

Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment, or the evaluation of student work, has long been part of the role of college instructors. However, in 1980, with the publication of the federal report, "A Nation at Risk", the focus on assessing or determining what students learn in school has become a national priority (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Most researchers will agree that assessment has some key components to be met for assessment to produce data that can be used to improve student learning:

- Assessment must balance external testing with appropriate benchmarks and teachers' knowledge of student abilities. Regular assessment of student learning does have a positive effect on student achievement.
- The information generated by assessments must be used to inform teachers and students of what gaps exist in learning and teaching. Careful and deliberate analysis of assessment data can help target areas that need improvement.
- Student participation is a critical component of assessment. If students are to participate they must be clear about the target (course objectives) and criteria for quality work (grading rubrics are helpful for this purpose), they must learn to self-assess in light of the criteria and they must take responsibility for improving based on feedback and data generated. For achievement to be raised, teachers must help students themselves learn how to make better judgments on the quality of their work.

Instructors need time and assistance in creating valid assessments of student learning. Instructors must take time and think carefully about what they will target as learning goals for a particular course. Regular collaboration and discussion among faculty with regard to what is good quality student work must take place in order for students to be provided with consistent messaging regarding acceptable levels of performance.

Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. The results of assessment should be usable data by which to improve student learning. Students should know at the outset of a course what they are expected to learn (learning goals/objectives). At the beginning of the course, the instructor should work with students to understand what she/ he already knows about the topic as well as to identify any gaps in understanding or misconceptions (initial/diagnostic assessment, also called pre-test). As the course progresses, the instructor takes time to collect data on how the students are progressing toward the learning goal and makes adjustments to teaching or learning activities as indicated by the assessment (formative assessment). Formative assessment is very valuable because it makes the instructor aware of what students are understanding and what they are struggling to

comprehend, while allowing time for adjustments to the instruction or learning activities to help students progress toward the learning goal.

Grading Rubrics

A final component for designing a powerful assessment is a rubric. A rubric is a scoring tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work, or the major points on which the student will be graded. For example, eye contact, strong voice, clear beginning, middle and end, and neat/clean in appearance are some criteria required for a public speaking performance. A rubric for an email project could include criteria for spelling and grammatical expectations, clearly defined purpose, and supporting paragraphs, socially acceptable on-line behavior, and so on. Heidi Goodrich Andrede (2009), in *Understanding Rubrics*, states that rubrics appeal to teachers and students for many reasons:

- Rubrics are powerful tools for both teaching and learning. Rubrics can improve student performance, as well as monitor it, by making teachers' expectations clear and by showing students how to meet these expectations. The result is often marked improvements in the quality of student work and in learning.
- Rubrics help students become more thoughtful judges of the quality of their own and others' work. They can easily be incorporated into peer assessment exercises.
- Rubrics reduce the amount of time teachers spend evaluating student work. When the teacher does have something to say, he/ she can often simply circle an item in the rubric, rather than struggling to explain the flaw or strength they have noticed. Rubrics provide students with more informative feedback about their strengths as well as those areas in need of improvement.
- Finally, rubrics are easy to use and explain. They provide a clear grading system for student work, and thus provide consistency.

A rubric is a useful tool that not only shows you, the instructor, if the student is learning, but provides the student with yet another meaningful learning experience. The more specific and detailed the rubric, the clearer it is for the student.

Rubrics can take many forms from a simple checklist to a de- tailed analysis (with accompanying point values) of each and every component of a successful demonstration. The rubric can be developed by the instructor or cooperatively with the students.

Designing Rubrics

Writing a rubric for the first time can be time-consuming and difficult. However, once you have successfully completed one or two, it becomes increasingly easy and begins to require less and less time. There are a few tips for writing good rubrics:

1. Review your outcomes and make certain that what you are asking your students to do in the assessment is congruent with your outcomes.
2. Brainstorm a variety of ways students will be able to demonstrate their mastery of the outcome. Don't get stuck on requiring the traditional paper or exam for demonstration. Take into consideration the opportunities the ever-growing field of technology brings to student assessment.
3. After deciding on the "context" of the demonstration, list the criteria for what you think counts for quality work.
4. Break the criteria into distinct categories.
 - a. Describe what constitutes a "quality" effort in each category.
 - b. Then describe what constitutes an "OK" effort in each category.
 - c. Third, describe what constitutes a "below average" effort in each category.
 - d. And finally, describe what constitutes a "failing effort" in each category.
5. Check to be sure that the language you have used is clear and concise and will not be misinterpreted or misunderstood.
6. Avoid unnecessary negative language. We all respond better to being told what is working and how we can improve than we do to what is wrong.
7. Always give the rubric to the student prior to the assessment.

