Elliott, C. (2003). *Clear expectations, improved outcomes: using rubrics.* FYI: journal of School Libraries Association of Victoria, Spring 2003, pp. 4-7.

Clear expectations, improved outcomes: using rubrics

Abstract: The use of rubrics to assess learning and performance introduces a level of fairness and consistency that can serve as a powerful motivator to students. Online applications simplify the task, guarantee a professional standard and remove subjectivity from assessment.

Introduction
Assessments should allow reasonable judgment to be made about the extent to which the student has achieved the intended outcomes; in addition assessment should support learning and not undermine it. Nightingale 1997

Frustrated student Thomas complains to student Sally, "I used a $3,000 computer, a $1,200 laser printer and a $300 word-processing program – and I still got a D on my term paper." What has gone wrong? Thomas is obviously using tools he considers effective to produce satisfactory assessment, however, he has yet again achieved a demoralizing mark. This article will examine the use of rubrics as a means of alleviating situations such as this. It will present criteria for the development of rubrics. Finally, online rubric construction resources will be provided that simplify this task significantly.

Increased awareness of the influence of particular learning styles and multiple intelligences, coupled with the work of programs like the Victorian Early and Middle Years Programs has focused attention on creating an environment conducive to student success. Using rubrics for performance assessment is a further component in that equation. They clearly stipulate expectations and provide a tool for measurement of performance against those expectations.

What is a rubric?
A rubric is a scoring tool used to evaluate student performance in a fair and consistent manner.
A rubric has 3 major components. Laid out in the form of a grid, it consists of:
a) a list of stated objectives or criteria against which a student will be assessed,
b) a numerical or comment range which rates student performance,
c) a description for each level indicating the degree to which students has satisfied the criteria.
It is the inclusion of component (c) that provides the powerful motivating force for all students, regardless of skill or ability.

Figure 1: Rubric for Persuasive Essay

Criteria	Performance			
	1	2	3	5
The claim	I make a claim and explain why it is controversial.	I make a claim but don't explain why it is controversial.	My claim is buried, confused, and/or unclear.	I don't say what my argument or claim is.
Reasons in support of the claim	I give clear and accurate reasons in support of my claim.	I give reasons in support of my claim, but I overlook important reasons.	I give some weak reasons that don't support my claim are irrelevant or confusing .	I don't give reasons in support of my claim.
Reasons against the claim	I discuss the reasons against my claim and explain why it is	I discuss the reasons against my claim but neglect some or	I say that there are reasons against the claim, but I don't	I don't acknowledge or discuss the reasons against

	valid.	don't explain why the claim still stands.	discuss them.	my claim.
Organization	My writing has a compelling opening, an informative middle, and a satisfying conclusion.	My writing has a beginning, a middle, and an end.	My organization is rough but workable. I may sometimes get off topic.	My writing is aimless and disorganized.
Conventions	I use correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.	I have some errors, but I generally use correct grammar, punctuation and spelling.	I have enough errors in my essay to distract a reader.	Numerous errors make my essay hard to read.

Adapted from: Andrade, H. (2003) http://ascd.org/publications/ed_lead/200002/Andrade.html

Student involvement

Distributed with the assessment task, the rubric takes the surprise out of assessment. Students are given a clear indication of the teacher's expectations and know what grading to expect for work submitted from the outset. By explicitly stating common criteria for all students, rubrics provide consistency and fairness with less possibility of a teacher's subjective bias colouring the assessment. They are particularly useful also in peer assessment when students take responsibility for evaluating each other's work.

There are no surprises as both teacher and student know what is expected. Potentially, any misunderstandings on the part of the student can be clarified at the outset. Ideally, the teacher will also revisit the rubric during the course of the task to "touch base" and ensure that all students are on task. Students are thereby provided with opportunities to clarify queries and gain ownership of their learning while there is still time to do something about it.

At their best rubrics also become tools of instruction as students negotiating a rubric gain an understanding of the mark they will receive in relation to the different performance benchmarks.

Levelling the playing field

Rubrics can also serve as an effective tool with struggling or reluctant students. Negotiating required performance levels create an opportunity for the teacher and student to discuss expectations and capabilities. It's a process that has the potential to reduce both student and teacher stress as the student is being asked to produce work to a level they themselves have agreed they are capable.

Time taken to negotiate an agreed rubric with a student increases commitment and makes successful submission more likely. Furthermore, focusing on the construction of the rubric provides students with strategies, skills and opportunities to evaluate their own learning and that of other members of the class.

