# Tip sheet – Deciding between the use of rubrics and marking guides

Rubrics and marking guides serve different purposes. A rubric is a tool that outlines specific aspects of an assessment task including assessment criteria and performance standards associated with those criteria. A rubric is designed for both students and staff to use. For students, it helps guide their thinking and planning on the assessment and can be used as a self-assessment tool. For staff, it can be used to guide grading as well as supporting student feedback.

A marking guide has a somewhat different purpose as it is usually intended for use by staff (only) to guide their marking by:

- providing a full version of the expected answer, calculations and so on to be unpacked. It is often constructed by topic coordinators for use by tutors or other markers in the topic
- detailing specifics of grading (e.g., if marks are associated with a specific section, how those should be allocated)
- outlining concepts or other aspects of the work to be graded upon that may not be conducive to a rubric format because they are more subjective (e.g., conceptual understanding, creativity, rhyming)
- communication of the pedagogical intentions
- not being available to students. Feedback (that may be stored in a comment bank) is returned on the assignment or via and feedback form.

However, the Flinders University learning management system (FLO) does not make this pedagogical distinction between rubrics or and marking guides. FLO includes both a rubric and a marking guide, both of which are criteria-based grading tools. Both are visible to staff, and both can be configured to be visible to students. One of the key differences between the FLO-based marking guides and rubrics though is that the marking guide allows a mark to be given up to a maximum point per criteria whereas the rubric plots the criteria against levels of achievement (and numeric mark is attached to each level).

This tip sheet focusses on context-dependent decision making for selecting whether to use analytical rubrics (which assess components of a completed piece of work), holistic rubrics (which assess work as a whole) or marking guides (which define what areas will be assessed).  Specifically, the tip sheet includes:

- if using rubrics, which type to use (analytical or holistic)
- marking guides

Although analytical rubrics can provide more detailed feedback to students on specific areas, they should not be viewed as having a greater value than holistic rubrics or marking guides.  Rather, the value of either of these rubrics as well as marking guides, is determined by the context of their use.  Table 1 below summarises some common contexts in which these differences may be used.

| Mechanism | Context for use |
|---|---|
| **Analytical rubric** | <ul><li>Problem solving</li><li>Application based assessments</li><li>Where different criteria are weighted differently</li><li>Complex assessments with numerous components</li></ul> |
| **Holistic rubric** | <ul><li>Focus is on overall quality, proficiency or understanding</li><li>Solution/ response is open to interpretation, and cannot be reduced to a singular answer/ response</li></ul> |

| Marking guide | <ul><li>Progress check ins</li><li>Competency based assessment where there is less importance placed on delineations of degrees of achievement</li></ul> |
|---|---|

**Table 1:** Alignment of rubrics and marking guides with context

A comparison of the key functional and operational features of analytical and holistic rubrics as well as marking guides are outlined in Table 2

| Feature | Analytical rubric | Holistic rubric | Marking guide |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Weighting of individual performance criteria** | Possible | Not possible | Possible |
| **Identifying weaknesses of submitted work** | Weaknesses identified if constructed with appropriate detail | Does not explicitly call attention to weaknesses | Variable, depending on number of criteria and nature of comments |
| **Level of detail in performance descriptors** | Usually, high level of detail | Usually, less detail than analytical rubrics given condensation of descriptors | Variable, depending on number of criteria and nature of comments |
| **Need to provide separate and repetitive feedback to the student cohort** | Less need if performance descriptors constructed with appropriate detail | Increased need if performance descriptors are scant in specific information | Variable, depending on the level of detail of the descriptors as well as the number of and detail within stored comment banks |
| **Consistency of feedback between markers** | Having more criteria reduces the need to provide additional feedback, and therefore reduces the volume of feedback which may vary | Having fewer criteria increases the need to provide additional feedback, which may vary between different markers | Variability may be introduced via choice of pre-populated elective comments as well as independently authored comments |
| **Consistency of final grade outcomes between different markers** | Having a greater number of performance criteria increases the likelihood that consistent outcomes will be achieved by different markers | Less likely to be achieved given the reduced number of performance criteria | Variability may come from the assignment of numerical scores (which may exist in a range) as well as pre-populated comments |
| **Student understanding on how to improve** | Expressing detail across a wide range of criterion provides an | Condensing all criterion into a singular performance | May be highly variable depending on level of |

| | overview of what has and/or hasn't been completed well, to what standard, and why | outcome provides an overview of the final outcome, but lacks transparency around potential areas for improvements | detail in the marking guide |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Meaningfulness of content of descriptors** | When well-constructed, content should be highly informative regarding performance | Will provide an overview of why an outcome has been arrived at, but specific details regarding performance will often be scant | Possible to provide a score only. Providing no or low corresponding comments will be of limited benefit to students for understanding the outcome |
| **Variation in feedback provided to different students** | May be less need to provide high levels of individualised feedback, therefore reducing the potential for variations to occur | May be more need to provide high levels of individualised feedback, therefore increasing the potential for variations to occur | May be more need to provide high levels of individualised feedback, therefore increasing the potential for variations to occur |
| **Economy of time** | Generally, longer to construct, but having a greater number of criteria and detail may reduce the need to provide extensive additional feedback when marking | Generally quicker to construct, but having a single outcome with finite detail may increase the need to provide extensive additional feedback when marking | Generally quick to construct (but low in detail). Adding comments into a comment bank will add to construction time, but may lead to savings when marking |
| **Applicable for progress evaluation** | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **Applicable for finished product evaluation** | Yes | Yes | Yes |

**Table 2:** Features of rubrics and marking guides

Further information on constructing rubrics and marking guides can be found in the following resources:

- Good Practice Guide - Rubrics
- Tip sheet – Designing analytical rubrics
- Tip sheet – Designing holistic rubrics
- Tip sheet – Rubrics and marking guides in FLO
- FLOSS – Mark in FLO using a rubric, marking guide or checklist