I

WHAT IS A RUBRIC?

\Ru"bric\, n. [OE. rubriche, OF. rubriche, F. rubrique (cf. it. rubrica), fr. L. rubrica red earth for coloring, red chalk, the title of a law (because written in red), fr. ruber red. See red.] That part of any work in the early manuscripts and typography which was colored red, to distinguish it from other portions. Hence, specifically: (a) A titlepage, or part of it, especially that giving the date and place of printing; also, the initial letters, etc., when printed in red. (b) (Law books) The title of a statute;—so called as being anciently written in red letters.— Bell. (c) (Liturgies) The directions and rules for the conduct of service, formerly written or printed in red; hence, also, an ecclesiastical or episcopal injunction;—usually in the plural.

—Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, 1913

Rubric: n 1: an authoritative rule 2: an explanation or definition of an obscure word in a text [syn: gloss] 3: a heading that is printed in red or in a special type v : adorn with ruby red color.

—WordNet, 1997

Today, a rubric retains its connection to authoritative rule and particularly to "redness." In fact, professors like us who use rubrics often consider them the most effective grading devices since the invention of red ink.

At its most basic, a rubric is a scoring tool that lays out the specific expectations for an assignment. Rubrics divide an assignment into its component parts and provide a detailed description of what constitutes acceptable or unacceptable levels of performance for each of those parts. Rubrics can be used for grading a large variety of assignments and tasks: research papers, book critiques, discussion participation, laboratory reports, portfolios, group work, oral presentations, and more.

Dr. Dannelle Stevens and Dr. Antonia Levi teach at Portland State University in the Graduate School of Education and the University Studies Program, respectively. Rubrics are used quite extensively for grading at Portland State University, especially in the core University Studies program. One reason for this is that the University Studies Program uses rubrics annually to assess its experimental, interdisciplinary, yearlong Freshman Inquiry core. Because that assessment is carried out by, among others, the faculty who teach Freshman Inquiry, and because most faculty from all departments eventually do teach Freshman Inquiry, this means that the faculty at Portland State are given a chance to see close up what rubrics can do in terms of assessment. Many quickly see the benefits of using rubrics for their own forms of classroom assessment, including grading.

In this book, we will show you what a rubric is, why so many professors at Portland State University are so enthusiastic about rubrics, and how you can construct and use your own rubrics. Based on our own experiences and those of our colleagues, we will also show you how to share the construction or expand the use of rubrics to become an effective part of the teaching process. We will describe the various models of rubric construction and show how different professors have used rubrics in different ways in different classroom contexts and disciplines. All the rubrics used in this book derive from actual use in real classrooms.

Do You Need a Rubric?

How do you know if you need a rubric? One sure sign is if you check off more than three items from the following list:

❑ You are getting carpal tunnel syndrome from writing the same comments on almost every student paper.

❑ It's 3 A.M. The stack of papers on your desk is fast approaching the ceiling. You're already 4 weeks behind in your grading, and it's clear that you won't be finishing it tonight either.

❑ Students often complain that they cannot read the notes you labored so long to produce.

❑ You have graded all your papers and worry that the last ones were graded slightly differently from the first ones.

❏ You want students to complete a complex assignment that integrates all the work over the term and are not sure how to communicate all the varied expectations easily and clearly.

❏ You want students to develop the ability to reflect on ill-structured problems but you aren't sure how to clearly communicate that to them.

❏ You give a carefully planned assignment that you never used before and to your surprise, it takes the whole class period to explain it to students.

❏ You give a long narrative description of the assignment in the syllabus, but the students continually ask two to three questions per class about your expectations.

❏ You are spending long periods of time on the phone with the Writing Center or other tutorial services because the students you sent there are unable to explain the assignments or expectations clearly.

❏ You work with your colleagues and collaborate on designing the same assignments for program courses, yet you wonder if your grading scales are different.

❏ You've sometimes been disappointed by whole assignments because all or most of your class turned out to be unaware of academic expectations so basic that you neglected to mention them (e.g., the need for citations or page numbers).

❏ You have worked very hard to explain the complex end-of-term paper; yet students are starting to regard you as an enemy out to trick them with incomprehensible assignments.

❏ You're starting to wonder if they're right.

Rubrics set you on the path to addressing these concerns.

What Are the Parts of a Rubric?

Rubrics are composed of four basic parts in which the professor sets out the parameters of the assignment. The parties and processes involved in making a rubric can and should vary tremendously, but the basic format remains the same. In its simplest form, the rubric includes a task description (the assignment), a scale of some sort

Title

Task Description

	Scale level 1	Scale level 2	Scale level 3
Dimension 1			
Dimension 2			
Dimension 3			
Dimension 4			

Figure 1.1   Basic rubric grid format.

(levels of achievement, possibly in the form of grades), the dimensions of the assignment (a breakdown of the skills/knowledge involved in the assignment), and descriptions of what constitutes each level of performance (specific feedback) all set out on a grid, as shown in Figure 1.1.

We usually use a simple Microsoft Word table to create our grids using the "elegant" format found in the "auto format" section. Our sample grid shows three scales and four dimensions. This is the most common, but sometimes we use more. Rarely, however, do we go over our maximum of five scale levels and six to seven dimensions.

In this chapter, we will look at the four component parts of the rubric and, using an oral presentation assignment as an example, develop the above grid *part-by-part* until it is a useful grading tool (a usable rubric) for the professor and a clear indication of expectations and actual performance for the student.

Part-by-Part Development of a Rubric

Part 1: Task Description

The task description is almost always originally framed by the instructor and involves a "performance" of some sort by the student. The task can take the form of a specific assignment, such as a paper, a poster, or a presentation. The task can also apply to overall behavior, such as participation, use of proper lab protocols, and behavioral expectations in the classroom.

We place the task description, usually cut and pasted from the syllabus, at the top of the grading rubric, partly to remind ourselves

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	Scale level 1	Scale level 2	Scale level 3
Dimension 1			
Dimension 2			
Dimension 3			
Dimension 4			

Figure 1.2   Part 1: Task description.

how the assignment was written as we grade, and to have a handy reference later on when we may decide to reuse the same rubric.

More important, however, we find that the task assignment grabs the students' attention in a way nothing else can, when placed at the top of what they know will be a grading tool. With the added reference to their grades, the task assignment and the rubric criteria become more immediate to students and are more carefully read. Students focus on grades. Sad, but true. We might as well take advantage of it to communicate our expectations as clearly as possible.

If the assignment is too long to be included in its entirety on the rubric, or if there is some other reason for not including it there, we put the title of the full assignment at the top of the rubric: for example, "Rubric for Oral Presentation." This will at least remind the students that there is a full description elsewhere, and it will facilitate later reference and analysis for the professor. Sometimes we go further and add the words "see syllabus" or "see handout." Another possibility is to put the larger task description along the side of the rubric. For reading and grading ease, rubrics should seldom, if ever, be more than one page long.

Most rubrics will contain both a descriptive title and a task description. Figure 1.2 illustrates Part 1 of our sample rubric with the title and task description highlighted.

Part 2: Scale

The scale describes how well or poorly any given task has been performed and occupies yet another side of the grid to complete the rubric's evaluative goal. Terms used to describe the level of performance should be tactful but clear. In the generic rubric, words such as "mastery," "partial mastery," "progressing," and "emerging" provide a more positive, active, verb description of what is expected next from the student and also mitigate the potential shock of low marks in the lowest levels of the scale. Some professors may prefer to use nonjudgmental, noncompetitive language, such as "high level," "middle level," and "beginning level," whereas others prefer numbers or even grades.

Here are some commonly used labels compiled by Huba and Freed (2000):

- Sophisticated, competent, partly competent, not yet competent (NSF Synthesis Engineering Education Coalition, 1997)
- Exemplary, proficient, marginal, unacceptable
- Advanced, intermediate high, intermediate, novice (American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages, 1986, p. 278)
- distinguished, proficient, intermediate, novice (Gotcher, 1997):
- accomplished, average, developing, beginning (College of Education, 1997)

(Huba & Freed, 2000, p. 180)

We almost always confine ourselves to three levels of performance when we first construct a rubric. After the rubric has been used on a real assignment, we often expand that to five. It is much easier to refine the descriptions of the assignment and create more levels after seeing what our students actually do.

Figure 1.3 presents the Part 2 version of our rubric where the scale has been highlighted.

There is no set formula for the number of levels a rubric scale should have. Most professors prefer to clearly describe the performances at three or even five levels using a scale. But five levels is enough. The more levels there are, the more difficult it becomes to differentiate

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	Excellent	Competent	Needs work
Dimension 1			
Dimension 2			
Dimension 3			
Dimension 4			

Figure 1.3   Part 2: Scales.

between them and to articulate precisely why one student's work falls into the scale level it does. On the other hand, more specific levels make the task clearer for the student and they reduce the professor's time needed to furnish detailed grading notes. Most professors consider three to be the optimum number of levels on a rubric scale.

