Tip sheet – Designing analytical rubrics

Rubrics provide information on assessable criteria within an assessment task and the level of accomplishment by the student (Biggs, 1982). Accordingly, it is important to design them to be clearly understood by both students and markers. Although there are many different kinds of rubrics, this tip sheet provides some guidance on designing analytical rubrics.

Analytical rubrics are particularly useful when there are a larger number of criteria to assess. They specify the criteria students need to address in the assessment task, as well as outline precisely what students are expected to demonstrate that has been learnt in relation to the learning outcomes. Ideally, they also provide a means for giving general and/or personalised student feedback. Depending on the task at hand, analytical rubrics may also have numerical values attached to them (described further below).

Analytical rubrics have four components: assessment description (i.e. the task), achievement levels (usually as a scale), assessment criteria (outlining the specific skills/knowledge involved in the assessment task), and performance descriptors (descriptions of the levels of achievement or each criterion in each performance level). Table 1 gives an example of a basic rubric format.

Table 1: Basic rubric format

Rubric Title

Assessment task description

	Scale level 1	Scale level 2	Scale level 3	Scale level 4
Criteria 1	Performance Descriptor	Performance Descriptor	etc	
Criteria 2				
Criteria 3				
…				

Rubric components

1. Assessment task description – this should ideally be placed at the top of the rubric to remind students of the task without having to look in several places for all the assessment information. At a minimum, a summary of the task should be provided.

2. Achievement levels - a continuum that describes the level of performance on the task. The number of different levels is variable and depends on the type of distinctions you want to make between the levels of performance. For example, you may wish to indicate only achievement or non-achievement (two levels) or you may wish to distinguish between levels of proficiency (4-5 levels; see examples below). However, 3-5 levels are commonly used as the more levels you have, the more difficult differentiation between the levels becomes. Descriptions should be clear, use unambiguous language and explicitly relate to achievement. Depending on needs and/or preferences, numerical values may or may not be attached to achievement levels, although it needs to be noted that doing so would restrict the possibility to differentially weight the criteria. They may use different kinds of indicative labels or even grades. Some examples might include:

   - Achieved, Not Achieved
   - Never, Sometimes, Always
   - Advanced, Proficient, Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory
   - Highly Competent/Sophisticated, Competent, Partly Competent, Not Yet Competent
   - Exemplary, Accomplished, Developing, Beginning (not met criteria/not attempted/unsatisfactory)
   - Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory
   - Outstanding (HD), Excellent (D), Good (C), Satisfactory (P), Unsatisfactory (F)

3. Criteria – outline the various parts of the task clearly so that students can easily see what is expected. Weighting the criteria reflects differential levels of importance (e.g., the referencing style is likely to be less important than the critical analysis component of an essay). Indicative weightings are helpful for illustrating the relative importance of distinct criteria as this helps guide students' efforts in completing the task, as well as markers in assessing it.

4. Performance descriptors – these should describe the relative differences in performance between the levels. In cases where numerical values are attached to either achievement levels or criteria, the wording of the descriptors needs to be prioritised. Approaches to construction might include:

   - adjectives to describe an aspect of the performance where the task is the same across each criterion but how well it is done changes (e.g., *comprehensively describes*…). Avoid simply repeating the achievement level title in the descriptors (e.g., don't use the word 'excellent' as a descriptor within the scale level titled 'Excellent' as this does not explain to the student, or the marker, what excellent work is).
   - be consistent and use the same adjective throughout each column of the achievement scale. For example, if the 'Outstanding' scale level includes descriptors using the adjective 'comprehensive' then this same adjective should be used throughout that same scale level and should not appear in a different scale level
   - specific aspects of the task that will differ across different performance levels (e.g., *critically analyses* the impact of…/*analyses* the impact of…/*lists* the impacts of…)
   - a numeric component that differentiates the levels (e.g., *includes three or more examples/includes 1-2 examples/includes no examples; discusses several strategies…/discusses some strategies…/discusses few or no strategies*…)
   - a description of the degree of assistance needed (e.g., in a practical assessment)

In developing the performance descriptors, it is often easiest to complete each end of the scale first and then the middle (i.e., determine the highest and lowest characteristics of achievement for the criteria, then describe the performance in between). These should be as precise and unambiguous as possible to provide students with usable information. You might also consider including descriptions of consequences in relevant rubrics (e.g., *this work demonstrates competencies at a level appropriate for a beginning practitioner to deal with simple client case / this work contains calculation errors that are likely to have significant negative consequences in the workplace*). An example of some clear descriptors is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Example of part of a rubric (NURS 3002 Advanced Decision making and Practice (Viva Voce Assessment)

Assessment criteria	Weight:	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Conclusion/Reflection: Reflect on your Professional Educators feedback provided to you. Discuss how you have addressed these points when developing this paper. Discuss why this feedback is significant to your decision making ongoing professional development in accordance with the [relevant] National Standards for [the profession].	20%	Comprehensive reflection on feedback provided. Discussion comprehensive and concise addressing how feedback has been applied in this paper – substantial evidence provided. Comprehensive insight - ongoing professional development in the role of the [the profession], clear concise links to [relevant] standards. Clear and concise plan for ongoing development	Clear reflection on feedback, presented clearly. Clear discussion on how feedback has been applied in this paper – relevant evidence provided. Clear insight –ongoing professional development in the role of the [the profession], supported with [relevant] standards. Clear plan for ongoing development	Broad reflection on feedback provided. Presents feedback with some insight – gaps evident. Adequate discussion on how this feedback has been applied in this paper – some gaps evident. Evidence provided however limited in relevance or volume. Superficial insight –ongoing professional development in the role of the [the profession], supported with [relevant] standards. Plan for ongoing development – not clear	Nil or insufficient/ inappropriate reflection on feedback provided. Nil or inappropriate discussion on how this feedback has been addressed in this paper/ Not addressed at all. Nil or inappropriate evidence supporting application of feedback provided. Nil or inappropriate/ incorrect significance presented, no insight for how feedback influences ongoing professional development in the role of the [the profession]. No link to [relevant] standards.
Academic requirements: Meets all style and academic requirements. Quality of evidence supporting discussion. Accurate referencing (APA) Word limit met Clear, concise flow Spelling, grammar and punctuation correct.	10%	All [college] academic requirements met. No errors. Comprehensive body of evidence presented. All references highly relevant. Word limit met, clear, concise flow with correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.	All [college]academic requirements met. Inclusion of evidence with all references relevant. Word limit met +/- 10% Logical flow and clarity. All spelling, grammar and punctuation correct.	All [college] academic requirements met with minor errors / omissions. Topic evidence only presented. Most references relevant. Word limit met +/- 10% Mostly clear, concise flow with minimal spelling, grammar and punctuation issues.	Limited or omission of [college] academic requirements. References presented incorrectly/ inconsistently. No evidence presented. References inappropriate. Word limit exceeds +/- 10% Unclear, poor flow Many spelling, grammar and punctuation issues.

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