Creating the rubric is the hard part, using them is the fun part. Once they are created they can be used over and over again, reducing the time involved in evaluation and assessment. Sample Rubrics can be found in Appendix B.

Appendix B:

Scoring or Grading Rubrics – Scoring rubrics allow students to familiarize themselves with the expected quality and performance of course work. Below you can find several examples of different types of rubrics used for term paper/essay writing, class participation and class presentation.

Sample Term Paper/Essay Scoring Rubric

Qualities & Criteria	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Target
Format/Layout Presentation of the text Structuring of the Text Follows requirement of length, font and style <i>(Weight 15%)</i>	Follows poorly the requirements related to format and layout.	Follows, for the most part, all the requirements related to format and layout. Some requirements are not followed.	Closely follows all the requirements related to format and layout.
Content/ Information All elements of the topics are addressed, the information is technically sound, information based on careful research, coherence of information <i>(Weight 50%)</i>	The essay is not objective and addresses poorly the issues referred in the proposed topic. The provided information is not necessary or not sufficient to discuss these issues.	The essay is objective and for the most part addresses with an in-depth analysis most of the issues referred in the proposed topic. The provided information is, for the most part, necessary and sufficient to discuss	The essay is objective and addresses with an in-depth analysis all the issues referred in the proposed topic. The provided information is necessary and sufficient to discuss these issues.
Quality of Writing Clarity of sentences and paragraphs, No errors and spelling, grammar and use of English, Organization and coherence of ideas <i>(Weight 20%)</i>	The essay is not well written, and contains many spelling errors, and/or grammar errors and/ or use of English errors. The essay is badly organized, lacks clarity and/ or does not present ideas in a coherent way.	The essay is well written for the most part, without spelling, grammar or use of English errors. The essay is for the most part well organized, clear and presents ideas in a coherent way.	The essay is well written from start to finish, without spelling, grammar or use of English errors. The essay is well organized, clear and presents ideas in a coherent way.
References and Use of References Scholarly level of references, How effective the references are used in the essay, Soundness of references, APA style in reference list and for citations <i>(Weight 15%)</i>	Most of the references used are not important, and/ or are not of good/ scholarly quality. There is not a minimum of 4 scholarly resources, and/or they are not used effectively in the essay. References are not effectively used, and/or correctly cited and/or correctly listed in the reference list according to APA style.	Most of the references used are important, and Are of good/scholarly quality. There is a minimum of 4 scholarly resources that are for the most part used effectively in the essay. Most of the references are effectively used, correctly cited and correctly listed in the reference list according to APA style.	All the references used are important, and are of good/ scholarly quality. There is a minimum of 4 scholarly resources that are used effectively in the essay. All the references are effectively used, correctly cited and correctly listed in the reference list according to APA style.
Grade:			

Overriding criterion: Originality and authenticity. If the essay is identified as not being original, and/or not done by the student, the instructor has the right to grade the paper as an F.

Courtesy of Dr. Stella Porto, University of Maryland, University College ,2005

Sample Class Discussion Grading Rubric

Class participation as a component of grading is based on several important ideas:

- To practice reflective thinking you must take the risk of sharing your perceptions and interpretations and receive feedback from others on their soundness;
- To be effective in your profession (or anyone else in a work setting for that matter) must develop and refine communication skills;
- We construct knowledge and learn from each other, and if you don't speak, others don't learn from you--and vice versa;
- The evaluation of your performance is based on what can be demonstrated and observed -- you need to show what you know;
- The more noticeable you make yourself (in good ways of course), the more memorable you are to others when they are trying to recall things about you.