If a professor chooses to describe only one level, the rubric is called a holistic rubric or a scoring guide rubric. It usually contains a description of the highest level of performance expected for each dimension, followed by room for scoring and describing in a "Comments" column just how far the student has come toward achieving or not achieving that level. Scoring guide rubrics, however, usually require considerable additional explanation in the form of written notes and so are more time-consuming than grading with a three-to-five-level rubric.

Part 3: Dimensions

The dimensions of a rubric lay out the parts of the task simply and completely. A rubric can also clarify for students how their task can be broken down into components and which of those components are most important. Is it the grammar? The analysis? The factual content? The research techniques? And how much weight is given to

each of these aspects of the assignment? Although it is not necessary to weight the different dimensions differently, adding points or percentages to each dimension further emphasizes the relative importance of each aspect of the task.

Dimensions should actually represent the type of component skills students must combine in a successful scholarly work, such as the need for a firm grasp of content, technique, citation, examples, analysis, and a use of language appropriate to the occasion. When well done, the dimensions of a rubric (usually listed along one side of the rubric) will not only outline these component skills, but after the work is graded, should provide a quick overview of the student's strengths and weaknesses in each dimension.

Dimension need not and should not include any description of the quality of the performance. "Organization," for example, is a common dimension, but not "Good Organization." We leave the question of the quality of student work within that dimension to the scale and the description of the dimension, as illustrated in Part 4 of the rubric development.

Breaking up the assignment into its distinct dimensions leads to a kind of task analysis with the components of the task clearly identified. Both students and professors find this useful. It tells the student much more than a mere task assignment or a grade reflecting only the finished product. Together with good descriptions, the dimensions of a rubric provide detailed feedback on specific parts of the assignment and how well or poorly those were carried out. This is especially useful in assignments such as our oral presentation example in which many different dimensions come into play, as shown in Figure 1.4, where the dimensions, Part 3 of the rubric, are highlighted on page 11.

Part 4: Description of the Dimensions

Dimensions alone are all-encompassing categories, so for each of the dimensions, a rubric should also contain at the very least a description of the highest level of performance in that dimension. A rubric that contains only the description of the highest level of performance is called a scoring guide rubric and is shown in Figure 1.5 on page 12.

Scoring guide rubrics allow for greater flexibility and the personal touch, but the need to explain in writing where the student has failed

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	Excellent	Competent	Needs work
Knowledge/understanding 20%/20 points			
Thinking/inquiry 30%/30 points			
Communication 20%/20 points			
Use of visual aids 20%/20 points			
Presentation skills 10%/10 points			

Figure 1.4   Part 3: Dimensions.

to meet the highest levels of performance does increase the time it takes to grade using scoring guide rubrics.

For most tasks, we prefer to use a rubric that contains at least three scales and a description of the most common ways in which students fail to meet the highest level of expectations. Figure 1.6 illustrates the rubric with three levels on the scale that was actually used for grading the "Changing Communities in Our City" assignment. Note how the next level down on the scale indicates the difference between that level of performance and the ideal, whereas the last level places the emphasis on what might have been accomplished but was not. This puts the emphasis not on the failure alone, but also on the possibilities. This final rubric on page 13 emphasizes Part 4 of rubric development for an oral presentation with the descriptions of the dimensions highlighted.

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	Criteria	Comments	Points
Knowledge/ understanding 20%	The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail to support the student's thesis. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.		
Thinking/ inquiry 30%	The presentation is centered around a thesis, which shows a highly developed awareness of historiographic or social issues and a high level of conceptual ability.		
Communication 20%	The presentation is imaginative and effective in conveying ideas to the audience. The presenter responds effectively to audience reactions and questions.		
Use of visual aids 20%	The presentation includes appropriate and easily understood visual aids, which the presenter refers to and explains at appropriate moments in the presentation.		
Presentation skills 10%	The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard, using eye contact, a lively tone, gestures, and body language to engage the audience.		

Figure 1.5   Part 4: Scoring guide rubric: Description of dimensions at highest level of performance.

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	Excellent	Competent	Needs work
Knowledge/ understanding 20%	The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail to support the student's	The presentation uses knowledge that is generally accurate with only minor inaccuracies and that is generally relevant	The presentation uses little relevant or accurate information, not even that which was presented in class or in the assigned texts

aids 20%		
	visual aids, which the presenter refers to and explains at appropriate moments in the presentation.	
Presentation skills 10%	The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard, using eye contact, a lively tone, gestures, and body language to engage the audience.	

Figure 1.5   Part 4: Scoring guide rubric: Description of dimensions at highest level of performance.

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Task Description: Each student will make a 5-minute presentation on the changes in one Portland community over the past thirty years. The student may focus the presentation in any way he or she wishes, but there needs to be a thesis of some sort, not just a chronological exposition. The presentation should include appropriate photographs, maps, graphs, and other visual aids for the audience.

	Excellent	Competent	Needs work
Knowledge/ understanding 20%	The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail to support the student's thesis. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.	The presentation uses knowledge that is generally accurate with only minor inaccuracies and that is generally relevant to the student's thesis. Research is adequate but does not go much beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned text.	The presentation uses little relevant or accurate information, not even that which was presented in class or in the assigned texts. Little or no research is apparent.
Thinking/ inquiry 30%	The presentation is centered around a thesis, which shows a highly developed awareness of historiographic or social issues and a high level of conceptual ability.	The presentation shows an analytical structure and a central thesis, but the analysis is not always fully developed or linked to the thesis.	The presentation shows no analytical structure and no central thesis.
Communication 20%	The presentation is imaginative and effective in conveying ideas to the audience. The presenter responds effectively to audience reactions and questions.	Presentation techniques used are effective in conveying main ideas, but they are a bit unimaginative. Some questions from the audience remain unanswered.	The presentation fails to capture the interest of the audience and/or is confusing in what is to be communicated.
Use of visual aids 20%	The presentation includes appropriate and easily understood visual aids, which the presenter refers to and explains at appropriate moments in the presentation.	The presentation includes appropriate visual aids, but these are too few, are in a format that makes them difficult to use or understand, or the presenter does not refer to or explain them in the presentation.	The presentation includes no visual aids or includes visual aids that are inappropriate or too small or messy to be understood. The presenter makes no mention of them in the presentation.
Presentation skills 10%	The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard, using eye contact, a lively tone, gestures, and body language to engage the audience.	The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard but tends to drone or fails to use eye contact, gestures, and body language consistently or effectively at times.	The presenter cannot be heard or speaks so unclearly that she or he cannot be understood. There is no attempt to engage the audience through eye contact, gestures, or body language.

Figure 1.6   Part 4: Three-level rubric: Description of dimensions with all levels of performance described.

In this sample rubric, the descriptions are limited enough that when a student does not fit neatly into one column or the other, we can convey that fact by circling elements of two or more columns. Under "Presentation skills," for example, we might easily find ourselves circling a "using eye contact and a lively tone" in the "excellent" column, but circling "fails to use" and "gestures and body language consistently or effectively at times" in the "Competent" column. When the descriptions are more comprehensive and include more options, we often use boxes that can be checked off beside each element of the description to make conveying this mixed response easier and tidier.

Seen in its entirety, the rubric for this oral presentation may seem more of a task than simply grading students the old-fashioned way. Stripped down to its four components, however, and developed step by step, it becomes a template on which to place the expectations most professors have in the backs of their minds anyway.

Creating Your First Rubric: Is It Worth the Time and Effort?

Professors who regularly construct and use rubrics can create a rubric like the oral presentation rubric we used as an example in less than an hour, less if they are simply modifying an existing rubric designed for a similar assignment. For beginners, however, the first few rubrics may take more time than they save.

This time is not wasted, however. When we first began constructing and using rubrics, we quickly found that they not only cut down on grading time and provided fuller feedback to our students, but they affected our classroom preparation and instruction as well.

The first step in constructing or adapting any rubric is quite simply a time of reflection, of putting into words basic assumptions and beliefs about teaching, assessment, and scholarship. We put ourselves in the place of our students by recalling our own student days and focusing not only *what* we learned but *how* we learned it best—that is, what expectations were clear, what assignments were significant, and what feedback was helpful. That reflection translated into classroom practices as we became more adept at imparting not only our knowledge and expectations for each assignment, but what we hoped our students would accomplish through fulfilling the assignments we

gave. Further down the road, we realized our students were not like us and out assignments should acknowledge different student learning styles.

