CREATING A GRADING RUBRIC

Grading rubrics are documents which indicate (1) the criteria according to which students' work is graded and (2) descriptions of various (3 or 4) levels of performance for each criteria. Instructors create these documents and, ideally, provide them to students and teaching assistants before the assignment is due. A rubric is thus a useful guideline for students, teaching assistants, and instructors. They can be constructed for classes in any discipline and for a variety of different types of assignment.

WHY USE GRADING RUBRICS

There are many reasons you might want to use a grading rubric. A well-constructed rubric functions as **an instructional tool** which guides students in developing their skills. It does so by clearly indicating what constitutes a beginner level of a skill through to an exemplary level of performance. This allows them to attempt to measure their own work against the criteria before submitting an assignment. A rubric also provides students with **structured formative feedback**: it gives them a sense of their strengths and areas for improvement as well as indicating how they can move from one level of performance to another. Rubrics also make the work of **grading less tedious** because you do not have to keep writing the same comments over and over as you move from one submission to another. Another useful element of rubrics is that they give multiple evaluators (i.e. TAs) a shared tool to use. This allows for more **consistency** across grading and provides specific suggestions they can give to students about how to improve their work. Finally, for some learners, the **visual** representation of grading makes it easier to understand and accept an assigned mark.

HOW TO CREATE A GRADING RUBRIC

Although rubrics may speed up the amount of time grading takes, they do take some time to prepare. If possible, you might want to spend a little time looking over other rubrics to get a sense of what would or would not work for the particular assignment you have in mind. Once you are ready to start, there are several steps to follow:

- Decide on the 3-6 most important criteria for a particular type of assignment. For example, communication style is a key criteria in an oral presentation.

- Once you have selected the most important criteria, consider the specific elements you would want to include in your description of each level of performance. In the oral presentation example, as you describe the quality of each level of performance for communication style, you might refer to several items: how audible the presenters were, whether they pronounced technical terms correctly, whether they explained all terms, whether they made eye-contact with their audience.

- Decide how many levels of performance you want to include. Ideally, there should be either 3 or 4 levels of performance. Using fewer than three levels means losing specificity and nuance in the descriptions. Yet, using more than four levels makes it difficult to write meaningful descriptors.

- Decide on the weight you want to give to each criteria and each level of performance. For example, a poor performance in a criteria graded out of four might get one mark (or a D) while an exemplary performance might get four marks (or an A).

- Create a table which includes the list of criteria in the left hand column, then add another three or four columns depending on how many levels of performance you have chosen. Across the top of

the table, you can label each column with a name (e.g. skill level: beginner, emergent, adequate, exemplary). For each criteria, assign a number and enter a description of the attributes describing each level of skill. In the oral presentation example, you might describe an exemplary level as follows: voice clear and audible, pronounced all technical terms correctly, clearly and correctly defined all terms, consistently made eye contact with audience throughout presentation. You could describe an adequate level as follows: voice mostly clear and audible, pronounced one or two technical terms incorrectly, defined most terms correctly, did not always maintain eye contact.

- Once you have finished filling in the descriptions in each square in the table, you have a rubric!

HINTS FOR CREATING A GRADING RUBRIC

- Where possible, look at examples. You can ask your colleagues or search for examples on-line. Check out www.rcampus.com (it includes a searchable database of rubrics and you can get a free membership to use the site to generate your own rubrics).

- Start with the highest level of performance for each criteria. This is usually easiest to describe and provides you a good starting point for being able to imagine a slightly less exemplary performance.

- Keep your rubric as simple as possible – too much detail is overwhelming for you to come up with, your TA to keep in mind, and students to take in.

- Do not go over four levels of performance.

- Make sure your criteria and descriptions are general enough that students can transfer their learning to the next assignment (or one for another class), but narrow enough to provide meaningful feedback.

- Avoid relative terms! In other words, do not describe a level of performance only in relation to another. If one level of performance includes the description "no grammatical errors," the lower levels should say "few grammatical errors" (not "more grammatical errors"), "some grammatical errors," and "many grammatical errors." The idea is to allow each student to understand their own level of performance against the criteria, not how they measure against other students.

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