

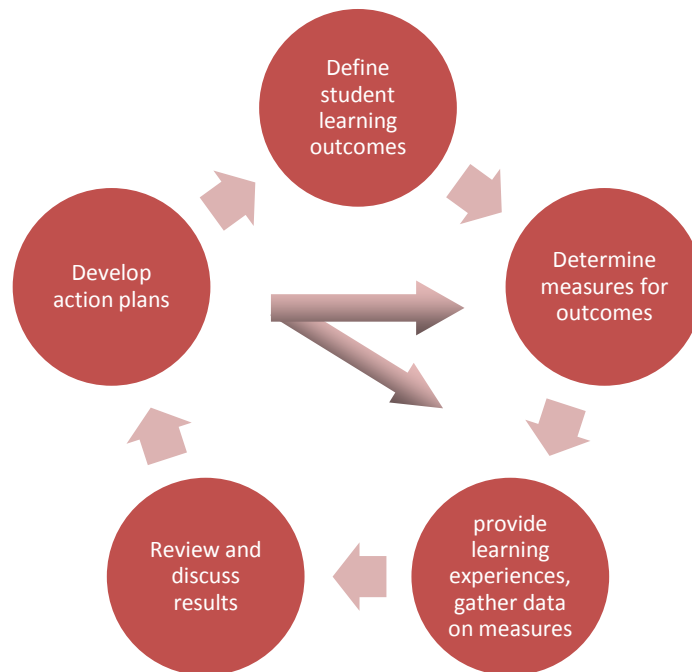
# Student Learning Assessment: Rubrics

This resource guide contains information on rubrics for use in student learning assessment, including:

- [Overview](#)
- [Elements of Rubrics](#)
- [Using Rubrics in Courses](#)
- [Developing Rubrics](#)
- [Using Rubrics for Program-Level Assessment](#)

## **Overview**

Student learning outcomes assessment is an ongoing process involving the systematic collection, examination, interpretation and use of evidence to document and improve student learning. Rubrics –**guides that articulate expectations for assignments and provide guidelines for scoring** – are a key aspect of developing effective assessment measures.<sup>1</sup>



## **Elements of rubrics**

Rubrics can be classified as analytical or holistic.

- Analytical rubrics are used to score student work on multiple criteria or dimensions, with each dimension scored separately.
- Holistic rubrics are used to score student work as a whole, yielding one holistic score.

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<sup>1</sup> Consult the [Assessment Website](#) for more information on effective measures.

Analytical rubrics are the focus of this resource guide. Analytical rubrics have dimensions/criteria, levels, and descriptors of products, as in the following template:

	Level 1 of Scale	Level 2 of Scale	Level 3 of Scale	Level 4 of Scale
Dimension/Criterion 1	<i>Description of a product that represents level 1 for dimension 1</i>			
Dimension/Criterion 2				
Dimension/Criterion 3				
Dimension/Criterion 4				
Dimension/Criterion 5				
Dimension/Criterion 6				

**Dimension/Criterion:** An aspect or element of the product or performance that is scored. *For instance, criteria for a rubric assessing oral presentation may include organization, delivery, use of supporting materials, central message, etc.*

**Level:** Level is an anchor point on a continuum (scale) into which student products will be rated. *For instance, levels may be: beginning, developing, intermediate, expert.*

**Descriptions of products/performance:** Descriptions are developed that characterize a product or performance at each level of each dimension. *For example, a description for a product at the expert level for the organization criterion of an oral presentation rubric may be: “Organizational pattern (specific introduction and conclusion, sequenced material within the body, and transitions) is clearly and consistently observable and is skillful and makes the content of the presentation cohesive.”<sup>2</sup>*

### ***Using rubrics in courses***

There are several instances in which rubrics may be **useful** for a course assignment or activity. A rubric may be useful if:

- You find yourself writing the same comments as feedback on many students’ assignments.
- At the end of grading a set of assignments, you have a feeling that you may have graded the first ones a bit differently than the last ones.
- After explaining the assignment a number of times, students ask questions about “what you really want.”
- You are coordinating a class with several sections taught by adjuncts and you want to make sure grading on a key assignment is consistent.
- Students frequently dispute their grades or express confusion by their grades on the assignment.

<sup>2</sup> From AAC&U VALUE rubrics, <http://www.aacu.org/value/index.cfm>

The potential **benefits** of using rubrics include:

- Clearly conveying assignment expectations to students.
- Providing a basis for addressing student confusion and reducing disputes.
- Facilitating consistency (reliability) in grading and assessment.
- Enabling more efficient grading.
- Serving as an instructional tool by promoting self-monitoring among students.
- Motivating students.

