

## Constructing Rubrics for Student Papers

“In depth and helpfulness, no method can replace a full-fledged response to a student’s paper. Sitting next to a writer and working through a draft, asking questions for clarification, offering reader-based response, or prompting ideas for revision not only models the collaborative processes that writers experience in countless professional settings, but also gives students the language and intellectual framework for responding to their own and other writers’ work. What we “value” in good writing for a *particular occasion* takes the form of constructive critique, not just judgment” (Anson & Daniels, 2002, p. 387, emphasis added).

Rubrics should not be seen as the only form of writing assessment nor as the best, but rather as one means of assessing student work on a spectrum of assessment tools. They frequently offer faculty a convenient, time-efficient way to assess student writing, but they do have dangers. Often, if a rubric is used without carefully considering how the class will understand it, the rubric can falter, leaving students to focus on the wrong things (for example, APA formatting and finding “the right sources” rather than producing a strong argument). On the other hand, rubrics frequently help students better understand the main components of a project or qualities necessary for high-caliber thinking.

When writing a rubric:

1. Treat students as your audience, and use language they will understand (linking the rubric to language used in class will help)
2. Clearly define the purpose of the rubric and the assessment/feedback/grade by first drafting ideas about:
  - a. The purpose of the assignment.
  - b. The process or activities students must undertake to meet the purpose.
  - c. What types of evidence will surface in the paper to prove students have undertaken those activities and are attempting to meet the purpose.
  - d. The textual features or characteristics you expect the paper to contain or utilize.
  - e. Describe characteristics of “strong,” “average,” and “weak” based on 1-5.
  - f. Tie the descriptions to grading standards you have already explained to students (perhaps through a syllabi or verbal discussion)
  - g. Transfer a-f into a simple rubric (table) and an “explanation” page which further explains the categories and characteristics you’ll be looking for.
3. Give your rubric to the students when the assignment is first discussed. Student will benefit from seeing how the rubric is directly connected to the assignment.
4. Rubrics take some “teaching”--use models to help students understand the features you’re looking for.

## Sample Rubrics and Rubric Activities

### Designing a rubric as a class

1. Assign students a handout reading for homework that explains their next project or paper.
2. Set aside class time during the next class session.
3. Ask students to get into four groups (you can place them into groups, too).
4. Each group should identify the features they feel are most important about the project with a short description of what would be “strong,” “average,” or “weak” for those areas. (Yes, they are creating a rubric!)
5. Have each group partner up with another (so the four groups become two groups). These large groups should compare their lists, combining, negotiating, and discussing differences until consensus is reached.
6. Put both documents up “on the board” (a document camera or ELMO would be useful here, but if students bring their laptops, files can easily be emailed and shared on the overhead) side by side.
7. As a class, compare, combine, and pair down the rubric until you have one rubric the class can agree on.
8. Make any changes or corrections you feel are necessary to the rubric, and explain to the class why you are making those changes as well as what they mean.
9. Consider asking your class to assign point values (if that is part of how you grade) to each quality the rubric addresses.

### Using common language

As Hope College continues to enhance writing instruction on campus, students may find it helpful to their learning to hear the same language about writing being used across multiple areas of campus. To that end, a rough draft of a common writing instruction language may be helpful to preparing rubrics or rubric components that focus on assessing writing characteristics. Ten key characteristics of effective academic writing that we may discuss with students include:

1. What is the **situation** or **purpose** for writing, and have you addressed it?
2. Is your audience for the paper an **actual audience** (such as your professor or classmates), an **implied audience** (such as educated people concerned with your subject who are not in your class), or **both**?
3. Does your paper put forth an interesting **answer** to a unique, thought-provoking **question**?
4. Does your paper have a **logical progression**?
5. Have you used **appropriate evidence**?
6. Are your **paragraphs** focused?
7. Do your body paragraphs **support** your **answer**?
8. Have you gone through several stages of the writing process including **revising** and **editing**?
9. Have you received **feedback** from a competent **reader** (such as a more experienced student or a [CWR Writing Assistant](#))?
10. Is your paper as **error-free** as possible?

### American Association of Colleges and Universities

Sometimes, large-scale rubrics are also helpful, such as the AACU’s rubric. However, keep in mind that documents such as this are more templates to use for contextualized assignments. One rubric will not fit all of the needs of every project or every student-audiences. All of the AACU’s rubrics are located here: [http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/pdf/All\\_Rubrics.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/pdf/All_Rubrics.pdf)

The Written Communication Value Rubric is located at the end of the packet.