We even began to involve our students in developing the rubrics. In so doing, we found that, as Cafferalla and Clark (1999) concluded in their analysis of studies of adult learners, making the process of learning as collaborative as possible for our students resulted in better teaching.

Moreover, although the first few rubrics may take considerable time to construct, they do save time in grading, right from the very beginning. When the sample rubric used in this chapter was used in a class of more than thirty students, for example, the time taken to grade the presentations was reduced to the actual class time in which the presentations were given, plus an extra hour or so devoted to adding a few individualized notes to each rubric. We simply circled whatever categories applied during or immediately after the student presented. Aside from saving time, this meant that the grades and comments were handed back to the students the very next class period, while the memory of the assignment was fresh in their minds. Timely feedback means more student learning.

Rubrics not only save time in the long run, but they are also a valuable pedagogical tools because they make us more aware of our individual teaching styles and methods, allow us to impart more clearly our intentions and expectations, and provide timely, informative feedback to our students. Chapter 2 elaborates on these reasons for incorporating rubrics into your classroom instructional practices.

WHY USE RUBRICS?

Rubrics save time, provide timely, meaningful feedback for students, and have the potential to become an effective part of the teaching and learning process. In fact, the main reason we don't use rubrics more often is simply because most of us have been unaware of them. Rubrics were not part of our own experience as students, and most of us find that we often teach as we were taught.

However, there are many reasons to use rubrics, reasons having to do not only with efficient use of time and sound pedagogy but, moreover, with basic principles of equity and fairness. In this chapter, we will look at the pragmatic, pedagogical, and equitable reasons for using rubrics.

Rubrics Provide Timely Feedback

The timing of feedback can be a vexed point between professors and students. We struggle to grade each assignment fairly and individually; students then complain that work is not handed back soon enough. Sometimes it seems to us as if students don't care as much about quality feedback (detailed feedback they can act on) as they do about getting their work back speedily. Many of us interpret this to mean that all students care about is their final grade. Although this may be at least partly true, Rucker and Thomson's (2003) research on feedback and learning among college students suggests the students' demand for speed may be valid. After studying 104 students in education and communication classes, Rucker and Thomson concluded that time actually was a factor in making feedback meaningful and useful to students. Feedback was most effective when given as soon as possible after task completion in helping students make positive changes in their subsequent work. Taras's (2003) work with British

undergraduates also noted the importance of feedback both for learning and for developing personal habits of self-assessment. Ilgen, Peterson, Martin, and Boeschen's (1981) classic work went further to note an actual decline in the value of feedback as time between it and the task increased: "The longer the delay in the receipt of feedback, the less the effect of feedback on performance" (p. 354). Extensive research over the years has validated that feedback, especially timely feedback, facilitates learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

But how are we expected to grade 30 research papers in the space of 48 hours so that they can be handed back while the feedback will still do the most good? The answer, of course, is rubrics. Rubrics are wonderful time savers and, for many of us, when first starting to use rubrics, timeliness is the main virtue that justifies their use. Rubrics allow us to meet the deadline posed by student attention spans and expectations and to do it without sacrificing the need for that feedback to be detailed and specific to each student's individual case.

As many of us know, most students make the same or similar mistakes on any given assignment. The combination of mistakes may be different and individual, but the actual mistakes are much the same. As a result, when we seriously try to offer specific, individual feedback to each student in note form, we often find ourselves writing variations on the same themes on most of the papers.

A rubric eliminates this problem. In a rubric, we simply incorporate easily predictable notes into the "descriptions of dimensions" portion of the rubric. Then, when grading time comes, all we need do is circle or check off all comments that apply to each specific student and perhaps add a note here and there where the rubric does not cover what was done precisely enough, where added emphasis is needed, or where the connection between one or more aspects of the student's performance needs to be stressed. The use of the rubric does not, of course, preclude notes specific to the student that can be placed on the rubric, the paper itself, or elsewhere. The evaluative process of grading remains the same, as does the specificity of the feedback, but the time taken to transmit the feedback to the student is cut by at least 50% and often more.

The result is an easier grading process for us, and timely, detailed, often easier-to-read feedback for the student.

Rubrics Prepare Students to Use Detailed Feedback

It's a vicious cycle. Students *say* they want detailed feedback so that they can know what they are doing right so they can keep doing it, as well as what they are doing wrong so that they can improve.

Yet, as we often discover, students barely seem to read, let alone absorb, the extended notes on their work that took up so much of our grading time. In time, some of us may become discouraged and stop writing such detailed notes. If this continues, eventually we may find that our written comments are confined to terse statements such as "lacks cohesion, needs more references, organized, C+."

Students are understandably confused and discouraged by such laconic remarks, and here too, research bears them out. Brinko (1993) found that feedback was most effective when it contained as much information as possible rather than simply evaluating the level of the work. The same study revealed, however, that including a description of the highest level of achievement possible was also useful to students. Balancing these two findings is where rubrics excel.

The demand for an explanation of the highest level of achievement possible and detailed feedback is fulfilled in the rubric itself. The highest level descriptions of the dimensions are, in fact, the highest level of achievement possible, whereas the remaining levels, circled or checked off, are typed versions of the notes we regularly write on student work explaining how and where they failed to meet that highest level. The student still receives all the necessary details about how and where the assignment did or did not achieve its goal, and even suggestions (in the form of the higher levels of descriptions) as to how it might have been done better.

Moreover, because we discuss the rubric and thereby the grading criteria in class, the student has a much better idea of what these details mean. Even when we make extensive notes and students actually do read them, there can still be quite a gap between comments and student understanding of expectations. For example, students may not have been acquainted with terms such as "context," "analysis," or "citations" before the rubric discussion began, but by the time they receive their graded work back, such words should have clear meaning for them.

Rubrics can also come to the rescue when students ask for serious help on specific, ongoing problems in their class work. In this case, we have to try to determine if their work is improving overall. Except for numbers or letter grades in the grade book, we have found that we have little idea whether and how a student's individual work may or may not be improving over time, still less in what ways. So we ask the student to bring in all work done to date, preferably the copies with the grading notes on them. All too often, we discover the student has not saved those notes or even the work. Neither have we.

Students are, of course, no more likely to keep completed rubrics than they are to keep complete collections of their other graded work. This is why some of us keep rubrics separate from the actual work until we have had a chance to run the rubrics through a copy machine. Only later is the original rubric stapled to the assignment to be handed back. In this way, we are able to keep a complete record of each student's progress without much extra effort. Moreover, the detailed feedback on the rubric becomes a useful tool for analyzing precisely where a student's strengths and weaknesses lie.

Using rubrics for overall assessment as well as immediate grading meets the demand for greater detail in feedback and also for determining whether a student's work is actually improving over time. A quick scan across several rubrics can even provide detailed information about the dimensions in which a student's work is improving and is not improving. Moreover, because many of us are likely to use similar formats and dimensions in constructing rubrics, the accumulated record is easy to read for both of us. Laid side by side, three or more rubrics usually reveal a pattern over time. For example, if "Organization" is a dimension on several rubrics and the student continually gets low marks in that area, we immediately know where to start in giving meaningful, useful advice and suggestions.

Students are often surprised to realize that they are receiving the same levels of commentary in the same dimensions with great regularity. Such students might, of course, have also noticed that they were receiving the same comments in written notes, but the grid pattern of the rubric with its clearly defined dimensions makes doubly clear which areas need work. If a student is taking classes from more than one professor who uses rubrics, the pattern may become even clearer.

Using several rubrics of completed assignments, students can draw their own conclusions about the weaknesses in their work and set out their own plans for improvement as well. As Huba and Freed (2000) have pointed out, this is the ideal way that motivation develops and learning occurs: "Feedback that focuses on self-assessment and self improvement is a form of intrinsic motivation (p. 59)". Once students clearly see how to improve, they can focus on that. Then the rubric comparisons of student performance over time may begin to reflect a more cheerful pattern of steady improvement.

Rubrics Encourage Critical Thinking

Because of the rubric format, students may notice for themselves the patterns of recurring problems or ongoing improvement in their work, and this self-discovery is one of the happiest outcomes of using rubrics. By encouraging students to think critically about their own learning, rubrics can inspire precisely the pattern of "self-assessment and self-improvement" intrinsic to creating the kind of motivated, creative students we all want in our classes. Used in conjunction with good academic advising, rubrics can play a major role in contributing to students' development of a more scholarly form of critical thinking—that is, the ability to think, reason, and make judgments based on an independent, accurate accumulation of data and an open-minded approach to each new topic (Huba & Freed, 2000).

