

# Writing Matters

Writing Across the Curriculum  
Southwestern Community College

Volume IV  
Number 7

Faculty Roundtable

## Sharing Our Best Practices

How Writing Works in Your Classroom



We all know that assigning writing in our classes is a tricky business. How can we better support our students to be successful on the writing they do for us?

Please plan to join your colleagues for a collaborative professional development opportunity. If you have a writing assignment that works well in your classroom, come share that with fellow instructors. If you are curious about integrating writing into your instruction, but you aren't sure how to do so, come listen to how your colleagues use writing.

This is a unique opportunity to share, discuss, and learn from one another in order to support student learning to the best of our abilities.

Thursday, November 29, 2012 • 2 p.m. • Burrell Building, Rm 202

## WAC Website and Style Guide

Be sure to check out the updates to the WAC website! The SCC Style Guide that was previously printed in a hard copy format can now be found online at <http://www.southwesterncc.edu/wac/style-guide>

The style guide is constantly being updated and tailored to meet our students' needs. Let the WAC Coordinator know if there's something specific you'd like to see on the site.

Please share these valuable resources with your students—even your online students!

## Rubrics—Grading Writing Just Got Easier

The literal definition of the word “rubric” is derived from its Latin root meaning “red.” Laws, important directions, and even instructions in the church’s liturgy were traditionally written in red.

In today’s world of education, a rubric is a structured, codified representation of the requirements of an assignment. It is a way of

conveying to students what is expected of them. It’s not surprising, then, that teachers like rubrics as much as they like red ink.

In *Introduction to Rubrics*, Dannelle D. Stevens and Antonia J. Levi state, “At its most basic, a rubric is a scoring tool that lays out the specific expectations for an assignment” (3). However, rubrics aren’t

designed simply for the students; teachers benefit from them as well.

### Why Use Rubrics?

For the teacher, rubrics can be a fantastic time-saver. We all know that we find ourselves writing the same feedback again and again on student papers. You can incorporate those comments into a rubric, then simply circle

whatever applies to the essay you are grading (see example on pg. 2).

Furthermore, rubrics give you an opportunity to assess what it is that you truly want in a particular assignment. Because you will be writing down your specific expectations, it gives you a chance to reflect on what the “ideal” piece of student writing would look like.

*(continued on page 2)*

High achievement always takes place in the framework of high expectation.

—Charles F. Kettering

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## Rubrics (cont'd)

For students, rubrics let them know the standards that will be applied to the writing they produce. They are more likely to turn in the kind of writing you were wanting to see in the first place than they would without a rubric. The rubric, in effect, sets them up for success.

### How to Create a Rubric?

Most rubrics are created using a simple

grid (see example below). The left column has characteristics you want to grade along with points assigned to each so you can weight certain aspects over others. Then, there are three or four columns that describe various levels of achievement.

Use phrases/comments in each level that indicate what you're looking for or what describes an essay in that level. You can be as detailed in this as you want.

Be sure to hand out the rubric when you give the writing assignment. Go over it in class so that students understand the language you've used. For example, if you use the word "analyze," make sure that students know what you mean and that you're all on the same page.

Finally, when grading student essays, circle the aspects that apply to a particular essay, add up points, staple the rubric to

the essay and return to the student.

Rubrics can also include room for comments. This gives you space to make specific suggestions without completely marking up the body of a student's essay.

Rubrics are more than just words in boxes. They are a way for the instructor and students to clearly know what is expected on an assignment.

Work Cited: Stevens, Dannelle D., and Antonia J. Levi. *Introduction to Rubrics*. Sterling: Stylus Pub., 2005.

### An Example of a Rubric

A sample rubric showing varying points assigned to each graded aspect, columns with phrases that describe an essay in that level of achievement, and space for comments/suggestions.

Comparison/Contrast Essay  
Scoring Rubric

	Excellent	Average	Developing	Points
Subjects Compared and Contrasted (50 pts.)	Subjects are introduced fully and clearly; essay completely shows similarities and differences between subjects; essay displays evidence of critical thinking; conclusion draws thesis out to larger picture	Subjects introduced; essay shows similarities and differences; some evidence of critical thinking; conclusion adequate	Subjects are present, though not clearly introduced; lack of evidence of critical thinking in displaying differences and similarities; conclusion simply ends the essay	
Organization (25 pts.)	Clearly organized (either subject-by-subject or point-by-point); obvious transitions guide reader through subjects; subjects are well balanced	Organized; some transitions used; analysis of subjects may be unbalanced	Somewhat organized; transitions lacking, reader works too hard; subjects completely unbalanced	
Grammar/Punctuation (25 pts.)	Few, if any, errors	Several errors but do not confuse meaning	Frequent errors, some confusing meaning	
			<b>TOTAL</b>	

Comments: