# How to Create Rubrics

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## PURPOSE

This job aid outlines the rationale for and benefits of using rubrics and will provide guidance on how to develop a holistic and an analytic rubric as well as how to develop rubrics interactively with your students.

## BACKGROUND

Rubrics are an assessment tool which makes an instructor's expectations clear for an assessment. A rubric explicitly describes an instructor's expectations for the assignment and can be used by students to guide them in completing the assessment as well as to inform their own self or peer assessment (Carnegie Mellon University, n.d.).

## WHY USE A RUBRIC?

Using a rubric:

- Makes marking more objective, unbiased, and consistent.
- Reduce the time spent grading.
- Helps to make marking more systematic and by using a pre-defined scheme the subjectivity becomes more objective.
- Communicates the expectations of the instructor to the students.
- Gives students useful feedback that can be used for future assignments.

## ANALYTIC AND HOLISTIC RUBRICS

Holistic rubrics group several different assessment criteria and classify them together under grade headings or achievement levels. Performance descriptions can be written in paragraphs and usually in full sentences. If, when creating an analytic rubric, you realize that there is a lot of overlap between your criteria, a holistic rubric might be the most appropriate for the assessment.

These are quick to use but do not give students a lot of information about their performance. They could be used for small assessments.

Analytic rubrics separate different assessment criteria. Most rubrics have a row describing the criteria to be assessed and columns describing levels of achievement described by a number, a letter grade, or by a descriptor such as amateur to professional.

*Figure 1 Infographic Holistic and Analytic Rubric Comparison*



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## HOW TO CREATE A HOLISTIC RUBRIC

Holistic rubrics contain overarching information to provide the learner with a description of their overall level of performance without going into the levels of performance within specific criteria.

To create a holistic rubric, follow these steps:

- Define the purpose and context: Clarify what the rubric is meant to assess (e.g., overall quality of a performance, final product, or piece of writing) and in what context it will be used.
- Identify the performance levels: Decide how many levels of performance you want to include (typically 3–5, such as *Excellent*, *Good*, *Satisfactory*, *Developing*) and ensure they are distinct and meaningful.
- Describe overall performance for each level: Write a narrative description for each performance level that captures the overall quality of work, rather than breaking it down into separate criteria. Focus on the key attributes that distinguish one level from another (e.g., clarity, depth, creativity, accuracy).
- Use consistent and comparative language: Ensure descriptors clearly differentiate levels using comparative terms (e.g., "demonstrates insight and originality" vs. "demonstrates basic understanding").

- Ensure alignment with learning outcomes: Make sure the rubric reflects what students are expected to learn and demonstrate, emphasizing the most essential elements of the task holistically.
- Test and revise the rubric: Pilot it with sample student work, check for consistency in scoring, and refine as needed to improve clarity and fairness.

| Scale | Criteria |
|---|---|
| 4 | • At least 4 accurate facts are displayed in the infographic<br>• Selection, color, shape, size, and arrangement of graphics contribute meaning to the overall message<br>• All 4 facts have sources identified on the infographic |
| 3 | • At least 3 accurate facts are displayed in the infographic<br>• Selection, color, shape, size, and arrangement are eye catching and contribute meaning to the overall message<br>• 3 facts have sources identified on the infographic |
| 2 | • At least 2 accurate facts are displayed in the infographic<br>• Selection, color, shape, size, and arrangement of graphics are present but do not contribute to the meaning<br>• 2 facts have sources identified on the infographic |
| 1 | • At least 1 accurate fact is displayed in the infographic<br>• Selection, color, shape, size, and arrangement of graphics are detracting or misleading<br>• 1 fact or 0 facts have a source identified on the infographic |

# HOW TO CREATE AN ANALYTIC RUBRIC

Analytic rubrics break an assignment down into distinct criteria, each with its own levels of performance. Here is how to develop one:

1. Identify the Assessment Criteria
These are the specific elements of the assignment you will evaluate—such as content, organization, analysis, grammar, or presentation. When selecting criteria, ask yourself:

- What course outcome(s) am I assessing?
- What observable behaviours or evidence will show that students have met the outcome?
- Why is this assessment appropriate for evaluating this outcome?
- What knowledge, skills, or abilities are students demonstrating in this assignment?
- What distinguishes excellent work from poor or incomplete work?

