

Using Rubrics to Assess Work

Rubrics are tools that can help you and the students to assess or evaluate student work. They provide guidance for the students when they have more complex assignments and can also help the students to learn how to improve their work.

What Are Rubrics?

Rubrics are “a set of criteria for evaluating student work or scoring tests. Rubrics describe what work must look like to be considered excellent, satisfactory, or less than satisfactory. In particular, rubrics are needed to minimize subjective judgments of performance assessments and essays” (*Ed Speak: A Glossary of Education Terms, Phrases, Buzzwords, and Jargon*, by Diane Ravitch [Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007], page 186.)

The Assessment Side of the Chart

Rubrics take the form of some type of chart. The top line of the chart contains point values for different evaluations that may correspond to your grading or point system.

Criteria	4	3	2	1
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In a four-point system such as the one described here and those we use in the teacher guide, there is an easy correspondence between the point value and the 4.0 grading system.

- 4 = A
- 3 = B
- 2 = C
- 1 = D

(One can either include the “F” on the rubric or have that be the known but invisible column. That would be the 0 point-value column. Space sometimes dictates whether you include the last column.)

The Criteria Side of the Chart

The first column on the left lists the criteria you will be evaluating with your rubric. Imagine that you have given a specific assignment like this:

Do a close reading of Genesis 11:1–9, the call of Abram and Sarai.



- Look up and define any person, place, or term that is unfamiliar to you in this reading, defining a minimum of four terms.
- Using the map of the Middle East, trace with a pencil the journey that Abram and Sarai took on their trip. Cite any relevant sources.
- Determine how far this trip was, in miles. Explain how you came up with this. Cite any relevant sources.
- Look up how far camels travel in a day, and then estimate how long Abram and Sarai would have traveled if they had done so by camel, taking into account that there was a group of them traveling. Explain your reasoning. Cite any relevant sources.
- Look up how far people can travel in a day in this area and estimate how long Abram and Sarai would have traveled if they had done so by walking, taking into account that there was a group of them traveling. Explain your reasoning. Cite any relevant sources.
- Estimate how far you could travel today by walking or camel riding from the place you live. Explain your reasoning. Cite any relevant sources.
- What did you learn from this exercise? Explain.

Creating a rubric challenges you to define what you mean by the different point values. We can tell a well-done assignment from one that is poor, but our students may not have that sense. This difference in viewpoint can lead to uncomfortable conversations like these:

Student: I did what you asked right here.

Teacher: You were supposed to give three supporting facts.

Student: The assignment paper didn't say this.

Teacher: "I explained this in class."

Creating a rubric for the assignment previously described would result in a chart like this:

Criteria	4	3	2	1
Assignment reflects a close reading of Genesis 11:1–9.	The assignment exhibits evidence of a close reading of Genesis 11: 1–9 because not only is there a good use of detail from the story but the assignment also shows additional reflection on the story.	The assignment reflects a close reading of Genesis 11:1–9 because there is a good use of detail about the story.	The assignment reflects a satisfactory but not close reading of Genesis 11:1–9 revealed by an error in the assignment.	Errors in the assignment indicate that there is not a close reading of the assigned text.



Four or more people, places, or terms are defined.	The four definitions are extremely thorough, and five to seven terms are defined.	Four or more people, places, or terms are defined in a complete way.	Three people, places, or terms are defined.	Two or fewer people, places, or terms are defined.
There is an accurate pencil-drawn connection between the beginning and end of Abram and Sarai's trip.	The journey is very carefully drawn with several interim reference points between the beginning and end.	There is an accurate pencil-drawn connection between the beginning and end of Abram and Sarai's trip.	The penciled line is accurate for the most part.	The line of the journey is either in pen or has been drawn inaccurately.
There is an estimated mileage and explanation for the estimation.	The assignment accurately determines the journey's distance and accurately reflects the problem solving used to find the route.	There is an estimated mileage and explanation for the estimation.	The estimated mileage is close, and the explanation is adequate.	The estimate mileage is off, and there is little or no explanation.
There is an estimated time for camel travel and for walking for this journey with explanation.	The assignment shows careful research and cites sources for the estimate given.	There is an estimated time for camel travel and walking for this journey with explanation.	The estimated travel time is close, and the explanation is adequate.	The estimated travel time is off, and there is little or no explanation.
There is an estimated time given for your travel from home using the same timeframe and mode of transportation.	The modern-day equivalent of this journey is presented accurately with some additional creativity.	There is an accurate estimated time given for your travel from home using the same time frame and mode of transportation and a good explanation for this estimation.	The estimated travel time is close to being accurate, and the explanation is average.	The estimated travel time is off, and there is little or no explanation.
There is an explanation of what you learned from this exercise.	There is a thoughtful reflection about what you have learned from this exercise.	There is an explanation of what you learned from this exercise.	The reflection is not expansive but is adequate.	There is a short reflection on learning, but it is inadequate.

Defining what you would like the students to strive for helps them to know specifically what they can do to succeed. It also prevents them from thinking you probably don't care much if they use pen or define only two people, places, or terms. A rubric not only teaches students how to do work well but also clarifies what is important.

Rubrics in the Teacher Guide



All the final performance tasks in the teacher guide have an accompanying rubric (see “Using Final Performance Tasks to Assess Understanding” [Document #: TX001917] in the Appendix). The rubrics emphasize that students need to demonstrate understanding of the most important concepts. Your focus may be different. Feel free to create your own rubrics, modify those provided in this teacher guide, or use those provided as is.

There are other learning experiences in the teacher guide where rubrics would be helpful. Examples include rubrics for group work, for self-assessment, for writing, for peer review, and so on. Luckily your fellow teachers have been generous about posting their rubrics online. A search for rubrics on the Web yields examples of rubrics, explanations about them, and tools for creating them.

