Designing Effective Legal Research Rubrics: The Foundation for Successful Assessment

SEAALL 2018 – Nashville, TN

Speakers:
Carol Watson, University of Georgia
Katie Hanschke, North Carolina Central University
Zanada Joyner, North Carolina Central University
Rubrics?! I never give my students rubrics! That's equivalent to cheating! I might as well write their essays for them!

College students should understand that they're expected to perform certain undisclosed outcomes. The point of learning is to keep them guessing about the criteria, so they'll work harder in their desperation not to fail. Stress facilitates success.

Besides, if I gave them a rubric, I'd have to admit that I decide their grades with a dart board.
What is a rubric?
Definitions

“detailed written grading criteria, which describe both what students should learn and how they will be evaluated.”

“an assessment tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work or what counts articulates gradations of quality for each criterion, from excellent to poor.”

“a scoring guide that seeks to evaluate a student’s performance based on a range of criteria.”
WHY?
Benefits

• Consistency
• Aids Collaboration
• Establishes expectations for students early
• Expected learning outcomes mirror assessments
• Allows for more sophisticated analysis
• Objectivity
• And...
Your Sanity!
Challenges

• Time consuming
• Less flexible
  • Formulaic
• How to quantify?
Potential components of a rubric

• Performance Elements
  • Breakdown of the concepts/objectives being measured

• Category of Measurement
  • Example: Beginning/Acceptable/Exemplary

• Description of Category
  • Criteria used to measure

• Level of Attainment/Rating
  • Often use grade level descriptors
  • Value associated with each category
Types of Rubrics
Checklists

Assures that specific objectives are met
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interactive Presentation Checklist</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Management</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Did I use my time at an even pace, completing all sections of the presentation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Did I set up and begin promptly?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Was the flow of my presentation and material logical and smooth?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Were all the presented materials well-organized and readily available?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource use</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Did I use different media to present my information?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Did I use the most important media for the kind of information I presented?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience Awareness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Did I make frequent eye contact with my audience?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Did I vary my voice to suit my presentation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Did I present my material in a way that suited my audience?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rating Scales

Identifies a range of performance without specific descriptors
**Rating Scale Example: Computer Program Quality Assessment**

**Expected Learning Outcome:** The student will write efficient, documented, error-free computer programs that meet the specifications.

**Criteria for Success:** A maximum of one item is rated as “Below Expectations”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Computer Program</th>
<th>Below Expectations=1</th>
<th>Meets Expectations=2</th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations=3</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achieves what it was designed to do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operates without errors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source code is efficient</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source code is well-documented</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exceeds Expectations =** Performance is above the expectations stated in the outcomes.

**Meets Expectations =** Performance meets the expectations stated in the outcomes.

**Below Expectations =** Performance does not meet the expectations stated in the outcomes.
Holistic

Single score based on a broad judgment
Example Holistic Rubric

Articulating thoughts through written communication—final paper/project.

4. **Above Average**: The audience is able to easily identify the focus of the work and is engaged by its clear focus and relevant details. Information is presented logically and naturally. There are no more than two mechanical errors or misspelled words to distract the reader.

3. **Sufficient**: The audience is easily able to identify the focus of the student work which is supported by relevant ideas and supporting details. Information is presented in a logical manner that is easily followed. There is minimal interruption to the work due to misspellings and/or mechanical errors.

2. **Developing**: The audience can identify the central purpose of the student work without little difficulty and supporting ideas are present and clear. The information is presented in an orderly fashion that can be followed with little difficulty. There are some misspellings and/or mechanical errors, but they do not seriously distract from the work.