You do not need to assess every aspect—focus on what is most relevant to the purpose of the assignment and aligned with course learning outcomes. Leave out criteria that are assessed elsewhere to avoid duplication.

Typically, rubrics include 3–8 criteria, but there is no fixed rule. Let the purpose of the assignment, the performance expectations, and your course learning outcome(s) guide you.

2. Define Levels of Performance
Decide how many performance levels each criterion will have (usually 3 to 5). These might include labels like *Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Needs Improvement*, or numerical scores.

Consider your grading scale. For example, if a pass is 60%, you may want the "Meets Expectations" level to align with that threshold.

Note: You can vary the number of levels across different criteria. For example, a basic summary might use a 2-point scale, while a complex analysis might require a 5-point scale.

3. Write Descriptors for Each Level
For each criterion, describe what performance looks like at each level. Use clear, consistent language that aligns with your instructional goals and ensures reliable grading.

Start with the "Meets Expectations" level—this helps anchor your understanding of what satisfactory or passing work looks like. Then develop descriptors for what it means to fall below or exceed that standard.

Tips:
- Avoid vague language like "good" or "poor"—be specific.
- Focus on observable qualities and behaviours.
- Ensure that someone unfamiliar with the assignment could still apply the rubric effectively.

4. Determine Weighting (Optional)
Not all criteria need to be equally weighted. If certain skills or learning outcomes are more central to the assignment, consider assigning them greater value.

One way to do this is to apply a multiplier. For example, critical analysis might be worth four times as much as grammar. Be transparent with students about how each part contributes to the overall grade.

**Infographic Rubric**

**Levels of Performance**

| Category | 15 | 10 | 5 | 0 | Points |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Content** (topic, references, argument) | At least 4 accurate facts are displayed in the infographic | At least 3 accurate facts are displayed in the infographic | At least 2 accurate facts are displayed in the infographic | 1 accurate fact displayed in the infographic |  |
| **Graphics & Visuals** (graphics, pictures related to argument) | Selection, color, shape, size, and arrangement of graphics contribute meaning to the overall message. | Selection, color, shape, size, and arrangement are eye-catching and contribute some meaning. | Selection, color, shape, size, and arrangement are present but do not contribute to the meaning. | Selection, color, shape, size, and arrangement are distracting or misleading. |  |
| **References** (sources for content cited properly) | All 4 facts have sources identified on the infographic. | 3 facts have sources identified on the infographic. | 2 facts have sources identified on the infographic. | One or zero facts have sources identified on the infographic. |  |
|  |  |  |  | Total |  |

Criteria · Descriptors

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## DEVELOPING RUBRICS INTERACTIVELY WITH YOUR STUDENTS

Involving students in the creation of a rubric offers several benefits. When students participate in developing the assessment tool, they gain a clearer understanding of the expectations and are more likely to engage meaningfully with the task. The process also encourages critical thinking, as students must identify and articulate the key criteria that define quality work (Rubrics, 2012).

To facilitate this, the instructor takes on a guiding role, supporting students as they collaboratively define the rubric's criteria and performance levels. In many cases, the rubric students develop closely aligns with what the instructor might have created independently, but with the added benefit of increased transparency and student ownership.

## REFERENCES

Carnegie Mellon University. (n.d.). *Creating and Using Rubrics*. Eberly Center Teaching Excellence & Educational Innovation. Retrieved January 27, 2022, from https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/assesslearning/rubrics.html

*Rubrics: Useful Assessment Tools*. (2012, November 7). Centre for Teaching Excellence. https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/assessing-student-work/grading-and-feedback/rubrics-useful-assessment-tools