

No matter which camp you are in, a rubric is a tool that is available to any and all instructors who desire to use it. BlueLine2 uses rubrics heavily for grading as well as assessing student achievement.

Since rubrics are measurement and communication tools, they serve two primary purposes:

● They help the instructor measure student achievement, and
● They help the instructor communicate (give feedback) to the student.

For this to happen, the rubric needs to be designed carefully, so that it effectively measures each student's achievement, and communicates the appropriate messages to the student.

Designing a Rubric

Every rubric begins where every course begins -- with the student learning objectives. If an instructor does not know what students should learn in the course, how can he or she assess them properly? How can the instructor give proper feedback?

If you do not have student learning objectives already developed for your course, you are encouraged to develop them as soon as possible. Information to assist you is available on the Virtual Center for Teaching Excellence website. You may also contact the Office of Academic Excellence and Assessment.

Assuming that you do have student learning objectives defined for your course, the
first step to developing a rubric is to determine what you would like to measure (your performance indicators). For example, in the fields of Journalism, Media, and Computing, meeting deadlines is important. It’s a sign of professionalism. If the program has a stated objective that “students shall exhibit behaviors conducive to effective professionalism in their chosen fields,” or something of that nature, then a course-level student learning objective may be something like “all assignments are submitted on time,” since meeting deadlines is a behavior associated with positive professionalism.

When developing a rubric for a specific assignment, one row on the rubric may be, in turn, “Assignment submitted by deadline.” This is indeed a measurable objective: the assignment is either submitted on time, or it’s not. This indicates that there are two possible ratings for this criterion: “Met deadline” or “Did not meet deadline.” A point value of 1 and 0 may also be associated with the ratings, especially if the rubric is used for grading as well as assessing.

That’s all there is to it! A rubric is simply a collection of these measurable performance indicators that are associated with student learning objectives. There are a multitude of rubrics available for your immediate use, or to inspire you when developing your own. These are available within the University (see links below) and also on the World-Wide Web. Simply go to your favorite search engine (like Google, Bing, etc.) and search for “higher education” rubrics examples. New examples are posted every day! For more information, please check out the resources below.

LINKS:
Grading and Performance Rubrics – Carnegie Mellon
How and Why to use rubrics – Cornell University
Rubric Resource – DePaul University
Examples and How-to’s for Authentic Assessments and Rubrics – University of Central Florida/Orlando
Rubric Development -University of West Florida
Grading Rubrics – University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill

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REFERENCES:
Association of American Colleges and Universities, Value Rubrics (download site)
Creighton University, Office of Academic Excellence and Assessment (your first stop to get help with anything having to do with improving your course, your teaching, and your assessment)
Creighton University, University-Level Outcomes
Creighton University, Classroom Assessment Techniques (adapted from Angelo and Cross, 1993)
Mueller, Jon, *Authentic Assessment Toolbox* (a great place to start with assessment and to gain a fresh perspective)