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English 400
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Classroom Practice Report: Grading Rubrics

Grading Rubrics: A Definition

- A grading rubric is an established set of criteria used to evaluate a piece of writing.
- Rubrics can be created for each assignment or a general rubric can be used repeatedly throughout a course.
- Rubrics can be distributed along with the assignment to inform student of the criteria which will be used to evaluate their work.
- A holistic rubric describes what an “A”, “B”, or “C” paper accomplishes
- An analytical rubric describes categories of evaluation with possibly several qualities listed in each category.

The History of the Grading Rubric

- The grading rubric is one of many assessment tools available to writing instructors.
- The evaluation of both an individual piece of writing and a student’s writing competency has changed dramatically over the past 50 years.
- Some say that analytic grading, such as the rubric, reduces writing to a list of traits and that good writing is more than the sum of its parts. The criteria listed in a rubric can be arbitrary and remove assignments from the larger context of composition

The Purpose of a Grading Rubric

- Grading Rubrics may demystify the grading process but creating a grading rubric may leave a teacher mystified over why we grade. Scriven (1974) has identified at least six functions of grading
 - To describe unambiguously the worth, merit, or value of the work accomplished
 - To improve the capacity of students to identify good work, that is, to improve their self-evaluation or discrimination skills with respect to work submitted
 - To stimulate and encourage good work by students
 - To communicate the teacher's judgment of the student's progress
 - To inform the teacher about what students have and haven't learned
 - To select people for rewards or continued education
- Grading Criteria, such as rubrics, can help: clarify the assignment for students and teachers, you decide which writing features to emphasize in class, students evaluate their own work, students focus on particular features of their writing, students gain practice in using the criteria on someone else's paper, students gain practice in using the criteria on someone else's paper (Carnegie Mellon website)

Benefits of the Rubric

- “demystifies grading process” allows for consideration of distinct elements as opposed to a ‘holistic’ whole
- makes the grading process more democratic and can simplify grading
- can identify particular areas for student improvement

What your Grading Rubric (or lack of one) says about you

- Your intentions for the course will greatly influence your grading rubric. Is the purpose of your course to evaluate general competency or “weed-out” students prior to more advanced courses?
- A rubric can indicate your intentions for an assignment and your rubric can emphasize your goals (developing an argument, organization, audience)

Some Elements of A Rubric

- There are a variety of categories a grading rubric can include. Here are some examples taken from <http://www.case.edu/artsci/engl/writing/pedagogy/grading.html>
 - Substance, content, words and sentences, editing/revisions, use of sources (from SAGES writing assessment)
 - Argument, information, analysis/so what?, organization (Emmons and Bassett)
 - Argument, Information, Analysis, organization, rhetoric, conventions, revision (Emmons)
 - Mindful writer, audience, structure, details, language, content, purpose (Brandel)

The attached grading rubric is the SAGES grading rubric from

<http://www.case.edu/artsci/engl/writing/pedagogy/grading.html>

Annotated Bibliography

Carnegie Mellon

<http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/resources/gradingcriteria.html>

This website is part of a Carnegie Mellon site on ‘Enhancing Education.’ This site may be useful for those instructors putting together their first course. It includes sections of course design, student audiences, ongoing assessment, using technology and suggested publications. Much of the emphasis on ‘developing grading criteria’ involves the instructor’s evaluation of the assignment prior to distributing it to students. This sort of preparation seems ractical and could be very beneficial.

Scriven, M. "Evaluation of Students." Unpublished manuscript, 1974. Cited

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/grading.htm>

(since unpublished and cited in another work, annotation is impossible)

White, Edward M. *Teaching and Assessing Writing, Recent Advances in Understanding, Evaluating, and Improving Student Performance*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Inc, 1985.

White is a good source to read against the use of analytic scoring including the grading rubric. He questions the effectiveness of arbitrary criteria and the ability of instructors to separately and repeatedly evaluate so many criteria in one piece of writing. The book includes several chapters on writing tests. The final chapter includes practical information for helping instructors assist their students in better writing. It was refreshing to read about actual student-teacher interaction and not just researched models of facilitation.

Wolcott, Willa and Sue M. Legg. *An Overview of Writing Assessment. Theory, Research, and Practice*. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1998.

This source is a recent text that addresses many of the concerns about evaluating writing in the composition classroom. A variety of methods are described including holistic, primary trait and analytic scoring. Each chapter includes generous sample materials, student essays and evaluations in the manner discussed in the chapter. A separate chapter discusses assignment design. The book lives up to its title of *An Overview of Writing Assessment* and is a good one at that.

SAGES WRITING ASSESSMENT

Student: _____

Date: _____

Instructors: _____

On this form, instructors score and comment briefly on each student's writing performance in five key areas. When students submit their final portfolios, we ask them to include copies of these forms from all of their seminars.

Evaluation Scale: 1 = *does not meet standards*
 2 = *making progress, but still in need of improvement*
 3 = *proficient*
 4 = *excellent*
 5 = *superb*

Score	Criteria
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_____	<p>Substance</p> <p>The writer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• explores an idea instead of merely reiterating a thesis• displays a full, clear understanding of the subject• makes distinctions as well as generalizations• draws connections (between events, concepts, statements)• fairly presents opposing points of view
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Comments:

_____	<p>Structure</p> <p>The writer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• presents topics in a logical order• moves purposefully from one point to another (transitions)• alternates between general statements and examples• gives each topic the attention it deserves, in light of the essay's purpose• constructs unified paragraphs and sections
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Comments:

_____	<p>Words and Sentences</p> <p>The writer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• chooses words precisely, aware of their meanings and implications• avoids undue repetition of single words or phrases (without relying on a thesaurus)
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- limits use of passive verbs by writing sentences with human subjects
(not "It can be claimed," but rather "Some scientists claim")
- keeps verb tenses consistent
- applies the rules of English syntax, constructing sentences that are logical and clear
- expresses ideas concisely and idiomatically, so that a reader never thinks, "But no one would *say* it this way"
- demonstrates mastery of grammar and punctuation

Score	Criteria
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Comments (on "Words and Sentences"):

Editing/Revision

The writer

- proofreads work carefully, often catching mistakes and infelicities by reading aloud
- responds thoughtfully to criticisms and suggestions, thus acquiring editorial skills that will prove valuable in future assignments
- tinkers with phrasing, recognizing that the first few words of a sentence are often the ones most in need of revision
- revises essays substantially, even radically, when necessary

Comments:

Use of Sources

The writer

- cites an appropriate range of sources
- uses a single citation system consistently
- chooses relevant quotations that advance the argument
- fits quotations smoothly into his/her own sentences and paragraphs
- synthesizes and summarizes source material through paraphrase

Comments: