

Module 2D: Rubric Design

by Dr. Tim Brophy

Hello. This is Tim Brophy. And welcome back to Passport to Great Teaching Creative Assessment. This module 2D is going to cover rubric design.

Let's define what we're talking about first. Rubrics basically are scoring models that we use to assess and score complex or lengthy responses. They allow us to get into some detail about the product that we're measuring, which is very helpful.

These all consist of some set of criteria. These state the critical elements that the response must contain. And I shared with you four models in the previous module.

These rubrics do contain usually a set of ordered categories with descriptions. So we can then use these descriptions to compare our student responses in order to assign a score or a level of achievement. So the levels of the achievement, though, need to be clear and distinct, while still allowing for a variety of possible correct responses in that same level.

So why do we use a rubric? Well, it does create a common framework and language for the work of assessment that we do. And we can really examine these more complex products or behaviors pretty efficiently with these.

So we do have to have well-trained reviewers. And if you're the professor who develops this, then you're the well-trained reviewer. All right. We all can apply, though-- if we have more than one person reviewing what we do in our course, apply the same criteria and the same standards and expectations.

So these are four criterion-referenced assessments. Again, I refer back to module 2C, where I shared you the four basic models for those.

So basically, raters asked this question. Did the student meet the criteria for level x of the rubric? All right. Rather than, how well did this student do compared to other students? So remember, the norm-referenced assessments that are designed specifically to compare achievement or performance between students, the criterion-referenced assessments do not do that.

So there's some rubric types. One is called "holistic." This type of rubric really only has one general descriptor at each level of achievement. It provides a single score that's based on the overall impression of a student's response.

An analytic rubric, however, breaks down these expectations into multiple criteria with multiple rating scales. So each is corresponding to a particular independent criterion in

the rubric. And that, when added together, can provide an overall score, if you wish. Or it can just provide levels of achievement.

So now let's think about the advantages and disadvantages of holistic rubrics. Well, the advantages are that they are pretty quick to score. They do provide an overview of student achievement. They're really efficient for a large group scoring. And usually, they're a little easier to write, because you're putting all of your expectations into one level of achievement.

Now, the disadvantages are that it really doesn't provide detailed information that you may be seeking. And it's really not diagnostic. So it could be difficult for scorers to decide on one overall score.

Let's think about analytic rubrics now. Remember, these are the ones that present a description of each level of achievement for each criterion and gives you a separate score or a rating for each one.

So what are the advantages here? Well, it does provide more detailed feedback on student performance, but it takes more time to do. But it does provide that information. And it is more consistently scored across students and raters, where you find this in the literature and our studies of the use of these rubrics. So this tends to be more consistently used.

So the disadvantage is it does take more time than applying a holistic rubric. So if you're going to use analytic rubrics, be sure you plan for the time to efficiently use them.

So you want to use these when you really want to see strengths and weaknesses in a student's performance or product or whatever it is that they're displaying for you in the assessment. And you do want to use it if you want detailed feedback about student performance.

So let's now think about some guidelines for developing rubrics. Because I'm sure that most of you who are watching this have developed a rubric of some kind. But let's go step by step so we can see exactly the best way to go about developing these.

The first step is to have to determine the type of rubric you want to use. Is it going to be better to use a holistic rubric for what you're measuring or an analytic one? So once you do that, you need to identify what you want to assess. These are the criteria for the assessment. They're usually part-- or they should be part, I should say-- of the description of the assignment or the task that you are giving your students.

Now, step three is to identify the characteristics to be rated. And these form the rows of the rubric. Rubrics are generally presented in tables. So these are the rows-- one row for each criterion.

So you want to specify skills, knowledge, or behaviors that you're looking for so students and you both understand it. But also when you write these, make sure that someone who is not you would be able to understand what you mean.

You want to really limit the characteristics to those that are most important to the assessment. You don't want your raters to be bogged down by a lot of additional information that really doesn't focus on what it is you're really looking for.

Continuing on, in this next step, you're going to determine how many levels of scoring you need to use. So four are usually plenty. But I've seen some that go from three to six, all right.

