

## Rubrics for Experiential Learning

Rubrics are a great tool for any instructor to have in their arsenal of assessments. Despite the common assumption that all rubrics are the same, rubrics can be constructed in many different forms and for many different purposes. It is important to know the different types of rubrics and what purpose they serve. Although similarities exist between all rubrics, some differences make one type of rubric more advantageous than another in any given discipline, course, and assignment.

### What is a rubric?

A rubric is a comprehensive set of criteria used to assess students on a specific task based on a list of performance levels to measure its quality (Brookhart, 2013). A good rubric serves three purposes: (1) it creates a systematic way to evaluate students on content knowledge, (2) it provides quick and easy feedback to both the instructor and the students, (3) it measures teaching (Reeves & Stanford, 2009; Steven & Levi, 2013).

Rubrics consist of four parameters (Steven & Levi, 2013):

- 1 **Assignment Description** – This provides students with a full description of what the students must do to complete the task. This portion connects the assignment itself to the rubric. This will include directions, time limits, and criteria for the assignment.
- 2 **Scale Level** – Scales help to distinguish student work, from the most exemplary to the poorest quality. There are no well-established rules on the number of levels, but some recommendations include a range between 3 and 6 levels for analytic rubrics (Arter & McTighe, 2001, p. 31).
- 3 **Dimensions** – The dimensions of the rubric outline the desired skills the course instructor expects the students to demonstrate in the assignment. Each dimension must be linked and mapped back to the course, program, or institutional learning outcomes.
- 4 **Dimension Criteria** – The dimension criteria differentiates the quality of work between each scale level of each dimension. This section of the rubric allows instructors to compare what is expected of the students and what the students have produced.

As shown in **Figure 1**, a rubric forms a table that allows for instructors to quickly analyze student work based on the criteria listed and offer rapid feedback on student performance:

	Title		
Assignment Descriptions	Scale Level 1	Scale Level 2	Scale Level 3
Dimension 1	Dimension Criteria	...	
Dimension 2	...		
Dimension 3			
Dimension 4			

**Figure 1:** Basic table of analytic rubric

## Why use a rubric?

Rubrics have fast become the assessment tool faculty use to evaluate student learning in experiential learning classrooms, but why do so many faculty rely on rubrics to measure student learning?

Rubrics have *flexibility* and *adaptability* that few other assessment tools possess. When used correctly, rubrics have been shown to “provide timely feedback, prepare students to use detailed feedback, encourage critical thinking, refine teaching methods, and facilitate communication with others” (Stevens & Levi, 2013, p. 28).

Research has shown that timely feedback facilitates learning (Black & Williams, 1998). In fact, feedback is most effective when it is given back to the students soon after the assignment is completed (Stevens & Levi, 2013). This is because the assignment is still fresh in the students’ minds. Students are more likely to accept and use the feedback in future assignments and class activities.

Rubrics also allow the instructor to identify the areas that students need the most improvement. Over time, if similar rubrics are used through the semester, instructors can easily map patterns of growth and regression in student work. This allows faculty to make the necessary changes needed within their pedagogy and/or emphasize greater attention to students’ weaker areas.

One way to ensure that students are meeting the criteria is to discuss the rubric in class. If students are aware of what is required from them before they begin the assignment, then they are less likely to stumble into common pitfalls. Stevens and Levi (2013) note that a class discussion when a rubric is first introduced to the students can “promote scholarly critical thinking”.

Instructors find that when rubrics are implemented and constructed correctly, they can be very powerful tools. Rubrics result in an easier grading process and provide timely feedback for students. When rubrics are tracked over time, instructors can easily find holes in the student learning and their own teaching. Conversely, rubrics show areas of strength and growth in student learning. However, in order to identify these strengths and weaknesses effectively, the correct rubric must be used and constructed for it to be of value.

## Types of Rubrics

There are various types of rubrics that can be used to assess student work. They allow instructors to make judgements and decisions on what students are learning in relation to the learning outcomes. In the following pages, four types of rubrics will be discussed: **analytic**, **holistic**, **checklists**, and **scoring guides**.