Factor	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Target
Frequency of participation	Does not contribute or, alternately, dominates discussion	Irregularly participate	Initiates questions and comments
Relevance & value	Tangential or pedantic	Contributes on portions or segments, but misses the big picture	Comments are pertinent to topic and add important facts and perspectives
Rhetoric	Argues opinion or emotion without evidence	Provides weak or inconsistent evidence or reasoning	Gives evidence supporting assertions, argues logically, gives examples
Inclusion	Does not mention others or further develop ideas previously discussed	Implies contributions of others and bases argument on previous contributions	Builds on and relates to points made by other contributors, summarizes, contrasts, harmonizes, etc
Articulation	mispronunciation, poor use of words, poorly organized ideas	Uses jargon, common expressions rather than appropriate technical terms	Clear and organized use of language, expresses ideas fluently, visual supplements

Vocabulary	Uses cliches, mundane vocabulary, uses terms incorrectly	Inconsistent in use of proper terms	Demonstrates knowledge and accurate use of terms
Receptive	Defensive, demeans others' comments, talks over them, or disregards feedback	Is respectful and listens, but does not apply feedback	Accurately listens to and considers feed- back from others
Preparation	Makes spontaneous but uninformed comments	Comments are informed but lack completeness of comprehensive preparation	Has read assigned material and relates comments to it
Originality/ Creativity	Restatement of readings or comments already offered	Unconventional ideas but may not be well thought out or practical	Presents novel view, different perspective, original approaches

Downloaded from:

<http://faculty.css.edu/dswenson/web/Gradingrubrics/gradingrubrics.htm>

Sample Presentation Rubric

Presentations are evaluated on a variety of aspects of the presentation including content, style, graphics, and teamwork.

Presentation Component	Unacceptable 0 Points	Acceptable 1 Point	Good 2 Points	Excellent 3 Points
Overview: introduction of case or problem and background described	no introduction or overview, background or agenda	introduction case or problem but awkward, sketchy or unclear over- view/agenda and background	confident and fluent introduction; clear overview/ agenda and back- ground, but could be more complete or polished	confident introduction of roles and contribution; clear purpose, overview, and agenda; relevant & clear back-ground
Style: use effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills (e.g., voice volume, inflection, eye contact, etc.)	poor style (long pauses, reading speech, "Ummm..." and other mannerisms, poor eye contact, monotone, etc.)	either fluent delivery but reading, or awkward delivery but spontaneous	generally good delivery and spontaneity but could improve	Excellent style involving matching verbal and nonverbal style, good projection with inflection, spontaneous speaking
Vocabulary: appropriate and fluent use of terms and concepts	little or no attempt to include terms, concepts, authors	use of terms but not well related, sporadic, misused or mispronounced	good use of terms but still uses jargon or forces or is awkward with use of terms	fluent vocabulary and pronunciation without pretention
Coverage: thorough and balanced in treatment of topic	very incomplete, significant gaps, or biased treatment of topic	either thorough but biased, or incomplete and balanced	generally thorough and balanced but awkward, needs more evidence, or better sequencing	thorough coverage of topic per assignment with balanced treatment of perspectives

Rationale: explains reasoning and provides evidence	little or no reasoning, explanation, or evidence provided	reasoning and evidence presented but not well organized or poor sources	good logical reasoning and evidence, but not integrated	logical reasoning integrated with authoritative references on key points
Graphics (if applicable) attractive & balanced lay-out, legible font	no graphics (may be appropriate in some cases)	graphics present but poor quality (illegible, inconsistent, , etc.)	well done graphics but too much or too little, and not on key points	well-designed and attractive graphics that simplify or summarize key ideas: original
Discussion: presenter is prepared to facilitate discussion and is receptive to feedback	little or no discussion	discussion but without clear organization or purpose	prepared discussion questions	prepared questions on key areas, and responsive to and elicit participant reaction and questions
Reflection: presenter can identify what he/ she would do differently to improve	little or no reflection	ask for feedback; some defensiveness	ask for feedback and clarify responses; generally non-defensive	request feedback, clarify responses and link to performance changes: positive

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(Chapter 12 and Appendix B, *Teaching at Delaware State University, A Guide for Faculty, Academic Staff and Teaching Assistants 2015-16*, Center for Teaching and Learning)