



# The Writing Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO

**DENVER | ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS**

## Designing Rubrics

### **Rationale:**

Rubrics serve as a scoring guide for teachers to rate a student's performance on a given assignment. The use of rubrics helps teachers to ensure they are grading fairly and evenly and demystifies the process for all students, especially first generation students or English Language Learners.

Rubrics also provide students with the grading criteria for an assignment, which enables them to better understand teacher expectations and the importance (weight) of each portion of the assignment. Overall, rubrics help students to meet course expectations and produce better papers while also allowing teachers to reduce their grading time and provide high quality, justifiable feedback.

### **1. Complete Pre-work**

Before designing the assignment and the corresponding rubric, it is important to complete some pre-work to determine the purpose of the assignment as well as how it fits into learning outcomes for the course.

- Define goals: What are you hoping to achieve with this assignment? What learning or knowledge will students illustrate?
- Identify and align with learning outcomes or course goals: How does this assignment support course outcomes? Which learning outcomes or course goals will be reflected in this assignment?
- Clarify purpose: Is the purpose of the assignment summative (grade determining) or formative (part of assignments leading toward a greater goal)?
- Determine scoring measure for the assignment: Will you be grading the assignment analytically (separate scores for each criterion) or holistically (single score for overall performance)? Holistic scoring is good for large batches of papers (200+), but analytic scoring is on the whole more effective.

### **2. Determine Criteria with Attributes**

The next step is to determine the criteria that will be used to assess the performance. Generally speaking, 3-6 criteria work best as the smaller the number the more reliable the assessment. If the weight is not evenly distributed across all the categories, then it is necessary to specify the weight each category holds. Each category needs to be:

- Important & Essential: The rubric should only present criteria that are important and essential to the learning goals/outcomes previously defined.

- Observable and measurable: All criteria should be defined by action verbs that can be tested or measured. It should be clear how criteria are measured and what denotes success.
- Distinct: Each category needs to be unique and shouldn't overlap with criteria from other categories.
- Attributes: Some rubrics utilize attributes (sub-categories) within criteria to provide further clarity. Attributes provide more detail about what is being measured in each of the major categories. If using attributes, each criterion needs to have the same number of attributes.

### **3. Performance Levels:**

After determining what is being measured, it is important to determine the levels that will be measured. In order to create a stronger rubric with less ambiguity (or difficulty determining different levels of achievement), rubrics should have no more than 3-5 levels.

### **4. Language**

After determining the number of levels, select either summative or formative descriptors for each performance level. Summative categories reflect that students have completed a task and demonstrated comprehension of a subject. Formative categories illustrate where students are on a continuum of understanding and development. Select informative descriptions such as "Developing, Proficient, Accomplished" or "Inadequate, Approaching, Proficient."

### **5. Descriptions:**

The last step in rubric generation is to write descriptions for the performance levels in each category. The language should specifically delineate the student's achievement in that category. All categories should be written in parallel structure, which means that any verbs used should be in the same tense and all descriptions should be similarly structured and evenly spaced. Point values or numbers (ex: 1-5) could be used in lieu of text.

### **Other Considerations:**

- Rubric generation is most helpful when done alongside assignment creation.
- When possible, provide students with rubrics alongside assignment descriptions.
- Students and teachers can create rubrics together in order to help students to understand teacher expectations and to illustrate how to dissect assignments. This also helps students to internalize criteria for what is being measured.
- Teachers should provide students with opportunities to review assignments and rubrics in class, allowing them to come up with questions and ensure they understand the expectations.

For further information on related concepts, please see the following handouts:

- Commenting on Student Writing
- Scaffolding Assignments