### ***Developing analytical rubrics***

There is not one correct way to create a rubric. Depending upon the circumstances, one or more of the following strategies may be useful:

1. Review relevant rubrics of colleagues, other institutions, educational organizations, etc. For instance:
  - The [AAC&U](#) and has developed a series of rubrics related to a variety of liberal arts competencies.
  - The [RAILS](#) project is devoted to Rubrics Assessment of Information Literacy
  - The [OpenEd Practices](#) project provides a searchable database that includes many rubrics
  - Rubric banks are also available from [Winona University](#) and [California State University at Bakersfield](#)
2. If you have used the assignment previously and have samples of student work:
  - Sort the samples into groups based on level of quality.
  - Make notes describing why you sorted the way you did.
  - Use these notes to determine criteria.
  - Review the samples again and, for each criterion, locate samples that are of different quality. Use these examples to write descriptions of the levels.
3. Share drafts with colleagues and students for feedback.
4. Approach rubric development as an ongoing process. Use your first draft. Take notes on what went well and what did not. Refine, refine, refine.

When developing **dimensions/criteria** ensure that:

- You have comprehensively characterized the task – that is, that you have included all necessary criteria. Ways monitor this include:
  - Asking an expert to evaluate the face validity of your rubric – would your colleague list the same criteria?
  - Comparing your criteria to those of existing rubrics assessing the same competency.
  - Try to craft a sample product that scores well on all the criteria, but does not really capture the “essence” of the task. (For instance, suppose your rubric for writing includes criteria of mechanics, grammar, and references but you forgot to include something about purpose or message. A student could do well on the rubric but never answer the question posed in the assignment.)
- The relative emphasis on dimensions is appropriate. If some dimensions are more important, make sure that they are weighted in the scoring.

Tips for determining the **number of levels** include:

- In general, four to six levels are considered ideal.
  - Fewer than four makes it difficult to distinguish performances.
  - More than six makes it difficult to comprehend distinctions (particularly for students).
- More complex performances require comparatively more levels than simpler tasks.
- When deciding on an odd or even number of levels, consider the effect of having a middle level. Will middle represent ‘neutral’ and is that acceptable for the task?

- Develop names for the levels that are tactful and descriptive. Examples:
  - Novice, developing, proficient, expert
  - Below expectations, approaching expectations, meets expectations, exceeds expectations
  - Unacceptable, developing, acceptable, exemplary
  - Beginning, developing, intermediate, expert
  - Needs work, fair, average, good, excellent
  - Unacceptable, marginal, meets standard, exceeds standard
  - Emerging, developing, operating, optimizing
  - Beginning, developing, advancing, accomplished
  - Beginning, basic, proficient, advanced, exceptional

When writing the **descriptions of the levels** ensure that the descriptions:

- Have face validity (make sense to students and other faculty).
- Are instructive to students. That is, the descriptions break down the dimensions of the task and articulate what quality is for each dimension.
- Reflect variations in *quality* of the dimension (rather than a shift in the *definition* of the dimension).
- Provide enough information to discern *important* differences, but not too much to encourage focusing on *trivial* differences.
- Are clearly defined, and avoid overuse of terms such as “fairly well,” “some,” or “substantial.”
- Are described well enough so that someone else could use the rubric and get the same result as you would.

### ***Using rubrics for program-level assessment<sup>3</sup>***

Rubrics can be used for program-level assessment as well as for assessment in individual courses. In fact, using rubrics at the program level can increase reliability and validity of measures. In addition, information from rubrics is often more actionable than scores or percentages.

Once a signature assignment and the applicable course have been identified for use in program-level assessment, there are two possible ways to employ rubrics:

- Option 1: Common rubric. A common rubric is used in all sections of the applicable course and by all faculty who teach. It is used first for grading of individual students. Then, each instructor reports scores for program-level aggregation.
- Option 2: Program rubric. A program rubric is used for program assessment but not for grading. In this option, individual instructors grade the signature assignment in whatever manner they choose. Then, each faculty member collects an anonymous random sample (e.g., 10%) of student products from his/her section of the course. Products are combined and scored (usually by a designated departmental committee) using the program rubric. These results are used as program-level assessment results.

### ***Additional information***

If you have questions or require additional information, please contact the Assessment Office: 108C Hepburn Hall, x3042, [sgerber@njcu.edu](mailto:sgerber@njcu.edu).

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<sup>3</sup> Consult the [Assessment Website](#) for more information on program assessment and on assessment measures.