I know in the state of Florida, the writing assessment that's done at grade 4. If any of you have children or know of this in grade 4, you know they take a writing assessment. And that particular holistic rubric is six levels of achievement.

So they can go higher than four. But you can use whatever works best for your item, as long as you ensure that the levels do make sense to you in terms of being in a continuum. I do recommend, though, no more than four.

So in the fifth step, you're going to write what we call "proficiency descriptors" for each level of the rubric. You're going to start with the highest level, because that's the one you want your students to aspire to achieve. All right.

And then you're going to work down to the lowest level. It's always best to start with the highest level, because that's what you expect your successful students to be able to do in response to your outcomes.

So let's think about some common rubric levels that are used. So there are some labels that I've seen across a number of rubrics. Some of them are exceeds expectations, meets expectations, near expectations, below expectations. Others could be exemplary, proficient, marginal, or unacceptable.

How about mastery, proficient, developing, or novice. Very common-- 4, 3, 2, and 1-- just numbers that are assigned. All right. So those are some common rubric levels that I have witnessed and that are commonly used by our faculty here.

Continuing on, you want to focus your descriptions, all right, on the presence of the quantity and quality you expect, rather than on the absence of them. So let's be sure to explain what you want to see, not what you don't want to see. So but at the lowest level, it's OK to state that an element is lacking or it could be absent. Or I often use the label "unable to score" because there's not enough to measure.

You want to keep the elements of the description parallel, performance level to performance level. All right. In other words, if your descriptors include quantity, clarity,

and details, make sure that each of the outcome expectations is included in each performance level descriptor. So you want to address each one of those elements in each level-- 4, 3, 2 or 1, or exceeds, meets, near, below-- whatever it may be.

And then you want to avoid the use of words that are vague-- "interesting," "well-done," "creative," "imaginative," "sufficient," "several," "numerous," "great," "OK." These are not appropriate words to use in the rubric, because they could be points of contention later if you are asked by a student to describe what you mean by that. So you want to avoid that if you can.

Be careful, also, not to make your descriptors so detailed or overly specific that it goes beyond what you intend students to show. This is what I mentioned earlier. You don't want your raters to be bogged down with information that isn't focusing it directly on the core of what you're assessing.

Continuing on, you want to test the rubric. Apply the rubric to an assignment, OK. Share it with your colleagues, all right. And try it out with a group of students, and see how it works. And then discuss it with your colleagues. As you get feedback from them, revise it.

Rubric development can be something that is a group effort. It's always good, in my view, to have your colleagues take a look at something you're producing-- if nothing else, just to check for its validity, all right.

So when you're developing a rubric, just enlist their help, OK. That's what I suggest here. Because these do promote shared expectations. You're teaching a course, but it's part of a larger program. So you want to be sure that the expectations and grading practices benefit the entire program body of students. And also it's good to share with your faculty.

So what are some variations of rubrics? Well, there are some point system rubrics where these actually give a range of points for each level of achievement. If you're familiar at all with the International Baccalaureate program that's offered in high schools, and you're familiar with their grading schemes, they're all point-level rubrics.

You can earn a certain number of points at each level of the rubric achievement. And those points are given by the scorer or the examiner, based on their opinion of the degree to which the points that they apply or assign matches the response they get.

So the weighted points system rubrics, though, are a variation of the point system rubric, where some criteria get more points than others, whereas in the standard point system rubric, where all of the rubric levels obtain the same number of points, the weighted point system rubric-- used very common here at the university-- is one where the criteria are weighted.

So you might earn 40 points for one criterion and 20 for another. But that depends on how you want to emphasize or weight the criteria in the rubric you're using.

So let's think for a minute, all right. Have you used a rubric for the assessment of student learning before? You probably have. But if you have, then review that rubric. Think about what task do you assess with this rubric? And is your rubric analytic or holistic? Did it meet the guidelines presented in this module? All right.

And if you don't use a rubric for assessment of student learning, explain why to yourself. Why have you not done this? OK. You might want to also describe an example of an assessment that you administer, for which you might develop a rubric. And what type would you develop? Why do you feel that would be the most beneficial?

Some things to think about. Thank you. And I'll see you in module 3.