**Analytic Rubrics** contain the rubric dimensions in the left most column, the scale levels running across the top of the table and a list of corresponding criteria that serve as the dimension criteria of the rubric (**Figure 2**). This is often the most difficult and time consuming rubric to construct. However, instructors find that this rubric is the most robust that allows instructors to save time on grading large assignments with multiple outcomes.

### Collaboration in a Service-Learning Project

Students will work in a group of four to begin brainstorming and research effective ways to promote diversity at the local community center. Write a 4 - 5 reflective paper on your experience on the group dynamics. How did you work effectively with your peers and community members? How were issues and disagreements resolved?

Objective	4 - Advanced	3 - Accomplished	2 - Developing	1 - Beginner
<b>Facilitates the contributions of team members</b>	Engages team members in ways that facilitate their contributions to meetings by both constructively building upon or synthesizing the contributions of others, as well as noticing when someone is not participating and inviting them to engage.	Engages team members in ways that facilitate their contributions to meetings by constructively building upon or synthesizing the contributions of others.	Engages team members in ways that facilitate their contributions to meetings by restating the views of other team members and/or asking questions for clarification.	Engages team members by taking turns and listening to others without interrupting.
<b>Contributes to team meetings</b>	Helps the team move forward by articulating the merits of alternative ideas or proposals.	Offers alternative solutions or courses of action that build on the ideas of others.	Offers new suggestions to advance the work of the group.	Shares ideas but does not advance the work of the group.
<b>Communicates with others</b>	Tailors communication strategies to effectively listen and respond to the diverse perspectives of others.	Frequently shows the ability to effectively listen and respond to the diverse perspectives of others.	Occasionally shows the ability to effectively listen and respond to the diverse perspectives of others.	Rarely shows the ability to effectively listen and respond to the diverse perspectives of others.
<b>Individual contributes outside team meetings</b>	Completes all assigned tasks by deadline; work accomplished is thorough, comprehensive, and advances the project. Proactively helps other team members complete their assigned tasks to a similar level of excellence.	Completes all assigned tasks by deadline; work accomplished is thorough, comprehensive, and advances the project.	Completes all assigned tasks by deadline; work accomplished advances the project.	Completes all assigned tasks by deadline.
<b>Works within group contexts/structures</b>	Demonstrates ability and commitment to collaboratively work across and within group contexts and structures to achieve a common aim.	Often demonstrates ability and commitment to work actively within group contexts and structures to achieve a common aim.	Occasionally demonstrates ability and commitment to work actively within group contexts and structures to achieve a common aim.	Demonstrates some ability to identify intentional ways to participate in group contexts and structures.

**Figure 2:** An example of an analytical rubric for collaboration. Adapted from AAC&U (2009).

**Holistic Rubrics** contain a full scale (typically, 1 to 4) and the corresponding dimension criteria for each level (**Figure 3**). However, the scale pertains to one dimension of the assignment. Effectively, the instructor rates the students on one element of the assignment. These are typically used in presentations or on assignments where a particular feature is emphasized.

### Collaboration in a Service-Learning Project

The student communicates with others in a group context:

- 4 (Advanced)** - Tailors communication strategies to effectively listen and respond to the diverse perspectives of others. Demonstrates ability and commitment to collaboratively work across and within group contexts and structures to achieve a common aim.
- 3 (Accomplished)** - Frequently shows the ability to effectively listen and respond to the diverse perspectives of others. Often demonstrates ability and commitment to work actively within group contexts and structures to achieve a common aim.
- 2 (Developing)** - Occasionally shows the ability to effectively listen and respond to the diverse perspectives of others. Occasionally demonstrates ability and commitment to work actively within group contexts and structures to achieve a common aim.
- 1 (Beginner)** - Rarely shows the ability to effectively listen and respond to the diverse perspectives of others. Demonstrates some ability to identify intentional ways to participate in group contexts and structures.

**Figure 3:** An example of a holistic rubric for a service-learning project. Adapted from AAC&U (2009).

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**Checklists** serve as an easy way to quickly check that students are meeting the basic criteria of the project (**Figure 4**). These are perfect for yes and no type criteria. They also offer students a quick and easy way to do a self-assessment of whether they are meeting the learning outcomes and expectations of the project.