We all want students who demonstrate such traits. Most of us hope that our classes, regardless of discipline, will contribute to producing such habits of thinking and learning. We also know that students need to be challenged to think critically, and we know what kinds of assignments will lead to critical thinking in our respective disciplines. Yet research shows that many of us continue to give too many of the multiple choice tests and short answer writing assignments that we know produce mostly rote memory skills and low-level, unconnected thinking (Boud, 1990; Huba & Freed, 2000). A major issue here is time constraints imposed by the need to grade the results. Using rubrics speeds up grading time enormously, thus allowing us to assign more complex tasks leading to critical thinking. However, that is not the limit of what rubrics can do toward promoting greater emphasis on critical thinking.

The greatest way that rubrics begin to promote scholarly critical thinking is in the classroom discussion of the rubric prior to the students beginning the assignment. Many of the rubric's dimensions break down the components of critical thinking in an explicit manner, while the descriptions of those dimensions spell out explicit demands for the basic components of critical thinking. These usually include such basics as the inclusion of an independent thesis, supporting data that is accurate and relevant, thought processes and analyses that are clearly shown, and judgments based on an open-minded consideration of all of these components. For most professors, these demands are so basic that they are often left implicit in the assignment and so may be overlooked by the students until the assignment is complete. By passing out the rubric in advance and allowing time for these components to be discussed, we make our implicit expectations explicit. In discussing the rubric, we are modeling, in reverse, the criteria by which the work will be graded and also the elements of critical thinking that are important in almost every scholarly work in almost any discipline.

Not all components of a rubric relate equally to critical thinking, of course. Punctuality, grammar and spelling, and other technical skills can and do affect communication and therefore grading but are not themselves evidence of scholarly critical thinking. If we want our students to understand that some dimensions are far more important than others, we can communicate that on the rubric by assigning points or percentages according to importance of that dimension to the final product. For example, on the 100-point paper illustrated in Chapter 1, the dimension "Communication" got 20 percent (or 20 points) of the grade, whereas "Presentation skills" got only 10 percent (or 10 points) of the final grade and "Thinking/inquiry" pulled a whopping 30 percent (or 30 points) of the final grade. By including points that make it clear that those components that relate to critical thinking are worth more in the overall grade than the technical skills, a rubric communicates what is important in scholarship in a direct and visual way. Further classroom discussion of the meaning of these critical thinking components can also clarify and explain the habits of mind we expect our students to demonstrate not only for a given assignment or class, but throughout their college careers and, for that matter, the rest of their lives.

Rubrics Facilitate Communication with Others

Whether we think about it that way or not, most of us teach in collaboration with others. The most common "others" in our academic teaching life are usually teaching assistants of some sort. Other significant groups involved in teaching our students may include the staff of a university writing center, tutors or remedial teaching staff, adjunct, and every other professor from whom those students are learning. Rubrics allow us to communicate our goals and intentions to all these people, sometimes without us even being aware that communication is taking place.

Teaching assistants (T.A.s) are the most obvious "other" people involved with our teaching, particularly if they lead discussion or lab sections for the class or grade papers. Rubrics tell the T.A. directly and clearly what we expect from the students; what they should be focusing on in the small group work, the lab, or the seminar, and what grading criteria we have in mind. Sometimes it is useful to involve T.A.s in the construction of the rubric from the start, as T.A.s often have a clearer idea of the individual students' needs and level of comprehension (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of rubric construction with T.A.s and others). Moreover, because many T.A.s plan to become professors in the future, modeling the use of rubrics can affect their teaching practices later on.

Another group who can benefit from our use of a rubric are those who assist students with specific learning problems. The most common of these teaching collaborators is the staff of the writing center. As anyone who has ever worked in a writing center knows, students who are having the most serious problems with their writing are often the last people who can explain the details of the assignment; often the reason they are at the writing center is because they have problems communicating. Much of the time, the writing center staff wind up calling the professor simply to be sure they are not leading the student in the wrong direction. If the student arrives at the center with a rubric, however, the task assignment and expectations are right in front of the person working in the writing center, and most writing center staff members can easily decode the intent behind the details of the rubric. The same is true of math tutors, language drill leaders, and even computer staff who may be called on to help with analytical programs.

The next group who may find rubrics useful are new faculty and adjunct professors. These newcomers are often less distressed at finding themselves without a desk or a mailbox than they are about finding themselves without a clue about the departmental expectations for the classes they are about to teach. A review of past syllabi will show them the lay of the land and the overview of the content, and it will give them some idea of the assignments. However, a review of past rubrics goes further, showing the new faculty member or adjunct not only the assignments but also the expectations for student performance in the course and in the discipline. Armed with both past syllabi and rubrics, newly arrived faculty can feel they have as good an idea of what led their new department to create the course as they would have had if they had sat in on the original department meetings where the faculty spelled out the reasons for creating the classes they will teach.

The final group of "others" who may benefit from rubrics are professors who are teaching the same class or even the same students. Most of us have little knowledge about what our colleagues do in class, even when those colleagues teach in the same discipline or in related fields. Often this is because many of us value our own autonomy in the classroom and worry about violating that of our colleagues, but the truth is that knowing what is going on in closely related classes can be useful, both in avoiding redundant efforts and in understanding what students are being taught. Within departments, rubrics can be shared to determine whether or not there is consensus on what is being taught at each level, how it is being taught, and why.

Sharing rubrics can also reveal the degree to which grading is consistent. Professors are often startled to find out how consistent their teaching and grading really are. In a recent and local case, Portland State University professors who collaborated on a single rubric for a shared assignment were surprised and reassured to discover that their standards and expectations were not wildly out of line with those of their colleagues. For a few of us, of course, rubrics may reveal that we do grade differently from our colleagues. Rubrics cannot tell us what to do about that, if anything, but they can at least make us aware of the situation.

Rubrics Help Us to Refine Our Teaching Skills

How do we know if we are good teachers? How can we find out what we can do to become better ones? Standardized student evaluations are one source. Yet, the questions are often broad, and, therefore, difficult to apply. Moreover, because they can be used in faculty promotion and tenure, most of us are a bit defensive about them. Even in the best of circumstances, these evaluations only reflect the students' responses as to items about whether the professor was knowledgeable, an engaging lecturer, or well organized in running the class (Huba & Freed, 2000). Even the evaluations that actually ask students whether or not they learned anything may simply ask for the students' opinions on that topic. They do not provide actual evidence or reveal details of what students may or may not have learned.

In the same way that keeping copies of individual student rubrics can allow us to pinpoint a student's continuing improvement or weaknesses over time, rubrics showing student development over time can also allow us to gain a clearer view of teaching blind spots, omissions, and strengths. If, for example, the majority of students in several classes are showing weak results in the use of citations, this should be a wake-up call to us that we need to be talking more about how and why citations are important. If there is a pattern of problems regarding inadequate use of examples, this too can be pinpointed and corrected. And subsequent rubrics from subsequent classes should provide us with evidence as to whether or not our changed teaching strategies are working. Needless to say, such results can also be used to provide persuasive evidence of teaching improvement in applications for promotion and tenure (see Chapter 6).

Referencing overall rubric results in class can also be a wonderful way to address class problems without singling out any particular student or group of students. If, for example, fully half the class lost points on the "Reflection" dimension of an essay, perhaps they really do not understand what critical reflection means. Mentioning this as we pass the graded assignments back, and again as we begin the discussion of the next assignment, can not only cut down on the number of individual conferences we might otherwise have with students in our office, but it can also allow us to reach the student who is too

shy, too insecure, or too unaware of academic survival skills to show up in our offices. Discussing problems that a large number of students share with direct reference to the rubric not only provides a solid rationale for discussing a task after the fact, but also offers students a chance to see how they can and should be using rubrics in evaluating their own performance, preferably before assignments are turned in.

Whatever we choose to do with them, collected rubrics provide a record of the specific details of how students performed on any given task, allowing us to quickly notice and correct any across-the-class blind spots or omissions. They can also provide an unexpected pat on the back as we notice improvements across the board, or perhaps even evidence of teaching areas that need no improvement from the start. And for junior faculty, they can provide that evidence in a form that can be included in portfolios submitted for promotion and tenure.

Rubrics Level the Playing Field

In recent years, the numbers of minority first-generation students coming into universities has increased enormously (American Council on Education, 2001; Mellow, Van Slyck, & Eynon, 2002). Most of us have welcomed the change, noting the benefits of a more diverse student body on the educational experience of all students and the educational benefit for citizens in our democracy. Yet the more diverse student body also presents challenges, as shown by the proliferation of support programs for these students (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Rodriguez, 2003). Most of these support programs, however, deal with issues other than in-class learning, such as English language problems, financial issues, childcare, and time management. All of these issues impact class learning, of course, but issues specific to the classroom experience are left for teachers to deal with.

