

# Rubrics

## What is a rubric?

A rubric is “a coherent set of criteria for students' work that includes descriptions of levels of performance quality on the criteria” (Brookhart, 2013, p. 4).

Put another way, a rubric is an assessment tool that clearly outlines the component parts of an assignment and describes in detail what various level(s) of performance related to those assignment components look like.

Rubrics articulate clearly the expectations for an assignment by listing all the components that will be assessed as well as describing what performance looks like at various levels (e.g. what an “A” level paper includes). Rubrics provide clarification for students and graders around what the differences between an “A” level assignment and a “B” or “C” level are by using descriptive language.

## Types of Rubrics

There are several types of rubrics that can be used in assessment and evaluation of student work. Choosing which rubric type to use will depend on both the details of the assignment/task you have set for your students as well as the type of feedback you will provide students and the purpose of the assessment.

When designing a rubric for an assignment *three elements should be detailed*. Where you place these elements will depend on the kind of rubric you are making. For example, in a holistic rubric the assignment criteria and criteria description are presented in the same space.

- 1) Assignment criteria: names the required elements of an assignment, should be clear and distinct (e.g. critical thinking, research, style and formatting, content knowledge)
- 2) Levels of performance: identify the levels of performance and provide a scale for students (e.g. grade levels, percentage points, 5-point scale, excellent/competent/needs work, etc.)
- 3) Criteria descriptions: describes what the assignment criteria looks like at the various levels of performance (e.g. “competent” research includes reference to at least 5 secondary sources from academic journals, while “needs work” research makes reference to fewer than 5 secondary sources and/or references are from inappropriate sources)

## Holistic Rubric

Holistic rubrics are the most general rubric format. In a holistic rubric a series of scoring level are presented alongside an accompanying broad description of assignment criteria. In the holistic rubric assignment criteria are presented together. The levels can be represented through letter grades, numbers, or otherwise. What makes a rubric holistic is the presentation of assignment criteria through a single, or holistic, description.

See the example below:

Level	Description of Criteria
A	Describe what an "A" level version of the assignment looks like including all of the components that contribute to a student's grade (e.g. formatting, content, critical engagement, etc.).
B	Describe what a "B" level version of the assignment looks like including all of the components that contribute to a student's grade. Important here is to be clear on the ways an "A" and "B" paper differ.
C	Same as above for a "C" level assignment. Here you describe how a "C" differs from a "B" level assignment.
D	Same as above for a "D" level assignment.
Fail	Describe a submission that would fail to meet the minimum requirements for the assignment.

## Analytic Rubric

Analytic rubrics provide a detailed breakdown of both the components of an assignment as well as a description of performance quality at various levels in relation to each distinct component. This approach allows for targeted feedback to be provided to students regarding which elements of their assignment were strong and which elements needed work. It also allows for the breaking down of an assignment mark in a manner which reflects the weighting of various criteria against the whole assignment.

See the example below, based on an assignment worth 10% (or 10 marks):

Assignment Criteria	Score	Level A	B	C	D
Criteria #1 (e.g. Style and Formatting)	/2	Describe here what "A" level formatting looks like and what it includes.	Describe here what "B" level formatting looks like, what it includes and how it differs from an "A".	Describe here what "C" level formatting looks like, what it includes and how it differs from an "B".	Describe here what "D" level formatting looks like, what it includes and how it differs from an "C".
Criteria #2 (e.g. Content Knowledge)	/4	Describe how students can demonstrate "A" level understanding of course content in this assignment.	Describe how students can demonstrate "B" level understanding of course content and how it differs from "A".	Describe how students can demonstrate "C" level understanding of course content and how it differs from "B".	Describe how students can demonstrate "D" level understanding of course content and how it differs from "C".
Criteria #3 (e.g. Critical Engagement)	/4	Describe how students can demonstrate exemplary or "A" level critical engagement in this assignment.	Describe how students can demonstrate "B" level critical engagement in this assignment and how it differs from "A".	Describe how students can demonstrate "C" level critical engagement in this assignment and how it differs from "B".	Describe how students can demonstrate "D" level critical engagement in this assignment and how it differs from "C".

## Single-Point Rubric

A single-point rubric is like an analytic rubric in that it breaks down assignment requirements into various criteria and describes these criteria individually. Where a single-point rubric deviates from the analytic rubric is that it only describes one level of performance for each criterion, generally the single-point rubric describes a proficient assignment. When sharing a single-point rubric with students or a team of teaching assistants and/or marker-graders it is important to note what level of proficiency is described in the single-point rubric (e.g. are you describing an “A” level or a “B” level).

A single-point rubric places its description of assignment criteria in the center column leaving space on either side for descriptive feedback on the ways student performance either meet/exceeded the performance described or ways student performance needs work. You can label these in a variety of ways (e.g. meeting expectations/areas for improvement; areas of strength/areas of concern).

Single point rubrics are a useful tool for those seeking to provide students with robust descriptive and actionable feedback.

Example of a single-point rubric:

Areas of strength	Assignment Criteria	Areas for improvement
	<p align="center"><b>Criteria # 1 - Style and Formatting:</b> Describe here what proficiency in this criterion looks like for this assignment</p>	
	<p align="center"><b>Criteria # 2 – Content Knowledge:</b> Describe here what proficiency in this criterion looks like. How students can demonstrate proficient understanding of course content in this assignment.</p>	
	<p align="center"><b>Criteria #3 – Critical Engagement:</b> Describe here what proficiency in this criterion looks like. How students can demonstrate proficient critical engagement in this assignment.</p>	

## Levelled Single-Point Rubric

A levelled single-point rubric remains a single-point rubric in that it provides the description of a single performance level in relation to assignment criteria. In a levelled single-point rubric, however, there is a place to specify for students the level at which they performed for each criterion through a check-mark while also providing room for feedback comments.