In summing up, rubrics:
- Allow assessment to be more objective & consistent,
- Show the student how their work will be evaluated.
- Clearly show what is expected from the beginning of the project.
- Enable students to focus on what is important.
- Promote student awareness about the criteria to be used when assessing peer performance.

- Provide a framework for negotiation.

The teacher's perspective
During the time that use of rubrics has been encouraged and supported at St Joseph's College, Mildura it is interesting to note that they are not limited to particular subject areas or year levels but are utilised right across the school. Teachers have become well acquainted with the concept of standard assessment criteria within the VCE and have simply applied those skills to rubric construction. Furthermore, many publishers now interpret the CSF criteria to units of work within text books making things that bit easier for teachers.

Introducing teachers to rubrics, whether they be experienced or graduates, evokes a common reaction of enthusiasm. Apart from the satisfaction of their students embarking on an assessment task with a clear understanding of expectations, teachers cite the benefits of rubrics in:
- determining teaching effectiveness. The ability to clearly establish which approaches/methods work and which don't. Are students achieving on the rubric at the expected rate? If not, does the teaching program need revision?
- determining achievement of desired goals. Have all criteria been covered? Do some skills require more weight and emphasis than others?
- communicating with parents, other teachers, support agencies, etc by providing benchmarks against which to measure and document student progress.

Changing technology
Assessment is becoming as complex as the technology our students are using to produce their work. It is important, therefore, that students gain the full benefit of their contribution by having it marked consistently regardless of the personal skills of each individual teacher. Teachers are exhibiting a preparedness to accept student work in varying formats to cater for multiple intelligences but how is it being assessed? Increasingly, traditional classroom assessment is expanding to include:
- multimedia presentations,
- web pages,
- video clips,
- visual diagrams,
- online discussion forums, and
- interactive web-based activities.

Constructing a Rubric
It isn't necessary to know how to create a rubric from scratch as abundant rubric resources are shared through the Internet. It is worthwhile, however, to have an understanding of the steps involved. Basically:
- Determine the learning outcomes. Record your own descriptive statements and categorise them into criteria for assessment.
- Each rubric item should focus on a different skill.
- Evaluate only measurable criteria.
- Determine whether a scoring mark (0-5) or words will be used (beginning, consolidating, accomplished) as indicators.
- Write an operational definition of each element.
- Keep your rubric short and simple. Recommendations are between 4-10 criteria statements. Ideally, the entire rubric should fit on one printed page.
- Re-evaluate the rubric after use. Did it work? Did it contain enough detail?
- Store your rubric in a format that facilitates access for future modification. Take care when using online rubric construction sites to store a copy in your own files.

Online rubric generators
A number of excellent online construction tools are available to take the hard work out of constructing rubrics.

The best of these is *Rubistar* http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.shtml. It's free and offers the user a full range of options from quickly and simply constructing a basic rubric with the template, through to customising it fully, analysing results from the whole class or constructing a rubric from scratch. It also offers an online storage facility, although you'd be well advised to also save a copy on your own computer as some sites have been known to discard files that haven't been updated within a reasonable timeframe.

Teach-nology rubric maker http://www.teach-nology.com/web_tools/rubrics/ is a simpler product but is just as effective. Like *Rubistar*, it provides numerous template options from a 'behaviour rubric' to provide feedback on student behaviour, through to a 'webquest rubric' generator with lots in between.

At the conclusion of this article is a list of recommended electronic rubric construction resources. While they are generally US based, they are easily adapted to Australian terminology. The value of the online tools is their efficiency in enabling teachers to produce effective rubrics quickly and professionally. The amount of modification you do to an online generated rubric is up to you.

Finally, rubrics give students the opportunity to perform where disappointment will not be a surprise; where abilities are taken into account fairly; where a teacher's judgement is accounted for fully. They provide both teacher and student with evidence of where the learning is occurring.❑
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Rubrics resources

Online rubric generators
Project based learning checklists (2003) http://www.4teachers.org/projectbased/checklist.shtml
[5 July 2003]

Rubistar (2003) http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php [6 August 2003]

Rubrics for web lessons, (2001) http://webquest.sdsu.edu/rubrics/weblessons.htm
[6 August 2003]

Teach-nology rubric maker (2003) http://www.teach-nology.com/web_tools/rubrics/
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Chicago Public Schools: the rubric bank (2003)
http://intranet.cps.k12.il.us/Assessments/Ideas_and_Rubrics/Rubric_Bank/rubric_bank.html (5 July 2003)

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The Staffroom of Ontario's teachers (2003) http://www.quadro.net/~ecoxon/ (10 September
2003)