

Assessing Reflection Using Rubrics

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Assessing reflection is key because it signals to students the importance of experiential learning and the value of thinking about how they acquire knowledge. Assessing reflection also provides an opportunity for the instructor to provide feedback, spot gaps in knowledge, and address common problems quickly and efficiently.

# Benefits of Using a Rubric (For Students)

* Clarifies expectations
* Provides a goal to work towards
* Articulates all components of the work
* Gives guidance for improvement
* Provides a rationale for grades achieved
* Articulates alignment between an assessment and intended learning outcomes for a course
* Encourages self-assessment and reflection on learning

# Benefits of Using a Rubric (For Instructors)

* Minimizes miscommunications regarding assessment expectations
* Leads to more focused work from students
* Aids in consistent grading, especially in course with multiple markers
* Allows for more efficient grading
* Creates more space for substantive comments
* Results in fewer meetings with s students to explain grades achieved

# Types of Rubrics

There are different types of rubrics that can be used to assess student work. The two most commonly used types are holistic and analytic. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses.

## Holistic Rubrics

Holistic rubrics evaluate the overall equality of an assessment. They are quick, efficient, and fair. When using a holistic rubric, several different assessment criteria are grouped together under grade headings or achievement levels.

Holistic rubrics are ideal for evaluating higher-order thinking where students might present a variety of responses. Holistic rubrics generally serve better as summative feedback, rather than formative feedback, because they do not explicitly address specific components of an assignment.

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| --- | --- |
| **Score** | **Criteria** |
| 4 (80-100%) | Essay demonstrates complete understanding and execution of the assigned objectives. Thesis statement is clearly stated, complex and original. The writing does not spend excessive time on any one point of development at the expense of developing other points in the body of the paper. Writing is also error-free and reads smoothly. |
| 3 (70-79%) | Essay demonstrates considerable understanding and execution of the assigned objectives. Thesis statement is stated, somewhat complex, and original. The writing shows accuracy and balance in developing body points but may exhibit occasional weaknesses. Writing also has some errors that do not impact readability. |
| 2 (60-69%) | Essay demonstrates some understanding and execution of the assigned objectives. Thesis statement is faintly stated and/or unoriginal. The writing is inconsistent in terms of balance in developing body points and exhibits frequent weaknesses. Writing also has many errors and that may impact readability. |
| 1 (50-59%) | Essay demonstrates limited understanding and execution of the assigned objectives. Thesis statement is simplistic, unoriginal, and/or not present at all. The writing is unbalanced in developing body points which are weak and/or incomplete. Writing also has numerous errors that negatively impact readability. |

## Analytic Rubrics

Analytic rubrics evaluate individual components of an assessment. They include a set of criteria on the left side of a grid with levels of performance along the top. Typically, the corresponding cells include a description of each criterion at each level of performance. When grading assignments, the marker checks off each of the appropriate criteria and may choose to include brief written comments below. Analytic rubrics can effectively provide specific feedback that highlights both strengths and struggles.

The drawbacks of an analytic rubric include the time needed to develop the rubrics, specifically the time and thought that is required to write well-defined and clear criterion. This time is arguably well-spent as the goals and outcomes of the assignment will be explicit for both instructor and student. In the long term, analytical rubrics are a time saver – time invested into their development is quickly paid off during the marking process.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria** | **Adequate (50-59%)** | **Competent (60-69%)** | **Good (70-79%)** | **Excellent (80-100%)** |
| Analysis of Primary Sources | Demonstrates limited knowledge of primary sources. Analysis is factually incorrect and/or absent. | Demonstrates some knowledge of primary sources. Analysis is factually accurate but limited and/or inconsistent. | Demonstrates considerable knowledge of primary sources. Analysis is factually accurate, consistent, and generally well-developed. | Demonstrates thorough and insightful knowledge of primary sources. Analysis is factually accurate, consistent, and well-developed throughout. |
| Communication of information and ideas | Communicates information and idea with limited clarity | Communicates information and ideas with some clarity | Communicates information and ideas with considerable clarity | Communicates information and ideas with a high degree of clarity and with confidence |

# Developing a Rubric

Developing a rubric can be time-consuming, especially the first time. However, creating a rubric is an investment that will pay off in the long-term, especially as rubrics can be reused or adapted for other assessments.

When designing a rubric, start by thinking about the intended learning outcomes. This process is multi-layered, as it requires thinking about both course level intended learning outcomes and assessment level intended learning outcome. What are students expected to accomplish?

Below are some sample rubrics designed specifically for marking critical reflection. They can be used as-is or adapted.

