Advanced Rubrics

Constructing a rubric is not an easy task; however, **the rewards of creating your own well-constructed rubric will be well worth the time.** As you become more accustomed to building and modifying rubrics, the process will become easier. It is important to not over complicate your process when writing or modifying your first rubric. Consider writing a rubric for one assignment and learn what works and what needs improvement. Refer to our "Introduction to Rubrics" webpage (teaching.utk.edu/rubrics) for types and parts of the rubric.

How to build and modify a rubric

Stevens and Levi (2013) suggest four stages to begin the process of creating your own rubrics:

Stage 1 - Reflecting: In the first stage of constructing a rubric, you need to reflect on what you want the students know once the assignment is complete, the purpose of the assignment, and your expectations of the students.

Stage 2 - Listing: In the second stage, you will begin to define the very specific details of the assignment. Begin by identifying what the highest level of achievement would be for each description. Write all of these on sticky notes, one per note. This way, at the end of Stage 2, you have a group of the learning objectives for the project, as well as clearly defined descriptions of what the "best" product would look like. If you use sticky notes to compile your list and descriptors, Stage 3 will be easier.

Stage 3 - Grouping: Once you have identified and prioritized the details from the list stage, you will begin grouping your sticky notes into categories. For instance, sticky notes that say "speaks clearly and precisely" and "maintains good eye contact with audience" can be grouped together under the heading "presentation." The "presentation" group would thus become one of the dimensions of the rubric. Keep in mind that the groups should link back to at least one learning outcome, but no more than three.

Stage 4 - Application: At this point, the dimensions should be added to the rubric. Dimension criteria is formed at this stage. Begin with the highest expectations you wrote in Stage 2 and grouped in Stage 3. Use the language from these descriptions to write your first criterion for the rubric. This will be the highest level on your scale. If you wish to use a scoring guide, your rubric is complete. For those that wish to use a more robust rubric, your next step will be to write what you believe will be the bare minimum you would accept for the assignment. This will be the criteria for the lowest level. Use these two criteria to distinguish the middle levels of your rubric. If you use a scale larger than 3 or 4 levels, the dimension criteria can become more difficult to produce. Begin with a smaller scale and lengthen it if you feel that there is enough distinction to justify more scale levels. This link here can help with using the right language for each scale level: https://bit.ly/2yWyonN

The same four stages can be used if you choose to take an existing rubric and modify the rubric to fit your classroom needs. Comparing your dimensions and dimension criteria will allow you to know what needs to be modified and what can be left alone. It's important to go through these stages before modification. It might be that the existing rubric does not fit your needs and modification would be more cumbersome than creating a new one.

HelpfulTips

- **Share the rubric** with your colleagues, experts in the field, and even your students!You can get great feedback on what dimensions should be used and avoided for the assignment, the feasibility of each scale level for each dimension, and the appropriateness of each dimension criterion.
- **Bloom's taxonomy can help with identifying verbs** that can be used for different scale levels of a dimension. In general, lower-level verbs can be used for lower-level scale points and higher-level verbs for higher-level scale points. This may not be applicable for every instance, but can help with the brainstorming process.
- If you decide to use an analytic rubric, you should consider if you want to place **more emphasis on certain dimensions over others.** If this is the route you want to take, then you will need to add weight your dimensions. This can add some complexity to the rubric, but will let students know what is valued in the assignment and what parts of the assignment they should focus most of the time on.

Common Pitfalls & How to Avoid Them

Many instructors fail to look in some obvious places to find pre-existing rubrics that will fit their needs. Ask a colleague (in and out of your department), contact the staff at Teaching and Learning Innovation for examples, or check out this list from the AALHE: http://course1.winona.edu/shatfield/air/rubrics.htm

Some rubrics are created with too many or too few dimensions. Remember, each dimension needs to link back to at least one outcome from the course. If a dimension does not measure a learning outcome, then omit it; if an important learning outcome is not measured, then another dimension needs to be added.

A failure to test is a failure to learn. Many rubrics are constructed and never tested. What good is a rubric that does not measure what you intend to measure or is not measured consistently from student to student? Consistently grading and measuring the appropriate skills and knowledge are important to understanding student growth. Don't forget to test for validity and reliability (see the next page)!

Some criteria, within a dimension, may not be distinguishable from the next. If a dimension criterion at one scale level is indistinguishable in language or difficulty from one in a different level, then either that scale level should be eliminated (but that will disrupt other criteria from other dimensions at that same scale level) or the language needs to be modified to make them more distinct.

Testing for Validity & Reliability

- **Content validity** looks at how well the dimensions and the corresponding criteria match to the curriculum (Banta & Palomba, 2015). Do the dimensions cover at least one learning outcome? Are the criteria at each scale level appropriate for that level (i.e. does the criteria for "outstanding" actually describe outstanding work?).

- **Inter-rater reliability** measures the consistency of two or more raters' assessment of a student's performance. Inter-rater reliability is often used in performance assessments to make sure that subjective grading is minimized. Types of statistics that can be used include: percentage of agreement, Cohen's Kappa, and Pearson correlation coefficients.

- **Intra-rater reliability** measures the consistency of a rater at two different times. This process can be tedious, but grading the assignment twice can ensure that the instructor is consistent with how they are grading students. The same types of statistics used to measure inter-rater reliability can also be used for intra-rater measures.

References

Banta, T.W. & Palomba, C.A. (2015). Assessment essentials: Planning, implementing, and improving assessment in higher education (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Stevens, D.D., & Levi, A.J. (2013). Introduction to rubrics (2nd ed.). Sterling, VA: Stylus.