Creating a Rubric

First Step: Reflection on assignment. A good rubric starts with a well-designed assignment. Determine the learning you want students to demonstrate; design an assignment that will have them demonstrate it; then create rubric with evaluation criteria. Sometimes, faculty create a rubric and apply it to student work, only to realize that the assignment did not ask students to demonstrate a particular element on the rubric.

Why did you create this assignment? What aspects of learning do you want students to demonstrate in this assignment? It may be useful to consult the course learning outcomes to think about the learning students will demonstrate. *(If you plan to use the rubric to gather information about program-level learning outcomes, you'll need to ensure that the rubric ties to those).*

Second Step: List Criteria. Once the learning goals for the assignment have been articulated, these can be turned into a list of criteria.
- Number of criteria: This will depend on the assignment. It can be difficult to distinguish between too many discrete areas, and often unnecessary. Focus on the criteria that are most vital for the assignment.
  - Most rubrics for course assignments limit themselves to around 5-6 criteria. Rubrics for larger student works – like collections or portfolios – may have more.
  - Some criteria can be grouped together under broader labels. For example, criteria for an oral presentation might include speaking slowly, speaking at the right volume, not going off track, and presenting a clear argument. These, and similar criteria, could be grouped into criteria related to presentation and organization
- The criteria should relate to the learning rather than the tasks students complete to fulfill the assignment. A rubric is not assignment directions in grid form.
- Remember that it is possible to build in qualities such as "originality" or "effort" into a rubric in order to capture criteria that are important to you.

Third Step: Create Performance Levels and Descriptions
- First, decide on how many performance levels to include. Most rubrics include between three and five, since it can be difficult to distinguish between more levels of performance. Some recommend selecting an even number of levels so that the middle category does not become the default.
- Create titles for the performance levels, making clear which represents the minimally acceptable performance for the assignment.
  - Avoid negative language whenever possible, since it discourages students
  - A few possible performance scales:
    - Exceeds expectations, meets expectations, approaches expectations, does not meet expectations
    - Exemplary, proficient, intermediate, novice
    - Accomplished, average, developing, beginning
- Create descriptions for each criterion for each level of performance—the best, the worst, and the levels in between. Make sure descriptions are clearly distinguishable from one another; this is a common pitfall.
- Some recommend starting with the category that is the minimally acceptable for passing. Others find it easier to start by imagining what an excellent assignment would be, and one that would be unacceptable, and working towards the middle category(ies).

- Be specific and descriptive rather than using evaluative terms like "proficient" or "excellent."
  - Example. Rather than say "paint quality" is "poor" or "below expectations," descriptions such as "excessive streaks" and "overly thick or bumpy paint" provide more feedback. Exceptional paint might be described as "paint is flat, opaque and even in texture." (Example from Academy of Art University)
  - Example: "well-written" would not be as clear as "strong thesis statement and clear organization"
  - Again, avoid unnecessarily negative language, like "boring." Also, be sure that the language is understandable by students.
- Possibilities for descriptions:
  - Quality: how well was the task done?
  - Quantity or Frequency? How many of the tasks were done? How often was the task done (or not done)
  - Consequence (what is the effect of the work done? E.g. did the presentation hold the attention of the class?
- Helpful words (from Mary Allen): (in)complete, (in)accurate, detailed, thorough, creative, original, subtle, sophisticated, synthesizes, integrates, analyzes, clarity, professional, insightful, relevant, complexity of thought.

Final Steps: Other Aspects to Consider
- Consider including a spot for personalized feedback. This could be a section at the bottom, a column for comments, or both.
- Determine whether and how the rubric will be related to grades and, if related, add points, percentage weights, or other ways to tie to grades.
- If possible, test your rubric on student work.
- If multiple instructors will use the rubric, hold a **norming session** if possible. In a norming session, teachers all use the same rubric and score the same pieces without looking at each other's scores. After a few pieces have been scored, the teachers look at all of the scores together and discuss discrepancies.
- Revise, revise, revise! Rubrics usually need to be fine-tuned as they are used. It is common to discover areas that need improvement. Some descriptions may be too vague, or indistinguishable; important criteria may have been omitted; and more.

Other tips:
- Share rubrics with students before they do the assignment, and discuss with them. You could even ask them for feedback, or create a new rubric with them.
- Have students apply the rubrics in a peer-assessment situation, or ask them to self-assess using the rubric.

Resources used:

Academy of Art University, http://faculty.academyart.edu/faculty/teaching-topics/teaching-curriculum/planning-classes-first-day-lesson-plans-last-day/rubrics-grading-feedback/rubrics-for-assessment-grading.html

Mary Allen, "Using Rubrics to Grade, Assess, and Improve Student Learning," http://www.mdc.edu/sailearn/documents/4.1%20Rubric%20Workshop%20Handout-Mary%20Allen.pdf

Susan M. Brookhart, *How to Create and Use Rubrics for Formative Assessment and Grading.* ASCD, 2013.

Linda Suskie, *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide*. 3rd Edition. Jossey-Bass, 2018.