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 timesaver. 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.

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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.


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**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.