One issue that is specific to the classroom experience is that of "translation." We do not refer here to the fact that many of these students may have English communication problems, but to the fact that even native speakers of English may not speak the kind of English that is used in academia. In the past, many of our students came from college-educated families where such English was taken

for granted or went to preparatory schools where basic academic terminology was used and explained, which led to success in postsecondary institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002). Now, however, teachers must learn to communicate with students for whom the words we use in daily academic speech are a foreign language or at least a bizarre dialect.

Rubrics can act as wonderful translation devices in this new environment. Not only do they help such students understand what teachers are talking about, but they help teachers understand when and where our words are not being understood or, worse yet, are being completely misunderstood. In discussing papers, for example, we may be startled to discover that many students think "introduction" and "conclusion" are synonyms for "beginning" and "end" or that "critical thinking" means criticizing something. We may also not realize that our students do not understand the difference between a discussion and an argument or between an academic debate and a shout-down match. Similarly, some students may assume that "analysis" refers only to situations in which numbers are involved or to the analyses contained in secondary sources. The revelation that in an academic paper, for example, "analysis" most often means their own conclusions informed by data can be startling to them.

Above all, first-generation students are apt to think of education in terms of the concrete knowledge absorbed. The correct use of rubrics can alter their entire understanding of the task of getting an education by introducing them to whole new concepts such as critical thinking, argumentation, objective and subjective views, and the other academic terms teachers take for granted. Rubrics offer a way for us to pinpoint problems in communication and deal with them until we are sure that our students are actually speaking the same language we are. Then we can communicate our expectations in ways that go beyond merely knowing the content of the class, especially if the rubrics are discussed or even constructed (see Chapter 4) in class.

Such "translation" is not mere hand holding, because we cannot always assume that students will be able to figure these things out "on their own." The truth is, they never did it "on their own." Some students arrive with that knowledge already in place because of a privileged upbringing or education. Many of those who are now arriving in our classes lack that privileged past. Failing to address

this reality by keeping assignments vague and failing to spell out what we mean by the academic terms we use benefits those who have already had the advantage of growing up in college-educated households or attending preparatory schools. Pretending all students are starting from the same point does not assure equity in the classroom; it simply privileges those who were privileged already.

Few of us would ignore such inequity deliberately, but we may do so unthinkingly or accidentally. Rubrics certainly are not the only way to address these inequities, nor are they a panacea. However, they can and should be a major component in the ongoing effort to create more equitable classrooms.

Conclusion

Why use rubrics? This chapter provided six key reasons for constructing and using rubrics in our classrooms:

- Rubrics provide timely feedback.
- Rubrics prepare students to use detailed feed back.
- Rubrics encourage critical thinking.
- Rubrics facilitate communication with others.
- Rubrics help us refine our teaching methods.
- Rubrics level the playing field.

The incredibly useful and flexible rubric accomplishes many objectives for our own classes as well as for our students' overall university experience. In the next chapter, we will describe in detail how to construct a rubric from the assignment in our syllabus to its final form.

HOW TO CONSTRUCT A RUBRIC

Constructing your first rubric may seem daunting. Time consuming too. In this chapter, we will share some ways to make constructing useful, high-quality rubrics easier and faster.

First, we remind ourselves that rubric construction gets easier with time, partly because we get better at it and also because we often find ourselves revising rubrics we created for other, similar assignments. One shortcut to creating your first rubrics is to adapt the model rubrics provided in the appendix of this book and at http://styluspub.com/resources/introductiontorubrics.aspx to serve your needs.

Second, we break the task down into four key stages. These four stages apply whether you choose to revise an existing rubric or construct your own from scratch.

Four Key Stages in Constructing a Rubric

Whether you choose to construct your own rubric from scratch by yourself, with teaching assistants, with colleagues, or even with students (see Chapters 4 and 5), four basic stages are involved in constructing any rubric regardless of the number of people participating:

Stage 1: Reflecting. In this stage, we take the time to reflect on what we want from the students, why we created this assignment, what happened the last time we gave it, and what our expectations are.

Stage 2: Listing. In this stage, we focus on the particular details of the assignment and what specific learning objectives we hope to see in the completed assignment.

Stage 3: Grouping and Labeling. In this stage, we organize the results of our reflections in Stages 1 and 2, grouping similar

expectations together in what will probably become the rubric dimensions.

Stage 4: Application. In this stage, we apply the dimensions and descriptions from Stage 3 to the final form of the rubric, using the grid formats shown in Chapter 1 or in the appendix.

In this chapter, we will show each step in each stage of rubric construction in detail, using examples from both a freshman core course and a graduate seminar. We do this to show how rubrics are drawn from and integral to our overall teaching goals and methods of instruction and to suggest some of the adaptations that may be necessary in different disciplines and at different levels of higher education.

Stage 1: Reflecting

In Stage 1, reflecting, we reflect not only on the assignment but also on the overall course objectives for this particular class. Moon (1999) defines reflection simply as a "mental process with purpose and/or outcome" (p. 5). Whether it is called "reflection" or something else, this kind of focused thinking is a part of every discipline. Even though the way we reflect may be different, the purpose is the same. All of us journal, meditate, draw mind maps, create outlines, make lists, analyze data, synthesize results, or engage in any number of personal or professional forms of reflection. All of us reflect prior to beginning a scholarly task such writing or creating a new lecture or class plan.

Constructing a rubric requires reflection on our overall class objectives, the assignment itself, its purposes, the task objectives, and students' prior knowledge, as well as our own previous experience with this type of assignment. The kind of reflection we all already do is easily adapted to rubric construction.

To begin a fruitful rubric reflection for any level, we have found it useful to focus on eight questions geared toward focusing our minds on what we already know but may never have articulated:

1. *Why did you create this assignment?* Think back to a previous reflective period, the one you engaged in before or as you wrote your syllabus. Is this assignment primarily designed to push the students to absorb as much content knowledge as possible (e.g., an exam), to develop a learning skill such as critical

thinking (e.g., a paper or critique), or to involve students in some sort of experiential learning (e.g., a lab, workshop, or performance)?

2. *Have you given this assignment or a similar assignment before?* What happened the last time you gave this or a similar assignment? What questions did the students ask about this assignment before and after they completed it? Were you pleased or displeased with the general result? What particularly satisfactory results can you recall? What particularly disappointing results can you recall? Are there any changes you can make to the task assignment to improve your chances of getting the same satisfactory results and avoiding the same pitfalls?

3. *How does this assignment relate to the rest of what you are teaching?* In what ways does it relate to other assignments? How important is it to the completion of future assignments that students complete this task successfully? How important is it to your discipline or their scholarly lives as a whole that they do well on this assignment?

4. *What skills will students need to have or develop to successfully complete this assignment?* Do they already have such skills and need to develop them further, or are they starting from scratch? Is the class mixed in terms of their existing capabilities? What, if anything, do you want to do about their skill levels? Is demonstrating one or more of these skills more important to you than others?

5. *What exactly is the task assigned?* Does it break down into a variety of different tasks? Are one or more of these component tasks more important than others? How can/will you explain the breakdown and nature of these component tasks to the students?

6. *What evidence can students provide in this assignment that would show they have accomplished what you hoped they would accomplish when you created the assignment?* What different kinds of evidence might students use to demonstrate their knowledge and skills?

7. *What are the highest expectations you have for student performance on this assignment overall?* What does an exemplary product look like?

8. *What is the worst fulfillment of the assignment you can imagine, short of simply not turning it in at all?* Where have students fallen short on the completion of similar assignments in the past? What are some of the pitfalls you might help your students to avoid this time?

We find it helps to write down the answers to these questions, but whether you do or not, the answers should supply the "big picture"—that is, the context of the assignment in the larger context of the class and your overall objectives. The answers should help you decide what kind of rubric will best serve your needs and the needs of your students. They should also help you decide whether you will construct your rubric from scratch or whether one of your old rubrics or a model rubric from this book or elsewhere can be adapted. These answers should also generate ideas that help you construct a high-quality rubric that communicates your expectations clearly to the students.

Stage 2: Listing

In Stage 2, listing, we turn our attention to describing how to capture the details of this assignment. We ask ourselves what specific learning objectives we hope will be accomplished with the completion of this assignment. The objectives will vary according to the overall course objectives, the nature of the task, the grade level of the students, and our experience in giving and grading this assignment in the past. In particular, the answers to Questions 4, 5, and 6 regarding skills required, the exact nature of the task, and the types of evidence of learning are most often our starting point in generating this list. Your choice of key questions may vary.

