Rubrics:
What They Are, Why You Should Use Them, and How to Make One

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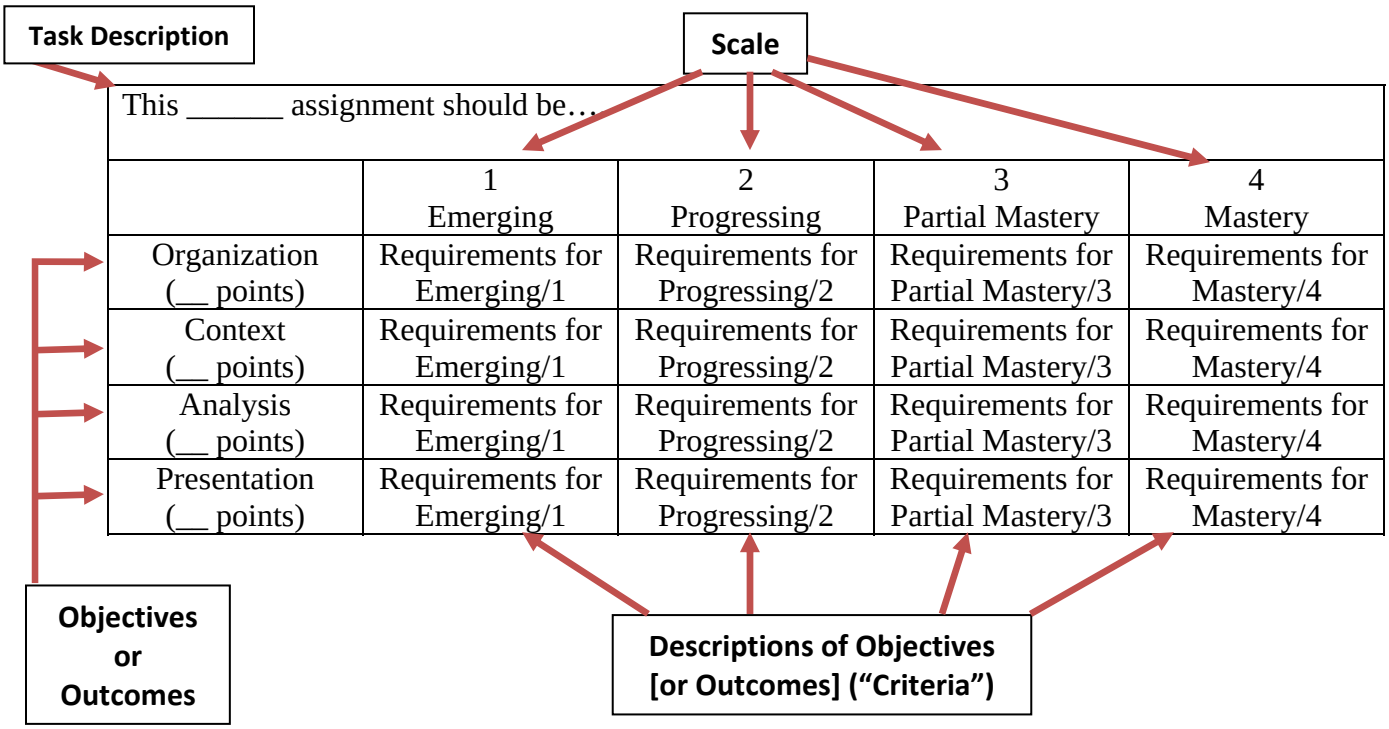
A rubric is an assessment tool used to evaluate a task or assignment. They are beneficial to both the teacher and the student. "At its most basic, a rubric is a scoring tool that lays out the specific expectations for an assignment. Rubrics divide an assignment into its component parts and provide a detailed description of what constitutes acceptable or unacceptable levels of performance for each of those parts" (Stevens 3). Rubrics are usually based on learning outcomes, set by the instructor(s). Rubrics are also more generally applicable to assessment of learning objectives or student learning outcomes.

The layout of the most common type of rubric is a grid, consisting of a task description, scale, dimensions, and descriptions of those dimensions. In this document, "dimension" will be replaced with "objectives" or "outcomes." (see diagram below).



