

RUBRIC

Teaching Students to Use Grading Rubrics

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Scott is a fifth-grade student with learning disabilities in written expression. He receives all of his instruction in an inclusive classroom, where he has two teachers, Mrs. Sanders (general education) and Mrs. Parker (special education). Scott liked social studies class when he could do research about historical events using the computer. Even science class was fun because he and his classmates could do experiments and go on field trips. Now Scott's affection for these classes and school is diminishing rapidly, because Mrs. Sanders and Mrs. Parker "make me write all the time," noted Scott. He further explained, "I guess I make bad grades because I'm not good enough, or maybe my teachers don't like me. I study really hard and for a long time each night, but I just can't get this writing stuff. If I have to write, I'm just gonna fail."

Montgomery (2000) indicated that most students do not understand why they received a particular grade on an assignment. The students may reason that their being good or bad or the teacher's perception of them is why they were given a particular grade. Montgomery stated that asking students to complete the same assessment that the teacher will use might give valuable clues to the students' understanding of the task and readiness for self-reflection skills. Then the teacher will be able to guide students toward setting realistic improvement goals.

This article includes a definition of grading rubrics, a rationale for their use, ways to introduce rubrics to students with learning disabilities using the RUBRIC strategy, and suggestions for rubric use.

What Are Grading Rubrics?

Though the original definition of rubric meant "marks in red" (Finson & Ormsbee, 1998, p. 80), today a rubric is viewed as a grading guideline to follow in assessment. Rubrics answer the question regarding the criteria by which a student's work should be judged. Therefore, the rubric becomes a scoring tool indicating "what counts" (Goodrich, 1996-97; Montgomery, 2000).

Scores are awarded based on predetermined criteria set forth in the rubric. Descriptions of performance for each level are contained within the rubric and indicate gradations of quality from high to low. Depending on the type of rubric used (see Table 1), grades are



Students are reviewing a rubric to be used to grade a particular assignment.

awarded by the total score only (i.e., holistic) or by separate pieces being judged and then totaled into a final score (i.e., analytic; Nitko, 2001).

Teachers, parents, and students can view the work from both formative and summative assessment perspectives:

- *Formative Assessment.* By knowing ahead of time what is expected and using the criteria as expectations, the rubric becomes a guide throughout the project. In this way, progress toward a goal and the process of learning is evaluated; hence, formative assessment is accomplished. The rubric also provides a guide for clear

Table 1. Types of Rubrics Analytic Rubrics	Holistic Rubrics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separates pieces of an activity individually and then adds all scores for a total rating • Is more process oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rates an activity in its entirety without regard to the separate pieces • Is more product oriented • Is used when the components of an activity are too interrelated for easy division

Rubrics help students achieve focused goals that help them learn.

See Table 2 for a summary of Goodrich's steps for creating and using rubrics.

Scaffolding Instruction Through Strategies

Goodrich's (1996-97) steps provide a framework; but you may decide you need a strategy, which is an individual's approach to a task, to help students with learning disabilities work with rubrics (Ellis & Lenz, 1996). Such a strategy becomes a scaffold for the students' future reference or a springboard to activate memory on how to perform a task.

In a review of the literature, regarding characteristics of adolescents with learning disabilities, Larkin and Ellis (1998) noted that these students are not likely to use effective or efficient learning or performance strategies because they do not know about them, do not recognize the need to use them, or may not be willing to expend the effort required to use them. Therefore, if students with learning disabilities are to use a strategy for assessing work, then it must be a strategy that they can be taught and a strategy that they will find worth their efforts to use.

Following the content, design, and usefulness features for a good learning

communication among teachers, parents, and students as expectations for academic success are clarified and refined toward the final product.

- *Summative Assessment.* Once the final product is submitted, summative assessment is accomplished as the rubric is used to award a final grade.

You can therefore use rubrics in either formative or summative assessment indicating growth and sequence, as well as assessing the total learning process. Together, both types of assessment provide a comprehensive system of evaluation (Montgomery, 2000; Oosterhof, 1999; Weber, 1999).