Whichever questions you choose, the answers can be used to create a new list of the most important (to you) learning objectives you expect students to accomplish by completing the task. As with writing, lecture preparation, or other scholarly tasks, the initial lists are apt to be messy accumulations of half-formed and even repetitious ideas to be refined, reorganized, and probably added to as you progress.

Lists of learning objectives can vary tremendously, even in classes that seem very similar and that are taught by the same professor. In the

examples that follow, we have included lists from two rather similar assignments taught by the same professor: oral presentations comparing and contrasting Japanese and American film versions of World War II. One of these, however, was a group project for a freshman core class designed to promote basic academic skills and interdisciplinary thinking. The other was for individual presentations of a similar topic in a graduate seminar in history. The learning objectives vary because of the different grade and skill level of the students, the different formats of the assignments (group and individual), and the long-term goals of the two classes (skills in the former, content in the latter).

The list of learning objectives for the *freshman core class* looked like the list in Figure 3.1. Note that for freshmen, the emphasis is more on skills than content. As Perry (1970) and others have documented, students do not necessarily come to College with the skills to engage in critical thinking. Most also have limited experience with public speaking, scholarly discussion, or cooperative work. Yet to succeed in higher education, students need these sets of skills (King & Kitchener, 1994; Leamnson, 2002). Many new freshmen core classes

Stage 2: Step 1
Freshman Core List of Learning Objectives

Develop public speaking skills.

Work well together as a group.

Learn to organize data and build a logical argument.

Show an awareness of different points of view including those of the presenters.

Recognize and express individual biases and opinions without letting them dominate or distort the evidence.

Recognize and understand how circumstances and events surrounding the creation of the film affect its nature and content.

Compile and effectively utilize accurate and appropriate evidence to support all points.

Figure 3.1   Stage 2: Listing. Step 1: List learning objectives. List of learning objectives for oral presentation assignment in a freshman core class at Portland State University.

Stage 2: Step 1
Graduate Seminar List of Learning Objectives

Tie the film analysis into the overall history and historiography of World War II.

Understand and use basic theories of film as presented in the text.

Select or develop a coherent theory to further explore the film in a focused, thematic manner.

Understand how this film compares or contrasts with other films being discussed in this class, especially those we have already seen.

Include and address other critiques of this film, whether to agree or disagree.

Present the results in an organized fashion using whatever visual or audio aids are appropriate and useful for the benefit of the class.

Figure 3.2   Stage 2: Listing. Step 1: List of learning objectives. Learning objectives for an oral presentation in a graduate seminar at Portland State University.

like those at Portland State University were, in fact, developed in good part to teach such skills. The list of goals and expectations for this class shown in Figure 3.1 reflects the emphasis on communication and critical thinking skills rather than content.

The list of learning objectives for individual presentations in the *graduate seminar* was quite different, as shown in Figure 3.2.

The second list is undoubtedly more satisfying to the "academic" in all of us, but comparing it to the list for the freshman core serves as a reminder of why this list of learning goals is necessary. The professor who created both lists not only drew on her experiential knowledge of student abilities at different levels, her disciplinary focus, and her theoretical biases within that discipline, but also on her understanding of her departments (history) or program's (Freshman Inquiry) objectives. In making her list, she made the difference crystal clear to herself first, a great asset in making things clear to students and for assuring that the final rubrics assessed what she hoped her students would learn in each class.

Once the learning goals have been listed, you can add a description of the highest level of performance you expect for each learning

Stage 2: Step 2
Freshman Core List of Highest Expectations for "Develop Public Speaking Skills" Learning Objective

Clear introduction that sets out the thesis and organization of the whole presentation.

Maintains good eye contact.

Body language is expressive and appropriate.

Speaks loudly and slowly enough to be easily understood.

Modulates voice quality and tone appropriately; does not drone.

Uses humor and stories that relate to the topic to liven up presentation.

Does not fumble with the overhead or projector.

Not too many words on the overhead or PowerPoint projection.

Captions of overhead or PowerPoint show key issues and themes.

Handouts are clear.

Handouts show key issues and themes.

Figure 3.3   Stage 2: Listing. Step 2: List of highest expectations. List of highest expectations for public speaking skills learning objective in a freshman inquiry class at Portland State University.

goal. These will later contribute to the "Descriptions of Dimensions" on the finished rubric. Like the objectives themselves, these descriptions also articulate the individual, disciplinary, and departmental objectives of the class. For example, Figure 3.3 presents the set of descriptions of the highest level performance of the "Develop public speaking skills" objective for the Freshman Inquiry group project.

There was no similar list of communication skills for the graduate seminar. Graduate students were expected to demonstrate decent communication and critical thinking skills, and these were therefore integrated into more content-focused learning objectives such as the "Tie the film analysis into the overall history and historiography of World War II", as shown in Figure 3.4.

Sometimes at this stage, rather than making lists, we use Post-its™. The ideas that would have been listed are now separated. We

Stage 2: Step 2

Graduate Seminar List of Highest Expectations for "Tie the Film Analysis into the Overall History and Historiography of World War II" Learning Objective

The major historical issue(s) addressed by the film are recognized and clearly articulated.

All major scholarly theories regarding this issue are articulated and the speaker takes a stand one way or another.

The speaker makes it clear what theories most affected her or his approach to the film.

The data introduced are accurate, appropriate, and, if controversial, defended.

Figure 3.4   Stage 2: Listing. Step 2: List of highest expectations. List of highest expectations for the history and historiography learning goal for an oral presentation in a graduate seminar at Portland State University.

put one idea or performance description on each Post-it™. These lists and/or Post-its™ often wind up stuck all over the office in little clumps of related ideas. The Post-its™ will give us the flexibility to move the ideas around when we begin grouping similar ideas together in the next stage. After listing or writing ideas on Post-its, we color code similar ideas. Color coding helps, although by the end our offices sometimes become so festooned with paper chains that we wonder if the holidays have come early. Cutting and pasting on the computer is tidier and works well for the more virtual minded.

At the end of Stage 2, you will have your overall learning objectives listed for the assignment, and under each objective you will also have a list that describes what the highest performance expectations for that particular learning objective are.

Stage 3: Grouping and Labeling

In Stage 3, grouping and labeling, we group similar performance expectations together and create labels for each group. We start with the final lists of highest performance expectations that we completed in Stage 2. We read through this list of performance expectations carefully

and begin to group together items that we think are related. We begin to construct groups of similar performance expectations such as organization, context, analysis, and presentation. This is inevitably a back-and-forth process in which existing groups suggest other groups that make up the overall assignment, while groups, once created, may result in ideas that went together under learning goals being reassigned to different groups. We often find that some performance expectations do not neatly fit in one group. When this happens to us, we construct an entirely new group of these related performance expectations.

Once the performance descriptions are in groups of similar skills, we read them and start to find out what is common across the group and label it. These labels will ultimately become our dimensions on the rubric, so its important to keep them clear and neutral. We try to limit them to a single word, such as "Organization," "Analysis," or "Citations."

In the case of the freshman core rubric, for example, most of the performance expectations listed in the "Develop public speaking skills" objective were grouped together in a category labeled "Presentation." However, the need for clear overheads, PowerPoints, or handouts also found their way into the "Organization" category, because caption selection and other aspects of creating visual aids involve developing an organizational framework. The need for a clear introduction that sets the thesis for the whole presentation might also have gone into the "Organization" category, but in the end it was considered sufficiently important to merit a group of its own labeled "Introduction." Thus, the original list of public speaking skills for the freshman core class wound up in three different groups as shown in Figure 3.5.

At the end of Stage 3, you will have all of the performance expectations related to your learning objectives now regrouped into new groups with labels. The original learning objectives, of course, will be hidden in your rubric but expressed through the individual descriptions of the performance expectations. The performance expectations related to each learning objective will have been separated into more familiar component skills such as "Organization," "Presentation," and "Introduction," which will become the dimensions of your new rubric.

Stage 2: Step 2
Freshman Core List of Highest
Expectations for "Develop Public
Speaking Skills" Learning Objective

Clear introduction that sets out the
thesis and organization of the whole
presentation.

Maintains good eye contact.

Body language is expressive and
appropriate.

Speaks loudly and slowly enough to
be easily understood.

Modulates voice quality and tone
appropriately: does not drone.

Uses humor and stories that relate to
the topic to liven up presentation.

Does not fumble with the overhead
or projector.

Not too many words on the
overhead or PowerPoint projection.

Captions on overhead or PowerPoint
show key issues and themes

Group (Dimension) 1: Presentation

Maintains good eye contact.
Body language is expressive &
appropriate.
Speaks loudly & slowly enough to be
easily understood.
Modulates voice quality & tone
appropriately.
Does not fumble with the overhead
or projector.