See the example below:

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
<b>Criteria # 1 - Style and Formatting:</b> Describe here what proficiency in this criterion looks like for this assignment					
<b>Criteria # 2 – Content Knowledge:</b> Describe here what proficiency in this criterion looks like. How students can demonstrate proficient understanding of course content in this assignment.					
<b>Criteria #3 – Critical Engagement:</b> Describe here what proficiency in this criterion looks like. How students can demonstrate proficient critical engagement in this assignment.					

## Benefits of rubrics?

Creating and sharing a rubric when assigning a task or activity can have benefits for instructors, TAs, and students.

### For instructors and teaching assistants

- Increase transparency in the expectations are communicated to students (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013)

- Assists in grading consistency (can be shared with teaching assistants and/or marker-graders) (Reddy & Andrade, 2010)
- Less time spent on scoring papers and more time spent on providing substantive feedback (Selke, 2013)
- Student work that is well-aligned with the assignment goals (Selke, 2013)

### For students

- Clarified understandings of instructor expectations (Reynolds-Keefer, 2010)
- Lowered student anxiety around assignments (Kuhl, 2000; Wolters, 2003)
- Support student planning and self-assessment around course assignments (Andrade & Du, 2005)
- Used as a student-centered assessment approach a rubric may be shared with students in order to support their learning (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007)

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*“Rubrics are designed to help clarify and make observable that which is inherently subjective”*

*(Selke, 2013, p. 32)*

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## Considerations for using rubrics as an assessment tool

Rubrics are also a flexible assessment tool that can be used to both provide feedback and/or for evaluative purposes. Instructors and graders/teaching assistants can use rubrics as an assessment tool that provides students with feedback on their work and/or progress on course assignments. Rubrics can also be used by instructors and graders/teaching assistants to evaluate student work.

### Aligning your rubric to the assignment

Rubrics can be used as an assessment tool for a wide variety of assignments including, but not limited to, essays, concept maps, literature reviews, citation analyses, critical thinking, presentations, poster presentations, portfolios, reflective writing, portfolios, communication skills and more (Reddy & Andrade, 2010).

It is important to carefully consider what type of rubric is best suited to the assignment and the purpose of the assessment. As Mary Goggins Selke points out in her useful book *Rubric Assessment Goes to College* (2013) misalignment between task and assessment tool can make the task and its assessment unclear and frustrating for both student and instructor.

The following considerations may you to decide which type of rubric is best-suited for your assignment task.

Holistic rubrics may be best suited when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- there is need to assess multiple related criteria simultaneously</li><li>- student performance is to be assessed as a whole</li></ul>
Analytic rubrics may be best suited when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- the assignment criteria are to be assessed individually</li><li>- distinct components of performance on the assignment are considered evidence of proficiency in individual criteria</li><li>- ratings are to be provided based on various separate and discrete assignment components</li></ul>
Single-Point rubric may be best suited when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- the marker seeks to provide robust written feedback</li><li>- when it is appropriate/useful to provide feedback for students on both what they have succeeded on in the assignment as well as areas that require additional work/revisions/etc.</li></ul>

### Meaningful criteria descriptions

When using a rubric, it is important to ensure that your criteria descriptions are connected meaningfully to the levels of performance you have created. Avoid vague descriptions such as “good” or “bad” instead providing detailed information to the rubric user such as “critical engagement with course content demonstrated by...” Providing specific and precise criteria descriptions provides clarity for both students as they complete their work as well as graders as they assess student products.

### Rubrics as feedback method

Rubrics have been shown to act as useful tools for student learning (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Brookhart & Chen (2015) note that rubrics which detail descriptions of performance levels in relation to assignment criteria “confer benefits that simple rating scales or point schemes cannot; they function as the goals towards which students can monitor their progress” (p. 364).

Rubrics, and in particular the single-point rubric, can also be used in formative assessment. Rubrics are a tool that can be used to provide students with information about their progress and to support student development (Black & William, 2009; William, 2011).

### Accessibility and rubric design

An important consideration of rubric design is ensuring accessibility for all students. Consider the following when designing your rubric:

- Font and font size: make sure you are using a simple and sans serif font, 12-point or larger

- Spacing: ensure line spacing between consecutive lines of text is maintained, while reducing the space between lines of text may help you to fit more words in your rubric it can make the text inaccessible
- Simple table format: avoid nested tables and split cells within your rubric, do not use tabs or the spacebar to create columns of text use the Microsoft “Columns” layout feature
- Using colour within the rubric: ensure that colour is not the only way to convey information; when using colour in the document ensure that high contrast is maintained
- Use built in styles: use the Microsoft “Styles” to design your text, a screen reader will not recognize enlarged and bolded text as a heading, using the styles tool ensures a screen reader can identify headings and emphasis

## Converting rubric scores to grades

Questions about using rubrics in assessment and evaluation often center around how you translate the described performance levels into grades. There are many possible strategies for converting rubric scores to grades and ultimately you will need to practice several them in order to develop a system that works for you. Selke (2013) describes a series of possible methods in *Rubric Assessment Goes to College*, chapter 9. Another valuable resource on this topic is Stevens and Levi (2013) *Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning*, chapter 6. Both of these are available in the Centre for Pedagogical Innovation’s library in TH 136.

A second area of concern sometimes occurs when a student’s performance in a criteria area does not fit in a single performance level description. At times, you may want to indicate that part of the criteria was demonstrated in student work at one level while the other part of the criteria was met at a different level. When doing so, providing written feedback is useful to contextualize the decision.

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