Why Use Grading Rubrics?

Students who have learning disabilities need a systematic way to help assess their own and their peers' work. Nitko (2001) stated that when grading rubrics are shared with students, the learning aims are clarified. Although you provide grades and feedback to students regarding the quality of their work, self-assessments and peer assessments are necessary components to help students reflect on their performance. Such reflection can help students to locate their errors, determine a better way to approach a task, and learn the necessary information intended from performing the task.

Also, students' understanding of the grading criteria and their importance in the product or performance is strengthened when they are involved in using rubrics (Ward, & Murray-Ward, 1999). Students then are able to focus on what is considered important. As summa-

rized by Weber (1999), rubrics help students achieve focused goals that help them learn. Figure 1 lists the benefits of students using rubrics.

How Do Teachers Introduce Grading Rubrics to Students?

Many students who earn an A on an assignment have no idea why they received the grade. Students often assume that the teacher likes them or that they are naturally good in a particular area. Therefore, the rubric serves as a systematic tool to guide student learning.

First, you must properly introduce your students to rubrics if the students are to use this new tool effectively. You must give students opportunities to become familiar with rubrics. Goodrich (1996-97) provided several steps that can help you orient your students to the use and/or creation of grading rubrics.

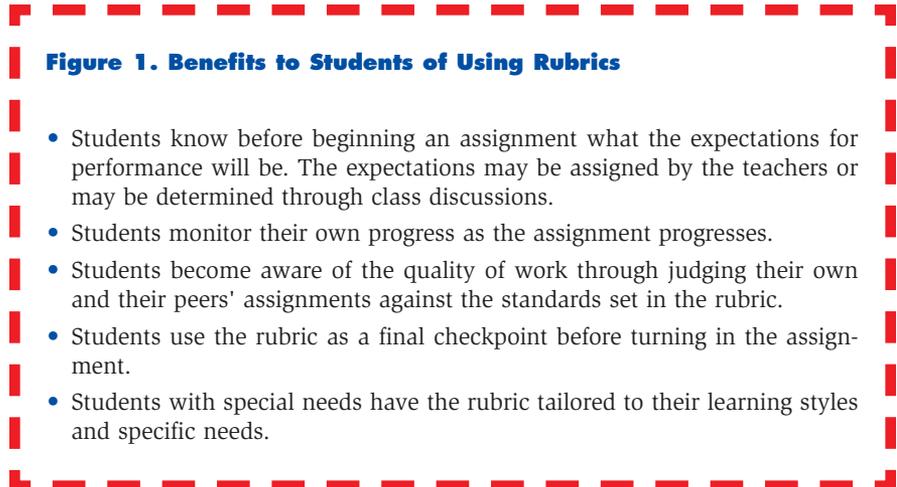


Table 2. Goodrich's Steps for Rubrics

Step 1. Look at models	Show students good and poor examples of student work for a particular task. Help students identify characteristics of each.
Step 2. List the criteria	Use the characteristics to generate a discussion about what is considered quality work.
Step 3. Articulate gradations of quality	Describe best and worst levels of quality on the continuum and then fill in the middle levels of quality.
Step 4. Practice on models	Have students use the rubric created in Steps 2 and 3 to assess the examples of good and poor work in Step 1.
Step 5. Use self-assessment and peer assessment	Stop students occasionally as they are working on a task to have them assess the work.
Step 6. Revise	Encourage students to revise their work based on the feedback they receive in Step 5.
Step 7. Use teacher assessment	Assess students' work by using the same rubric they have used to assess their own and their peers' work.

strategy outlined by Ellis and Lenz (1996), we created the RUBRIC strategy to aid students in assessing their own work and that of their peers (see Figure 2). This strategy provides a systematic means to accomplish Step 5 (i.e., use self-assessment and peer assessment) of the Goodrich (1996-97) rubric model.

