Evaluating student performance is part of the assessment development process, and the methods used will vary based on the nature of the assessment items and task. The purpose of the assessment will determine the most effective method to use in evaluating students' work. Methods may be formal and fairly lengthy or may require only a short descriptive response. For open-ended, constructed-response formats or performance assessments, clearly developed rubrics are beneficial. Using rubrics may be appropriate for your assessment because many times, a numerical value may not indicate <u>how</u> a student can improve his or her performance. Rubrics provide descriptions that define what is expected at each performance level.

Introduction to Rubrics

A rubric is an evaluation tool, usually in a table format, that is used to assess student performance along a set of criteria. Rubrics are a means of communicating expectations for student performance on an assessment and providing focused feedback on a student's progress.

Reasons to Use Rubrics

- Rubrics enable multiple evaluators to apply the same criteria to evaluating assessments.

- Rubrics may be used to provide formative feedback for drafts of work before a final submission is due. For example, a student can use a rubric to assess his or her peers' performance.

- Rubrics provide meaningful feedback concerning a student's strengths and weaknesses.

- Rubrics allow teachers to help students understand more clearly and completely how the teacher evaluated their work or performance.

- Rubrics also help teachers authentically monitor a student's learning process.

- Rubrics may inform instructional practice by allowing teachers to modify future lessons based on student performance.

A rubric typically consists of two components: *criteria,* which are the characteristics of good performance on a task; and *levels of performance,* which decscribe the degree to which a criterion has been met. The *criteria* in a rubric is typically found as the table rows on a rubric, includes a description of each element of the assessment and may also include performance samples that illustrate each of the levels of performance. The *levels of performance* in a rubric, typically found as the table columns on a rubric, determine the degree to which the student has met the criterion.

Elements of a Quality Rubric

Consider the following elements of a quality rubric:

- Criteria are objective and based on observable behaviors.

- Language clearly communicates expectations for students.

- Language focuses on what is present and not just on what is absent.

- Rubric clearly communicates strengths and weaknesses and how the students may improve their work.

- Rubric provides effective feedback that is directly related to student performance on the assessment or task.

- Each performance level is clearly stated so that it can easily be distinguished from the others.

The table below provides some guidance on how to develop a rubric. The questions on the left side of the table are considerations. On the right, the action describes where to place the content in the rubric for each of these considerations.

Question	Action
What criteria or essential elements must be present in a student's work to ensure that they meet the standard? • These should be the key skills and knowledge that a student will demonstrate.	Include these as rows in your rubric.
How many levels of performance do I wish to illustrate for students? • **The levels should describe a range of performance from beginning to advanced. For example, beginning, developing, proficient, advanced.**	Include these as columns in your rubric and label them.
For each criterion or essential element, what is a clear description of performance at each achievement level? • Use objective descriptions that help provide guidance to students.	Include descriptions in the appropriate cells of the rubric.
When I use the rubric, what aspects work well and what aspects need improvement? • Does the rubric help you distinguish among the levels of performance in a student sample? • Are the criteria appropriate?	Revise the rubric accordingly.

Source: Adapted from Huba, M. E., & Freed J. E. (2000). *Learner-centered assessment on college campuses: Shifting the focus from teaching to learning*. Boston: Ally & Bacon.

Tips to Develop Rubric Sections

Criteria: When defining your assessment's criteria, it may be helpful to think back to the indicators that you identified or created for your assessment. These outcomes may help you define the essential elements of student performance. Alternatively, you may choose to think about the types of tasks you are asking students to complete as part of this assessment. These considerations will guide the development of the rubric's criteria. Keeping this information in mind will help ensure that your rubric is well aligned with the assessment's purpose and learning expectations.

Levels of Performance: When you determine your performance levels, it helps to think about the development of learning over time. To represent this chronologically, we suggest listing your performance levels from left to right in order of increasing mastery.

Descriptions of Performance: In your performance descriptors, the information listed should tell students precisely what performance should look like at each level. In addition, the descriptors should be clear about how a student's work might be distinguished from the work of other students. Writing clear descriptors that are aligned with standards and performance outcomes will mean students are presented with clear expectations and will provide teachers with an opportunity to provide consistent and objective evaluations. The rubric will ultimately offer quality feedback to students for self-reflection on their learning.

Using Rubrics for Effective Feedback

Using rubrics is an excellent way to ensure that feedback on assessments is specific and targeted. When the feedback is targeted and linked to the explicit performance outcomes, students will have a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and will be able to take responsibility for their learning. A quality rubric enables and supports conversation between the teacher and learner, or peer and learner, and allows for self-reflection. Therefore, quality rubrics:

- Communicate expectations.

- Use language that focuses on what is present and not just what is absent.

- Clearly communicate strengths and weaknesses and how the student may improve.

- Provide effective feedback that is directly related to student performance on the assessment task.

To ensure that you can provide effective feedback to your students, create a rubric that has enough performance levels to showcase a range of student abilities. A rubric should provide feedback to students who may exceed the standards or expectations as well as to students who may be approaching a concept or skill for the first time. To accomplish this, the rubric should include clearly articulated descriptors within each performance level. To showcase the difference between a poorly written and a well-written descriptor, see the example below. In this example, the teacher is evaluating student papers for the presence of reference citations.

Example of a Poorly Constructed Descriptor:
- *Student includes many sources and citations both in text and in the references section.*

Example of a Well-Constructed Descriptor:
- *Student includes a broad representation of the available sources in the bibliography along with all in-text citations formatted properly according to APA guidelines.*

In the poorly constructed descriptor, the language about expectations is vague. What does the word "several" mean? How many sources are enough? Are students expected to complete in-text citations along with a works cited page? Should references follow a particular format? A student may have all these questions. However, as you see in the well-constructed descriptor, the teacher answers all the students' questions, clearly describing how their work will be evaluated. The teacher may want to lead a discussion with students about how many and what kinds of sources are appropriate, since a "broad representation" may be more or fewer than 10, depending on the size of the body of information that is available on their chosen topic.

Final Notes

When developing rubrics:

- Make sure the language is understandable to students. For example, using first-person language will help reinforce student ownership of the assessment process.

- Make sure to focus on stated objectives and describe the performance for each trait at several levels using descriptors.

- Involve students: Facilitate a conversation or activity in which students build the rubrics that will be used to assess their work. Have the students use the rubric on a sample and facilitate a

discussion that leads to common understanding of the descriptors and/or, if necessary, change and clarify the language on the rubric.

It is important to remember that student performance on an assessment should inform instruction. Rubrics may be a useful evaluation tool that accompanies assessments for this purpose. Teachers should be attentive to patterns that may suggest the need to modify instruction or the need to revisit the content, based on patterns that emerge across student performance when using the rubric.