### Collaboration in a Service-Learning Project

The student fosters constructive team climate through the following:

- Treats team members respectfully by being polite and constructive in communication.
- Uses positive vocal or written tone, facial expressions, and/or body language to convey a positive attitude about the team and its work.
- Motivates teammates by expressing confidence about the importance of the task and the team's ability to accomplish it.
- Provides assistance and/or encouragement to team members.

**Figure 4:** An example of a checklist for a service-learning project. Adapted from AAC&U (2009).

**Scoring guide rubrics** contain only the criterion for the highest level of work (**Figure 5**). The instructor assesses the students on each established dimension of the rubric. Students are judged on the highest level of work. If students fall short of the highest level, the instructor can pinpoint the areas of weakness and make comments on what was unsatisfactory, what needs to be improved, and, possibly, how they can improve these weaknesses. This type of rubric is well suited for oral presentations, as they provide quick and well-organized grading when the work is done well.

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Objective	Criteria	Comments
Faciliates the contributions of team members	Engages team members in ways that facilitate their contributions to meetings by both constructively building upon or synthesizing the contributions of others as well as noticing when someone is not participating and inviting them to engage.	
Contributes to team meetings	Helps the team move forward by articulating the merits of alternative ideas or proposals.	
Communicates with others	Tailors communication strategies to effectively listen and respond to the diverse perspectives of others.	
Individual contributions outside team meetings	Completes all assigned tasks by deadline; work accomplished is thorough, comprehensive, and advances the project. Proactively helps other team members complete their assigned tasks to a similar level of excellence.	
Works within group contexts/ structures	Demonstrates ability and commitment to collaboratively work across and within group contexts and structures to achieve a common aim.	

**Figure 5:** An example of a scoring guide rubric. Notice that only the highest level of criteria is listed and comment section is included. The comment section should provide extra feedback if the students did not achieve certain parts of the criterion. Adapted from AAC&U (2009).

# How to build and modify a rubric

Constructing a rubric is not an easy task, however, the rewards of creating your own, well-constructed rubric will be well worth the time. As you become more accustomed to building and modifying rubrics, the process will become easier.

Stevens and Levi (2013) suggest four stages to begin the process of creating your own rubrics:

- 1 Stage One: Reflection** – In the first stage of constructing a rubric, you need to reflect on what you want the students to know when the assignment is complete, the purpose of the assignment, and your expectations of the students.
- 2 Stage 2: Listing** – In the second stage, you will begin to define the very specific details of the assignment. Begin by identifying what the highest level of achievement would be for each description. Write all of these on sticky notes, one per note. This way, at the end of Stage 2, you have a group of the learning objectives for the project, as well as clearly defined descriptions of what the “best” product would look like. If you use sticky notes to compile your list and descriptors, Stage 3 will be easier.
- 3 Stage 3: Grouping** – Once you have identified and prioritized the details from the list stage, you will begin grouping your sticky notes into categories. For instance, sticky notes that say “speaks clearly and precisely” and “maintains good eye contact with audience” can be grouped together under the heading “presentation.” The “presentation” group would thus become one of the dimensions of the rubric. Keep in mind that the groups should link back to at least one learning outcome, but no more than three.
- 4 Stage 4: Reflection** – At this point, the dimensions should be added to the rubric. Dimension criteria is formed at this stage. Begin with the highest expectations you wrote in stage 2 and grouped in stage 3. Use the language from these descriptions to write your first criterion for the rubric. This will be the highest level on your scale. If you wish to use a scoring guide, your rubric is complete. For those that wish to use a more robust rubric, your next step will be to write what you believe will be the bare minimum you would accept for the assignment. This will be the criteria for the lowest level. Use these two criteria to distinguish the middle levels of your rubric. If you use a scale larger than 3 or 4 levels, the dimension criteria can become more difficult to produce. Begin with a smaller scale and lengthen it if you feel that there is enough distinction to justify more scale levels.