# Sample Rubric #1

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria** | **Habitual Action / Non-Reflection (50-59%)** | **Understanding (60-69%)** | **Reflection (70-79%)** | **Critical Reflection (80-100%)** |
| Reflection on Existing Knowledge | Response is superficial with little conscious or deliberate thought. Does not refer to existing knowledge. Response does not demonstrate understanding of underlying concepts or theory. | Response draws on existing knowledge without attempting to appraise or evaluate knowledge. Demonstrates understanding of underlying concepts or theory but does not relate to other experiences or personal reactions. | Response demonstrates active and careful consideration of existing knowledge. Articulates new understanding of underlying concepts or theory as a result of the experience. | Response critically reviews existing knowledge, questions, and assumptions. Articulates new perspectives on underlying concepts or theory as a result of the experience. |
| Connection to Academic Concepts | No connections made between experience and class content and/or literature. | Connections between experience and class content and/or literature, but these connections are superficial or abstract. | Clear connections between experience and class content and/or literature. There is evidence of the application of theory. | Superior connections between experience and class content and literature. There is evidence of the application of theory and the reconstruction of perspective. |
| Evidence of Development | No insights about self or a particular issue or concept as a result of the experience. | Superficial insights about self or a particular issue or concept as a result of the experience. | New insights about self or a particular issue or concept problem as a result of the experience. | Transformation of perspective of themselves or a particular issue or concept as a result of the experience. |

Adapted from Kember, D., McKay, J., Sinclair, K., Kam, F., & Wong, Y. (2008). A four-category scheme for coding and assessing the level of reflection in written work. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 33(4), 369-379.

[Download a copy of the rubric.](https://mcmasteru365-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/whitwese_mcmaster_ca/EZeonGeW7CpCgRIqp2YNnWYBF1perymrHbO-A9VKjHiYHw?e=Z2QogG)

# Sample Rubric #2

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria** | **Undeveloped / Beginner** | **Developing / Intermediate** | **Skilled / Advanced** |
| Describing the Learning Experience | Limited description of the context of the learning experience.  Does not provide concrete examples to clarify and enhance understanding of knowledge claims  Imposes judgement, bias, or interpretation in the description of the experience. | Clear description of the context of the learning experience.  Offers concrete examples to clarify and enhance understanding of knowledge claims, but some examples are underdeveloped or unclear.  Imposes some judgement, bias, or interpretation in the description of the experience. | Clear and engaging description of the context of the learning experience.  Offers concrete examples to clarify and enhance understanding of knowledge claims.  Does not impose judgement, bias, or interpretation in the description of the experience. |
| Analyzing the Learning Experience | Does not offer analysis and interpretation of the learning experience from diverse perspectives.  Does not describe and explain changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behaviours.  Does not connect the learning experience and/or knowledge claims to concrete examples from course content or literature.  Does not connect the learning experience and/or knowledge claims to previous experiences. | Offers analysis and interpretation of the learning experience from a few perspectives.  Describes and explains changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behaviours, but some explanations are underdeveloped or unclear.  Sometimes connects the learning experience and/or knowledge claims to concrete examples from course content or literature.  Sometimes connects the learning experience and/or knowledge claims to previous experiences. | Offers analysis and interpretation of the learning experience from multiple perspectives.  Clearly describes and explains changes in knowledge, skills, attitude, or behaviours.  Connects the learning experience and/or knowledge claims to concrete examples from course content or literature.  Connects the learning experience and/or knowledge claims to previous experiences. |
| Applying the Learning Experience | Does not discuss how the learning experience has confirmed, differed, and/or enhanced theoretical or practical understanding of a  Does not articulate practical insights or offer recommendations for next steps. There is no action plan.  Does not communicate the value of the learning experience. | Discusses how the learning experience has confirmed, differed, and/or enhanced theoretical or practical understanding of topic, but the discussion is abstract or superficial.  Articulates some practical insights and offers recommendations for next steps, but the action plan is unclear.  Somewhat communicates the value of the learning experience. | Clearly discusses how the learning experience has confirmed, differed, and/or enhanced theoretical or practical understandings of a topic.  Articulates practical insights and offers recommendations for next steps. There is a clear action plan.  Clearly communicates the value of the learning experience. |

Adapted from Kiely, R. (2017). “Rubric for the what? So what? Now what? Critical reflection framework.” Office of Engagement Initiatives, Cornell University. <https://usm.maine.edu/sites/default/files/service-learning-volunteering/Engaged%20Cornell%20Reflection%20Rubric.pdf>

[Download a copy of the rubric.](https://mcmasteru365-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/whitwese_mcmaster_ca/ETRZe9bVYNdJpZrQeogDVvkB3H9G6AGHuiZwixXC10wXmw?e=NsYbSl)

## Modifying Rubrics

The rubrics provided here are merely a starting point. While they can be used as-is, they may need to be adapted to address specific course content or themes.

# References

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