Group (Dimension) 2: Organization

Captions of overhead or PowerPoint
show key issues and themes.
Handouts are clear.
Handouts show key issues and themes.
Uses humor and stories that relate to
the topic to illustrate, support, and
liven up presentation.

Group (Dimension) 3: Introduction

Clear introduction that sets out the
thesis and organization of the whole
presentation.

Figure 3.5   Stage 3: Grouping and Labeling. List of highest expectations moved
into three groups that become rubric dimensions.

Stage 4: Application

In Stage 4: Application, we transfer our lists and groupings to a rubric
grid. The labels for the groups of performance expectations now
become the dimensions of the rubric and are placed in the left column
of the rubric grid, while many of our earlier lists of learning and task
objectives find their way into the descriptions of the highest level of
performance for each dimension. In the case of the graduate seminar,
the process stopped there with the creation of a scoring guide rubric.

Construction of a Scoring Guide Rubric

In the case of the graduate seminar described earlier, the professor
decided to create a scoring guide rubric rather than a three-to-five-
level rubric. A scoring guide rubric lists only one set of criteria: the

highest possible performance for each category. Individualized notes then tell students how completely they did or did not meet that criterion. Scoring guide rubrics require more grading time than three-to-five-level rubrics, but they are still faster to use for feedback than handwritten notes because we can reference what was left out without having to rewrite it each and every time. Scoring guide rubrics work best for assignments in which students are allowed greater flexibility of approach; in this case, they had the option of focusing on film theory or historical theory. For this reason, these theoretical frameworks were grouped together under the "Context" category, although they had originally been quite separate in terms of learning goals. The need to discuss the historical issues addressed by the film (it was a history class, after all) regardless of the theoretical approach found its way into both the "Introduction" category and the "Evidence" dimension.

Scoring guide rubrics provide greater flexibility of response and can make grading something that is happening rapidly (like an oral presentation) more organized and easier and quicker to grade when the work is good; they therefore fulfill most of the highest expectations spelled out in the scoring guide rubric. Scoring guide rubrics do not, however, save much time when dealing with a student who has to be given more explicit feedback to be successful the next time (see Chapter 6 on grading using scoring guide rubrics). Of course, sometimes just a simple "see me" encourages the student to seek the more elaborate feedback from the professor. Figure 3.6 on page 40 illustrates the finished scoring guide rubric used to grade the graduate seminar presentations.

Construction of a Three-to-Five-Level Rubric

Unlike the graduate students in the seminar, the professor decided that the students in the freshman class needed a clearer description of what constituted less than exemplary performances, partly in order to know what to avoid and partly to allow her to avoid lengthy written notes. She therefore decided on a three-level rubric with check boxes. A rubric with check boxes simply means breaking down the descriptions of dimensions into individual parts and including a box (❏) to check off beside each; this allows us to more accurately pinpoint strengths and weaknesses and show the student how he or she may actually incorporate bits of all three levels in one dimension.

Scoring Guide Rubric for Film Presentations

Task Description: Each student will develop an hour-long presentation on a Japanese or American movie about World War II designed to acquaint the class more fully with the theoretical, historical, and interpretive issues surrounding the film. Clips or other audio-visual aids may be used, but guard against overusing these items; remember that we have all seen the movie once.

Film:

	Criteria	Comments
Introduction	The introduction tells the audience exactly what to expect in terms of how the speaker feels about the movie, what theories and theoretical framework(s) she or he will introduce and what conclusions she or he will draw.	
Organization	The presentation is organized to create a logical argument and so that topics that need to be discussed together are presented together.	
Context	The presenter discusses the main historical issues raised by the film and how other film scholars and historians have dealt with these issues both with regard to this film and in general. The presenter explains where he or she stands on these issues, which theories he or she finds most useful, and why.	
Evidence	The presenter includes sufficient, detailed examples from the film and other sources to support her or his analyses.	
Analysis	The presenter uses her or his evidence to support a consistent, coherent analysis of how the film does or does not contribute to our understanding of World War II.	
Presentation	The presenter spoke clearly, slowly, loudly enough to be heard, but not too loudly; used appropriate, effective gestures and body language; and maintained eye contact with the class. Audio-visual aids, if used, are technically sound (to prevent fumbling with equipment), appropriate, and referenced in the presentation.	

Figure 3.6 Application. Groups placed on a scoring guide rubric listing only highest level of expectations for an oral presentation for a graduate seminar at Portland State University.

As we noted in Chapter 1, labeling the levels on the scale can be a delicate matter. We need to be clear about expectations and about failures as well as successes, yet we also try to avoid overly negative or competitive labels. These can discourage students. We have found that the best way to avoid overly negative scale labels is to remember that one major purpose of our rubric is to demonstrate for our students the steps toward an exemplary performance. In the case of the three-level rubric for the Freshman Inquiry group project, the professor considered the following options

- Exemplary, competent, beginning
- Proficient, intermediate, novice
- Exemplary, competent, not yet competent
- Excellent, good, developing
- 1, 2, 3
- Strong, satisfactory, weak

Eventually she settled on "Exemplary," "Competent," and "Developing" as the labels for each level of performance and placed these on the horizontal upper bar of the grid. Then, using her lists and groups from Stage 3, grouping and labeling, she added the "Dimensions" to the vertical side of the grid. Finally, she inserted the descriptions of the highest level of performance in each dimension to the appropriate place in the "Exemplary" column of the grid. The initial grid is shown in Figure 3.7 on page 42.

To complete the grid and the descriptions of the other levels, we find it easiest to fill in the lowest performance descriptions next. Because they are the lowest task expectations, these descriptions are often simply the negation of the exemplary task description, in which case, we can actually cut and paste the exemplary description and then edit it accordingly. In other cases, however, the lowest performance description is not a direct opposite, but a list of the typical mistakes that we have seen students commit over the years. It is sadly easy to define a very low performance.

This was certainly the case with the Freshman Inquiry rubric. In fact, it looked like Figure 3.8 on page 43, once the "Developing" descriptions of each dimension were filled in.

Rubric for Film Presentation

Task Description: Working in groups of four or five, students will develop and present to the class an analysis of a Japanese movie about World War II. This analysis should go beyond a simple synopsis of the movie to discuss how well or poorly the film reflects a particular point of view about the war. You are expected to do additional research to develop this presentation and to use visual aids of some sort. All group members are expected to participate in the presentation.

	Exemplary	Competent	Developing
Individual presentations	❏ The presenter spoke clearly, slowly, and loudly enough to be heard without shouting, modulating voice tone and quality. ❏ The presenter used expressive, appropriate body language and maintained eye contact with the audience. ❏ The presenter used all the time allotted but did not speak too long. ❏ The presenter used humor and anecdotes appropriately to liven up and illustrate the presentation. ❏ The presenter or an assistant competently handled the equipment.		
Group work	❏ The presentation allowed each member an equal opportunity to shine. ❏ The individual presentations followed one another in a way that promoted a logical discussion of the topic, and connections between individual presentations were clearly shown. ❏ Group members treated each other with courtesy and respect. ❏ The technologies used to illustrate and assist the presentation were appropriate and competently handled without any fumbling.		
Introduction	❏ The thesis is clearly stated at the beginning and carried through in the rest of the presentation. ❏ The topics to be covered are introduced and the direction the overall presentation will take is made clear.		
Individual organization	❏ The individual presentation was well organized in itself with an introduction, body, and conclusion. ❏ That organization was emphasized and made clear to the audience through the use of appropriately captioned PowerPoints, overheads, or handouts.		
Individual content	❏ Facts and examples were detailed, accurate, and appropriate ❏ Theories referenced were accurately described and appropriately used. ❏ Analyses, discussions, and conclusions were explicitly linked to examples, facts, and theories.		

Figure 3.7   Three-level rubric with check boxes. The scales have been defined and the description of the highest level of performance for each dimension have been filled in.

Rubric for Film Presentation

Task Description: Working in groups of four or five, students will develop and present to the class an analysis of a Japanese movie about World War II. This analysis should go beyond a simple synopsis of the movie to discuss how well or poorly the film reflects a particular point of view about the war. You are expected to do additional research to develop this presentation and to use visual aids of some sort. All group members are expected to participate in the presentation.