**Argumentative/Thesis-driven assignment rubric categories sample**

	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
Thesis:	Easily identifiable, plausible, novel, sophisticated, insightful, crystal clear. Connects well with paper title.	Promising, but may be slightly unclear, or lacking in insight or originality. Paper title does not connect as well with thesis or is not as interesting.	May be unclear (contain many vague terms), appear unoriginal, or offer relatively little that is new; provides little around which to structure the paper. Paper title and thesis do not connect well or title is unimaginative.	Difficult to identify at all, may be bland restatement of obvious point.
Structure:	Evident, understandable, appropriate for thesis. Excellent transitions from point to point. Paragraphs support solid topic sentences.	Generally clear and appropriate, though may wander occasionally. May have a few unclear transitions, or a few paragraphs without strong topic sentences.	Generally unclear, often wanders or jumps around. Few or weak transitions, many paragraphs without topic sentences.	Unclear, often because thesis is weak or non-existent. Transitions confusing and unclear. Few topic sentences.
Analysis:	Author clearly relates evidence to "mini-thesis" (topic sentence); analysis is fresh and exciting, posing new ways to think of the material. Work displays critical thinking and avoids simplistic description or summary of information.	Evidence often related to mini-thesis, though links perhaps not very clear. Some description, but more critical thinking.	Quotes appear often without analysis relating them to mini-thesis (or there is a weak mini-thesis to support), or analysis offers nothing beyond the quote. Even balance between critical thinking and description.	Very little or very weak attempt to relate evidence to argument; may be no identifiable argument, or no evidence to relate it to. More description than critical thinking.
Logic and argumentation:	All ideas in the paper flow logically. The reader is able to see and understand the different sections of the paper. Creates appropriate college level, academic tone.	Argument of paper is clear, usually flows logically and makes sense. The reader can figure out the different sections of the paper, but clarification is needed. Mostly creates appropriate college level, academic tone.	Logic may often fail, or argument may often be unclear. The reader struggles to separate the sections of the paper. Occasionally creates appropriate college level, academic tone, but has some informal language or inappropriate slang.	Ideas do not flow at all, usually because there is no argument to support. Simplistic view of topic. Readers are unable to understand the different sections of the paper, if all sections are even there. Does not create appropriate college level, academic tone, and has informal language or inappropriate slang.
Use of evidence:	Primary source information used to support every point with at least one example. Examples from the ad/commercial support mini-thesis and fit within the paragraph. Critically evaluates/responds to those ideas in the ad/commercial in an analytical manner.	Examples used to support most points. Some evidence does not support point, or may appear where inappropriate. Demonstrates a solid understanding of the ad/commercial and critically evaluates/responds to those ideas in an analytical manner.	Examples used to support some points. Points often lack supporting evidence, or evidence used where inappropriate (often because there may be no clear point). Demonstrates a general understanding of the ideas in the ad/commercial and only occasionally critically evaluates/responds to those ideas in an analytical manner.	Very few or very weak examples. General failure to support statements, or evidence seems to support no statement. Demonstrates a little understanding of (or occasionally misreads) the ideas in the ad/commercial and does not critically evaluate/responds to those ideas in an analytical manner.
Mechanics:	Sentence structure, grammar, and diction excellent; correct use of punctuation and citation style; minimal to no spelling errors; absolutely no run-on sentences or comma splices. Conforms in every way to format requirements.	Sentence structure, grammar, and diction strong despite occasional lapses; punctuation and citation style often used correctly. Some (minor) spelling errors; may have one run-on sentence or comma splice. Conforms in every way to format requirements.	Problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction (usually not major). Some errors in punctuation, citation style, and spelling. May have some run-on sentences or comma splices. Conforms in almost every way to format requirements.	Big problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction. Frequent major errors in citation style, punctuation, and spelling. May have many run-on sentences and comma splices. Does not conform to format requirements.

## Portfolio assignment simple rubric example

Component	Sub-elements	Points Possible	Points Earned	Comments
Projects				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All drafts included</li> <li>All comments from peers still accessible</li> <li>Finalized version (with revisions—should be noted somewhere)</li> </ul>	42		
Intro & Conclusion Letters				
	Does not rely on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>effort you put into the class/portfolio</li> <li>participation in course</li> <li>outside feedback (me or CWR)</li> </ul>	4		
	Introduction	4		
	Conclusion	4		
	Thesis	4		
	Body paragraphs are PIE	16		
Cohesive Design				
	Rhetorical purpose/design	2		
	Appropriateness/clarity for audience	2		
	Standard writing conventions	2		
<b>Totals</b>		<b>80</b>		