The same four stages can be used if you choose to take an existing rubric and modify the rubric to fit your classroom needs. Comparing your dimensions and dimension criteria will allow you to know what needs to be modified and what can be left alone. It’s important to go through these stages before modification. It might be that the existing rubric does not fit your needs and modification would be more cumbersome than creating a new one.

# EXAMPLE OF REFLECTION RUBRIC

Adapted from Burton (1999)

## Self-Reflection of Journal for Service-Learning Project

The instructor in charge of the service-learning course must rely on the students' journal entries and other types of feedback to ascertain the quality and value of the service experience. Reflections the university student gives to the instructor needs to be insightful and succinct. By providing specific responses to written journal entries accordingly, you will see immediately where you need to improve your performance.

CRITERIA Score	EXCELLENT 4	VERY GOOD 3	SATISFACTORY 2	NEEDS WORK 1	UNSATISFACTORY 0
<b>Writing Quality</b>	Strong writing style with clear ability to express thoughts and point of view. Excellent grammar, syntax, spelling, etc.	Good writing style with solid ability to convey meaning. Very good grammar, syntax, spelling, etc.	Writing style conveys meaning adequately. Some grammar, syntax and spelling errors.	Difficulty expressing ideas, feelings or descriptions. Limited syntax. Needs to work on grammar, spelling, etc.	Considerable difficulty expressing ideas or descriptions clearly. Many grammatical, syntactical, and spelling errors.
<b>Description of Service-Learning Session(s)</b>	Clear incisive description that reveals situation and dynamics vividly. Excellent use of adjectives, metaphors, etc. Sensitive and perceptive.	Solid description that fully discloses the scene. Some interpretation of events, meanings, etc.	Factual description of sequence of events with little "texture" or interpretation. Clearly not fully developed.	Brief or general statement with few details. Little if any sense of meaning.	Little description at all, or brief, perfunctory statements glossing over the event(s). The reader has little idea what transpired.
<b>Insights &amp; Understanding</b>	Definite insights into issues and implications of events for self and students. Aware of increased complexity of issues and situations.	Some insights into situations, issues and personal change/growth. Making connections with implications for self or students. Some sense of complexity.	Positive experience at an intuitive or emotive level. Gains affectively from the 'experience' but insights based on conscious reflection are few or simplistic.	Doing the assignment. Neutral experience without personal resonance or impact.	Rigid attitude. Resistant to change in established point of view.
<b>Commitment &amp; Challenge</b>	Creates a personal plan of action or personal challenge based on commitment to class or insights into teaching.	Creates a 'next step' based on previous events or progress in teaching.	Committed to class through rapport or personal caring. Notes class' progress.	Somewhat committed to class and/or teaching. Unchallenged.	Not committed to the class or teaching. Definitely not exerting self to a level of commitment.
<b>Progress &amp; Leadership Development</b>	Significant growth or personal development. Evidence of synthesis of experience into goals or plan of action, with implications for the future.	Increased sensitivity, change of attitude, and awareness of connections.	Steady course. Incremental progress of which the teaching assistant may not be personally aware.	No progress. Repetitious experience and reflection.	Losing ground. Bored or frustrated. Negative attitude in reflection.

## EXAMPLE OF STUDY ABROAD RUBRIC

### Connection to Study

How will the study abroad you propose build on your education to date, as well as connect to your education when you return to campus? Rather than simply listing courses and other educational experiences, focus on their lessons for you.

4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clear and detailed articulation of the student's education to date</li> <li>detail on how study abroad will build on education to date</li> <li>anticipates appropriate follow-up activities upon return that are directly linked to the students' studies</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>general discussion of the student's education to date and the relation of the proposed study abroad to it</li> <li>anticipates some general ways in which the student can connect the study abroad educational experience to the student's studies upon return</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>vague description of the student's studies to date</li> <li>vague connection between study abroad and studies to date</li> <li>not clear how the student will connect the study abroad to her/his studies upon return</li> </ul>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>very basic description of the student's education to date</li> <li>no meaningful connections between the education to-date and study abroad</li> <li>no meaningful educational follow-up upon return</li> </ul>

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