	Exemplary	Competent	Developing
Individual presentations	❏ The presenter spoke clearly, slowly, and loudly enough to be heard without shouting, modulating voice tone and quality. ❏ The presenter used expressive, appropriate body language and maintained eye contact with the audience. ❏ The presenter used all the time allotted but did not speak too long. ❏ The presenter used humor and anecdotes appropriately to liven up and illustrate the presentation. ❏ The presenter or an assistant competently handled the equipment.		❏ The presenter mumbled, spoke too fast or too slow, whispered or shouted, or droned to the point where intelligibility was compromised. ❏ The presenter fidgeted, remained rigid, never looked at the audience, or engaged in other body language that distracted seriously from the content. ❏ The presenter barely used the time allotted or used much too much time. ❏ The lack of humor and anecdotes made the presentation dull. ❏ There was a lot of fumbling with the equipment that could have been prevented with a little practice.
Group work	❏ The presentation allowed each member an equal opportunity to shine. ❏ The individual presentations followed one another in a way that promoted a logical discussion of the topic, and connections between individual presentations were clearly shown. ❏ Group members treated each other with courtesy and respect. ❏ The technologies used to illustrate and assist the presentation were appropriate and competently handled without any fumbling.		❏ The presentation was seriously unbalanced so that one or a few people dominated or carried the ball. ❏ There was little if any evident logic in how the individual presentations followed one another, and the connections between individual presentations were unclear. ❏ Group members showed little respect or courtesy toward one another. ❏ The technologies used to illustrate and assist the presentation were unnecessary, clumsy, and accompanied by too much fumbling with the equipment.
Introduction	❏ The thesis is clearly stated at the beginning and carried through in the rest of the presentation. ❏ The topics to be covered are introduced and the direction the overall presentation will take is made clear.		❏ The thesis is unclear, unstated, and not evident in the rest of the presentation, which is about something else. ❏ There is no indication of what topics will be covered or what direction that coverage will take.
Individual organization	❏ The individual presentation was well organized in itself with an introduction, body, and conclusion. ❏ That organization was emphasized and made clear to the audience through the use of appropriately captioned PowerPoints, overheads, or handouts.		❏ The presentation rambled with little evidence of an introduction, body, or conclusion. ❏ PowerPoints, overheads, or handouts either were not used or did not assist the audience in following the organization in any significant way.
Individual content	❏ Facts and examples were detailed, accurate, and appropriate ❏ Theories referenced were accurately described and appropriately used. ❏ Analyses, discussions, and conclusions were explicitly linked to examples, facts, and theories.		❏ Facts and examples were seriously lacking in detail, inaccurate, or inappropriate. ❏ Theories referenced were inaccurately described and inappropriately used or not referenced or used at all. ❏ There is no clear connection between analyses, discussions, and examples, facts, and theories.

Figure 3.8   Three-level rubric with check boxes. The descriptions of the highest and lowest levels of performance for each dimension have been filled in.

Once this was done, filling in the middle level became a matter of distinguishing between the two; this is a bit more difficult when working with more levels, but even then, we have found that working from the outside in is the best method. Three level rubrics are relatively easy to construct. The middle level usually contains elements of both sides and some statements of degree of success or achievement. For example, in the Freshman Inquiry group presentation rubric, the professor differentiated between lapses that affected comprehensibility and those that did not. The result is shown in Figure 3.9 below.

Conclusion

Constructing rubrics using this four-stage approach does not require learning any new skills or procedures. It simply systematizes how we use the skills and talents that made us academics in the first place,

Rubric for Film Presentation

Task Description: Working in groups of four or five, students will develop and present to the class an analysis of a Japanese movie about World War II. This analysis should go beyond a simple synopsis of the movie to discuss how well or poorly the film reflects a particular point of view about the war. You are expected to do additional research to develop this presentation and to use visual aids of some sort. All group members are expected to participate in the presentation.

	Exemplary	Competent	Developing
Individual presentations	❏ The presenter spoke clearly, slowly, and loudly enough to be heard without shouting, modulating voice tone and quality. ❏ The presenter used expressive, appropriate body language and maintained eye contact with the audience. ❏ The presenter used all the time allotted but did not speak too long. ❏ The presenter used humor and anecdotes appropriately to liven up and illustrate the presentation.	❏ The presenter was understood but mumbled, spoke too fast or too slow, whispered, shouted, or droned; intelligibility, however, was not compromised. ❏ The presenter's body language did not distract significantly, but the presenter fidgeted, remained rigid, never looked at the audience, or engaged in other inappropriate body language. ❏ The presenter's timing was too long or too brief. ❏ Humor and anecdotes were used, but they were over- or underused to liven up or illustrate the presentation. ❏ Equipment was used but there was some fumbling although not to the point where it seriously distracted from the presentation.	❏ The presenter mumbled, spoke too fast or too slow, whispered or shouted, or droned to the point where intelligibility was compromised. ❏ The presenter fidgeted, remained rigid, never looked at the audience, or engaged in other body language that distracted seriously from the content. ❏ The presenter barely used the time allotted or used much too much time. ❏ The lack of humor and anecdotes made the presentation dull. ❏ There was a lot of fumbling with the equipment that could have been prevented with a little practice.

Figure 3.9   Three-level rubric. All descriptions of dimensions completed.

	Exemplary	Competent	Developing
Group work	❏ The presenter or an assistant competently handled the equipment. ❏ The presentation allowed each member an equal opportunity to shine. ❏ The individual presentations followed one another in a way that promoted a logical discussion of the topic, and connections between individual presentations were clearly shown. ❏ Group members treated each other with courtesy and respect. ❏ The technologies used to illustrate and assist the presentation were appropriate and competently handled without any fumbling.	❏ The presentation was unbalanced in the way time or content was assigned to members. ❏ The individual presentations followed one another in a way that mostly promoted a logical discussion of the topic, but connections between individual presentations were not clearly shown, or the presentation lost direction from time to time for other reasons. ❏ Group members mostly treated each other with courtesy and respect, but there were lapses where members were not listening to each other. ❏ Technologies were used to illustrate and assist the presentation; however, some were off topic, unnecessary, or accompanied by too much fumbling.	❏ The presentation was seriously unbalanced so that one or a few people dominated or carried the ball. ❏ There was little if any evident logic in how the individual presentations followed one another, and the connections between individual presentations were unclear. ❏ Group members showed little respect or courtesy toward one another. ❏ The technologies used to illustrate and assist the presentation were unnecessary, clumsy, and accompanied by too much fumbling.
Introduction	❏ The thesis is clearly stated at the beginning and carried through in the rest of the presentation. ❏ The topics to be covered are introduced and the direction the overall presentation will take is made clear.	❏ The thesis emerges from the presentation but is either unclear, unstated, or not stated directly. ❏ A clear thesis is stated, but it is not carried through in the presentation. ❏ Topics to be covered and the direction the presentation will take are stated, but they are not the topics covered or the direction actually taken.	❏ The thesis is unclear, unstated, and not evident in the rest of the presentation, which is about something else. ❏ There is no indication of what topics will be covered or what direction that coverage will take.
Individual organization	❏ The individual presentation was well organized in itself with an introduction, body, and conclusion. ❏ That organization was emphasized and made clear to the audience through the use of appropriately captioned PowerPoints, overheads, or handouts.	❏ The individual presentation was mostly well organized, but there were problems with the introduction, body, or conclusion. ❏ The presenter used PowerPoints, overheads, or handouts, but these were too wordy or too vague to help the audience follow the organization.	❏ The presentation rambled with little evidence of an introduction, body, or conclusion. ❏ PowerPoints, overheads, or handouts either were not used or did not assist the audience in following the organization in any significant way.
Individual content	❏ Facts and examples were detailed, accurate, and appropriate ❏ Theories referenced were accurately described and appropriately used. ❏ Analyses, discussions, and conclusions were explicitly linked to examples, facts, and theories.	❏ Facts and examples were mostly detailed, accurate, and appropriate, but there were lapses. ❏ Theories were referenced but they were either not accurately described or not appropriately used. ❏ The connection between analyses, discussions, and conclusions is evident or implied, but it is not explicitly linked to examples, facts, and theories.	❏ Facts and examples were seriously lacking in detail, inaccurate, or inappropriate. ❏ Theories referenced were inaccurately described and inappropriately used or not referenced or used at all. ❏ There is no clear connection between analyses, discussions, and examples, facts, and theories.

Figure 3.9   Continued

from reflecting to listing to categorizing and applying. The use of these skills helps us create a grading tool, the rubric, that is advantageous to both teachers and students. By using the stages in this chapter, we can eventually streamline the process of rubric creation.

As is the case with creating syllabi and other teaching tools, most of us find that after constructing our first few rubrics, we begin to see that what initially seemed a time-consuming addition to our schedules becomes a real time-saver. In addition, we recognize that rubrics help us give more feedback, more consistently, with many more opportunities for all students to not only understand but to meet our expectations. In Chapter 4, we discuss the benefits and challenges of including others in this rubric construction process.