Teaching About Rubrics

Before using the RUBRIC strategy, students will need to become familiar with the concept of rubrics. Thus you will

need to generate a rubric—perhaps with the aid of your students. First, you may want to examine some grading rubric resources (see box, Rubric Resources for Teachers) to determine if an appropriate

grading rubric exists. If you locate an appropriate rubric, you may decide to use it—unless you want your students to have the experience of creating their own rubric.

If you cannot locate an appropriate rubric, you may use basic rubric frameworks and “generators” to help you and your students create rubrics. When you guide students to create their own rubric, you may wish to follow the steps provided by Goodrich (1996-97). Then the RUBRIC strategy can be implemented as Goodrich’s Step 5 for self-assessment and peer assessment (see Figure 2). Once the RUBRIC strategy is performed, students can follow Goodrich’s Step 6 to revise their work, based on the feedback they received and their own reflections.

Guiding Students Through the Steps

Once the students have a thorough understanding of rubrics and their uses, they are ready to apply the RUBRIC strategy to help them remember the operation of a rubric.

Read. First, the students will *Read the rubric and the material to be graded*. Students need to become familiar with the rubric and material to be graded to

- Gain the “big picture” of the task and how it is to be assessed.
- Understand how the rubric addresses particular components of the task.

A learning strategy like RUBRIC becomes a scaffold for the students' future reference or a springboard to activate memory on how to perform a task.

Figure 2. The Rubric Strategy

- R** ead the rubric and the material to be graded
- U** se the rubric to give an initial score
- B** ring a buddy to help you rate again
- R** eview the material together
- I** dentify and award the scores together
- C** heck the scores again

You can help students achieve clarity by asking what is meant by the evaluation criteria before students begin using the rubric.

Here, you can help students achieve clarity by asking what is meant by the evaluation criteria before students begin using the rubric. Students with learning disabilities may have a tendency to rush into a task with the only goal of task completion. Therefore, accuracy and quality may be sacrificed when they perform the task and when they attempt to assess task performance using the rubric.

If students are able to articulate the evaluation criteria of the rubric before work begins, then the goal of clarity has been achieved. Therefore, the first **R** step encourages students to look before they leap into the assessment process through reading and understanding the rubric.

Use. Second, the students will *Use the rubric to give an initial score*. Students work individually using the rubric to assess the material. This forces a student to record his or her own assessment thoughts without initially being influenced by their peers.

For students with learning disabilities, this step allows them to further clarify their thought processes on how to use the rubric. The students can use the individual time to ask questions regarding clarity or to verbalize their thought processes to someone else to make sure they are on track. Thus, when later sharing with peer buddies, students can talk about their own reflections regarding the assessment of the material with greater confidence and ease. This sends the message that it is acceptable to think different thoughts and possibly have differing opinions.

Bring. Third, the student will *Bring a buddy to help you rate again*.

Review. With the buddy, the student goes to the fourth step, *Review the material together*. The two students form a team to compare scores and ideas based on the material to be reviewed and the rubric. Be sure to provide ample time for the two students to share and defend their positions in an atmosphere of acceptance. If possible, the two students need to agree. If not, then both need to document in writing why they continue to hold firmly to their original statements.

Once a pair of students gives an initial rating or has written dissenting opinions, group discussion can ensue as pairs of students share their ratings and thoughts with other students. This discussion provides for additional thinking opportunities as students hear the thought processes, opinions, and positions of other students. The process also widens their horizons concerning the material to be rated and possibly the rubric itself. Group discussions also allow you, as the teacher, to promote higher-order thinking activities regarding the material to be rated.

Identify. Fifth, students and their peer buddies *Identify and award the scores together*. When group discussion is completed, the students go back to the original peer grouping to synthesize the material to be rated, the rubric's score components, and the opinions expressed by the other students. The two students then rate the material again as a team. Naturally, if the two students agree on all score components of the rubric, then awarding a final score will be easy. If there is disagreement, then mediation may resolve the differences; or you may ask both students to attach their explanations of the differing points to the rubric. This means that when students have work returned from peers with differing explanations, they can use this written feedback and rubric scores to refine their own thinking process and enable them to produce a work of higher quality.