This _____ assignment should be…				
	1 Emerging	2 Progressing	3 Partial Mastery	4 Mastery
Organization (__ points)	Requirements for Emerging/1	Requirements for Progressing/2	Requirements for Partial Mastery/3	Requirements for Mastery/4
Context (__ points)	Requirements for Emerging/1	Requirements for Progressing/2	Requirements for Partial Mastery/3	Requirements for Mastery/4
Analysis (__ points)	Requirements for Emerging/1	Requirements for Progressing/2	Requirements for Partial Mastery/3	Requirements for Mastery/4
Presentation (__ points)	Requirements for Emerging/1	Requirements for Progressing/2	Requirements for Partial Mastery/3	Requirements for Mastery/4

The task description is the explanation of the assignment (or whatever is being assessed) and is at the top of the page, above the rubric grid. The scale is used for rating the task or assignment. It

can be a quantitative-scale (numeric) or a qualitative-scale (words) [or both], and it fills the first row of the grid. Next are the objectives [or outcomes], and they are the different components of the assignment that will be graded. It is helpful to include the points that each component is worth with the objective. The objectives [or outcomes] go on the far left side of the grid (or the first column). Then there are the descriptions of the objectives [or outcomes] (the criteria by which each objective [or outcome] is evaluated. These descriptions or criteria are the most difficult part of writing the rubric. For each objective [or outcome], you need to write the descriptions (or criteria) [using the scale at the top of the grid] for the highest level of performance to the lowest level of performance, and each level in between.

So now that you know what a rubric is and the different parts of it, how do you make one? Follow these steps, and you will be on your way to having a useful rubric.

1. Figure out what the assignment is. What is it that you want to assess? This will be used for the task description, and you cannot have a rubric if you do not have an assignment for which to use it.
2. Decide what learning objectives you want the students to gain from the assignment. These will help you fill out the objectives [or outcomes] of the rubric grid. At the same time, prioritize each objective to help give point values to each one. These will of course vary from assignment to assignment, and could vary from instructor to instructor.
3. Create a scale. You first need to decide if the scale is going to be quantitative (numeric) or qualitative (words) [or both]. If you choose a qualitative scale, you need to be careful as to which words you select. You do not want to choose words that will be discouraging to the student such as “poor”. Instead choose a word like “emerging” or “progressing”. You also need to determine how big of a scale you want it to be. (Most are 3-5 in length).

4. After you have the learning objectives (learning outcomes) figured out, come up with descriptions of the expectations for the highest level of performance for each objective [or outcome]. In other words, what will the student need to accomplish to get the most points for each different objective? After you have figured out what the highest points will require, do the same for the lowest points possible. After you have the two ends of the scale figured out, you can fill the levels in between. These will all be part of the Descriptions of Objectives [or Outcomes] of the rubric.

This may seem like a lot of work, but here are some pieces of advice to help you write a rubric:

1. Rubrics should almost always be one page. This will make it easier reading and scoring.
2. "[Objectives (or outcomes)] should actually represent the type of competent skills students must combine in a successful scholarly work, such as the need for a firm grasp of content, technique, citation, examples, analysis, and a use of language appropriate to the occasion" (Stevens 10).
3. If you are making a rubric for a new assignment, start off with three levels on the scale. After you have used the rubric, you can expand it to four or five levels because you will be more familiar with the type of work you will be getting from the students.
4. If you are still stuck, for more assistance in creating a rubric, visit the RCampus web sites related to rubrics:

   http://www.rcampus.com/indexrubric.cfm

   http://www.rcampus.com/rubricshellc.cfm?mode=gallery&sms=publicrub&srcgoogle&gclid=CMSB1JqYoJgCFRHxDAodC3jYnw

   These will do a lot of the work for you, but you can still tailor the rubric to your liking. Another rubrics web site, which focuses more on rubrics useful in secondary education environments is: http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php

You may be thinking that making a rubric is a lot of hard work or that there is no point to it. But that would be a false assumption. Rubrics are actually very beneficial both to the instructor and to the student. From the instructor's standpoint, it might take some time to create a rubric, but it will save a lot of time in the long run, especially during scoring of assignments, and of student artifacts in general. Instead of writing comment after comment for feedback, you can circle on the rubric, or enter a score, where the student stands for each objective. As an instructor, you can also use these rubrics year after year. From the student's standpoint, they will be able to see where they are falling short of the score they want. There is more detail as to how they can improve on future assignments. They will also get feedback quicker, while the assignment is still fresh in their mind. So, while a rubric will be somewhat time-consuming to create, it will be very helpful and beneficial in the future.

Works Cited

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