1. **Needs Improvement**: The audience cannot clearly or easily identify the central ideas or purpose of the student work. Information is presented in a disorganized fashion causing the audience to have difficulty following the author's ideas. There are many misspellings and/or mechanical errors that negatively affect the audience's ability to read the work.
Specific levels of performance for individual criteria
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Elements</th>
<th>Needs Improvement (1)</th>
<th>Developing (2)</th>
<th>Sufficient (3)</th>
<th>Above Average (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarity (Thesis supported by relevant information and ideas.)</td>
<td>The purpose of the student work is not well-defined. Central ideas are not focused to support the thesis. Thoughts appear disconnected.</td>
<td>The central purpose of the student work is identified. Ideas are generally focused in a way that supports the thesis.</td>
<td>The central purpose of the student work is clear and ideas are almost always focused in a way that supports the thesis. Relevant details illustrate the author’s ideas.</td>
<td>The central purpose of the student work is clear and supporting ideas always are always well-focused. Details are relevant, enrich the work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization (Sequencing of elements/ideas)</td>
<td>Information and ideas are poorly sequenced (the author jumps around). The audience has difficulty following the thread of thought.</td>
<td>Information and ideas are presented in an order that the audience can follow with minimum difficulty.</td>
<td>Information and ideas are presented in a logical sequence which is followed by the reader with little or no difficulty.</td>
<td>Information and ideas are presented in a logical sequence which flows naturally and is engaging to the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanics (Correctness of grammar and spelling)</td>
<td>There are five or more misspellings and/or systematic grammatical errors per page or 8 or more in the entire document. The readability of the work is seriously hampered by errors.</td>
<td>There are no more than four misspellings and/or systematic grammatical errors per page or six or more in the entire document. Errors distract from the work.</td>
<td>There are no more than three misspellings and/or grammatical errors per page and no more than five in the entire document. The readability of the work is minimally interrupted by errors.</td>
<td>There are no more than two misspelled words or grammatical errors in the document.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overview: How to Create a Rubric

1. Identify the skills, knowledge and understanding you want students to demonstrate
2. What type of rubric will you use?
3. Determine how many levels
4. Define criteria
5. Write descriptors
Identify Skills or Knowledge to be Assessed
Select Type of Rubric

• Rating Scale
• Analytic
• Holistic
• Check List
Criteria, Descriptors & Levels
Levels

- 1, 2, 3, 4
- Exemplary, Proficient, Acceptable, Unacceptable
- Substantially Developed, Mostly Developed, Developed, Underdeveloped
- Distinguished, Proficient, Intermediate, Novice
- Exemplary, Accomplished, Developing, Beginning
- Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Poor, Unacceptable
Criteria

- What are the characteristics of the final product?
- What steps are required for the assignment?
- Be sure the criteria can be measured
- Is the criteria important and essential?
GOAL: Describe what success looks like at any given level for each criterion

1. Describe highest level with words such as “all,” “completely,” or “thoroughly”
2. Describe lowest level by using opposite words such as “none,” “missing,” “does not include,” or “few”
3. Fill in middle level by using words such as “most,” “some but not all,” or “several”
Writing Descriptors

• Avoid use of words that connote value judgments in these commentaries, such as "creative" or "good”

• Try describing A/B/C work

• Use parallel language

• Keep descriptors brief and understandable
Helpful Descriptor Words

• (in)Complete
• (in)Accurate
• Detailed, Thorough
• Subtle, Sophisticated
• Synthesizes, Integrates
• Relevant
• Applies

• Analyzes
• Minor/Major conceptual errors
• Complexity of thought
• Clarity
• Well-documented, Well-supported
• Organized
Online Tools – https://quickrubric.com

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rubric Title</th>
<th>Rubric Description and Instructions</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubric Title</td>
<td>Edit Me</td>
<td>No Score</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria/Topic</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33 Points</td>
<td>25 Points</td>
<td>17 Points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Edit Me</td>
<td>Edit Me</td>
<td>Edit Me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(× ▼)
Online Tools – http://rubric-maker.com

### Legal Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Component**
- **Custom Component**
- **Description**

- **Clear everything in this row**

- **Checklist**
Advice from the field (or the trenches)

• Consistency is important within the rubric
  • Language matters
  • Writing is messy and entries contain spelling errors, pages are out of order or missing v. Few of the required elements are present

• Use templates with caution

• Considerations for sharing rubrics with students
  • Type, nature of assignment, difficulty of assignment

• Get feedback
Rubric Practice
What do you think?
References


• Dannelle D. Stevents & Antonia Levi, Leveling the field: Using Rubrics to achieve greater equity in teaching and grading, Essays on Teaching Excellence, Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education. 2005; 17 (1). Available at https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1087&context=edu_fac