Check. As a sixth and final step, ask the peer buddies to *Check their work*. This sends the message that anyone can make errors and omissions. Students recheck their math to ensure that all

Rubric Resources for Teachers

<http://rubistar.4teachers.org>

Rubistar is a tool to help teachers create their own rubrics. A tutorial is available to guide teachers through this process. A number of customized rubrics can be created for the following categories: oral projects, products, multimedia, science, research and writing, work skills, and math. Rubrics can be saved to the Web site for 18 months, during which time they can be edited or viewed.

http://teachers.technology.com/web_tools/rubrics/ This Web site contains a rubric generator for the following: basic reading skills, behavior, class participation, cleanup/changing activities, general, handwriting, homework, lab report, listening, math, notebook, oral expression, presentation, project, science fair, teamwork, and writing. Icons are available in several categories to add pictures to the rubrics.

<http://school.discovery.com/scirockguide/assess.html#rubrics> Kathy Schrock's "Guide for Educators" section on assessment and rubrics contains links to general and subject-specific rubrics, as well as educator skills. Also, there are links to related articles such as "Creating Rubrics" and "Empowering Students" and "Using Rubrics in Middle School."

http://www.geocities.com/freddyk_us/9_2_8_rubrics.htm

Mr. K's Links 2 Learning 4 Educators Web site contains an extensive resource list of Links to other Web sites pertaining to rubrics.

<http://www.4teachers.org/projectbased/checklist.shtml>

This Web site provides Project-Based Learning Checklists, a helpful rubric generator.

Be sure to provide ample time for student buddies to share their thoughts in an atmosphere of acceptance.

tabulations are correct, and they recheck their written opinions to ensure that others can understand the explanations easily. Double checking work is crucial to ensure accuracy, clarity, and completion. The rechecking also allows for the buddy team to review the entire rubric process from the beginning.

Posting the RUBRIC strategy in a permanent location within the room and on cue cards on students' desks reminds them that a process for using a rubric has been provided for them. Because you have led the students through the entire rubric process once, the process itself becomes clearer in their minds. The individual student and the class as a whole then can refer back to the RUBRIC strategy with feelings of success.

What Are Some Common Problems in Using Grading Rubrics?

Although using the RUBRIC strategy in class and using a rubric for grading and clarifying goals makes the evaluation of a project easier, the entire process is not without its problems. Table 3 provides a summary of the common problems in using a rubric and suggestions to solve the problems. For example, if students do not understand assessment criteria, take time to write definitions of terms in clear, positive language.

Post the RUBRIC strategy in a permanent location within the room and on cue cards on students' desks.

Table 3. Common Problems and Suggestions for Using Grading Rubrics

Common Problems	Suggestions
<p>1. Students do not understand assessment criteria (unclear language)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to interpret assessment criteria and suggest specific or precise words to clarify the language used • Make sure terms used on the rubric are defined • Use descriptive, but not negative language • Articulate clear gradations of quality
(Goodrich, 1996-97; Montgomery, 2000)	
<p>2. Students do not understand the differences among gradations of quality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As much as possible, restate gradations of quality in measurable and observable terms • Define gradations of quality in a manner in which there is a definite distinction among each • Make sure that each gradation may receive only 1 point value, not a range of point values
<p>3. Students do not understand how to obtain a total score or the meaning of the total score</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide directions for arriving at a total score • Define the meaning of all possible total scores

Final Thoughts

Using rubrics provides a framework for teachers, parents, and students to understand the expectations of an assignment before the project begins. The RUBRIC strategy enables students to not only evaluate other student's work but also to apply the strategy to their own work. In this way, the RUBRIC strategy supports student learning and enables students to evaluate their own learning. This concept particularly is beneficial to students with learning disabilities, like Scott, who need memory devices to jog their memories.

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