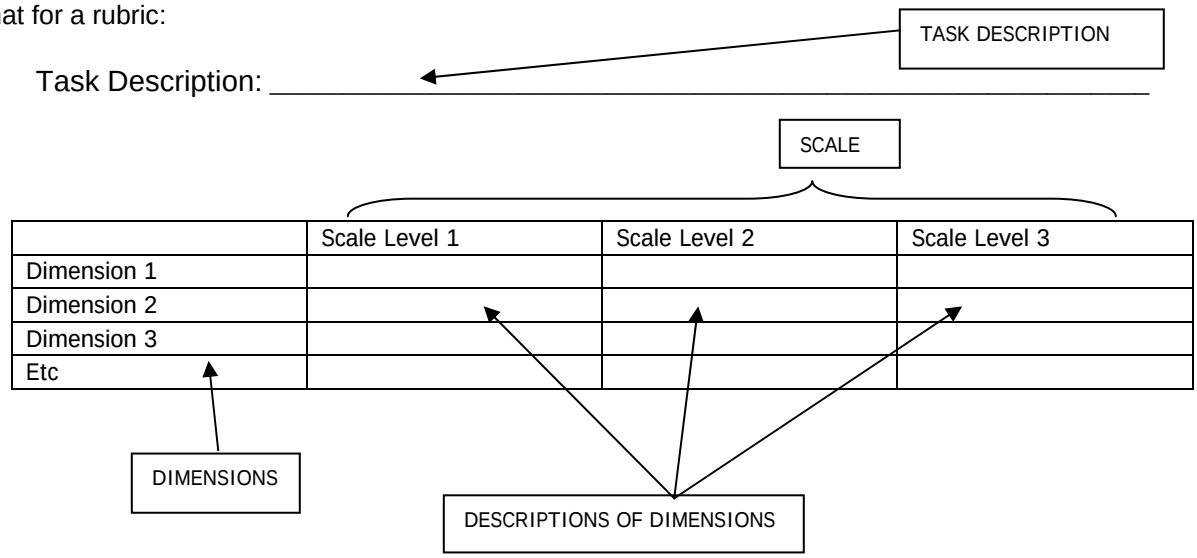
How to Create Rubrics

(Based on Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning by Stevens and Levi 2005; Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education by Allen 2004; and Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses: shifting the focus from teaching to learning by Huba and Freed 2000)

Format for a rubric:



A rubric involves four components:

Part 1: *Task Description*

- Involves a "performance" of some sort by the student
- The task can take the form of a specific assignment; e.g., a paper, a poster, a presentation
- The task can take the form of overall behavior; e.g., participation, use of proper lab protocols, behavioral expectations in the classroom

Part 2: *Scale*

- Describes how well or poorly any given task has been performed
- Positive terms which may be used: "Mastery", "Partial Mastery", "Progressing", "Emerging"
- Nonjudgmental or noncompetitive language: "High level", "Middle level", "Beginning level"
- Commonly used labels:
    - Sophisticated, competent, partly competent, not yet competent
    - Exemplary, proficient, marginal, unacceptable
    - Advanced, intermediate high, intermediate, novice
    - Distinguished, proficient, intermediate, novice
    - Accomplished, average, developing. Beginning
- 3-5 levels are typically used
    - the more levels there are, the more difficult it becomes to differentiate between them and to articulate precisely why one student's work falls into the scale level it does
    - but, more specific levels make the task clearer for the student and they reduce the professor's time needed to furnish detailed grading notes

Part 3: *Dimensions*

- Lay out the parts of the task simply and completely
- Should actually represent the type of component skills students must combine in a successful scholarly work
- Breaking up the assignment into its distinct dimensions leads to a kind of task analysis with the components of the task clearly identified

Example:

Task: *Each student will make a 5-minute presentation on the changes in one community over the past 30 years. The student may focus the presentation in any way he or she wishes, but there needs to be a thesis of some sort, not just a chronological exposition. The presentation should include appropriate photographs, maps, graphs, and other visual aids for the audience.*

	Excellent	Competent	Needs work
Knowledge/understanding 20%			
Thinking/inquiry 30%			
Communication 20%			
Use of visual aids 20%			
Presentation skills 10%			

Part 4: *Description of the Dimensions*

- A rubric should contain at the very least a description or the highest level of performance in that dimension
- Scoring Guide Rubric = a rubric that contains only the description of the highest level of performance

Example Scoring Guide Rubric: (includes description of dimensions at the highest level of performance)

Task: *Each student will make a 5-minute presentation on the changes in one community over the past 30 years. The student may focus the presentation in any way he or she wishes, but there needs to be a thesis of some sort, not just a chronological exposition. The presentation should include appropriate photographs, maps, graphs, and other visual aids for the audience.*

	Criteria	Comments	Points
Knowledge/understanding 20%	The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.		
Thinking/inquiry 30%	The presentation is centered around a thesis, which shows a highly developed awareness of historiographic or social issues and a high level of conceptual ability.		
Communication 20%	The presentation is imaginative and effective in conveying ideas to the audience. The presenter responds effectively to audience reactions and questions.		
Use of visual aids 20%	The presentation includes appropriate and easily understood visual aids, which the presenter refers to and explains at appropriate moments in the presentation.		
Presentation skills 10%	The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard, using eye contact, a lively tone, gestures, and body language to engage the audience.		

Example Three-level Rubric: (includes description of dimensions with <u>all</u> levels of performance described)

<u>Task</u>: *Each student will make a 5-minute presentation on the changes in one community over the past 30 years. The student may focus the presentation in any way he or she wishes, but there needs to be a thesis of some sort, not just a chronological exposition. The presentation should include appropriate photographs, maps, graphs, and other visual aids for the audience.*

	Excellent	Competent	Needs work
Knowledge/understanding 20%	The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.	The presentation uses knowledge that is generally accurate with only minor inaccuracies and that is generally relevant to the student's thesis. Research is adequate but does not go much beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned text.	The presentation uses little relevant or accurate information, not even that which was presented in class or in the assigned texts. Little or no research is apparent.
Thinking/inquiry 30%	The presentation is centered around a thesis, which shows a highly developed awareness of historiographic or social issues and a high level of conceptual ability.	The presentation shows an analytical structure and a central thesis, but the analysis is not always fully developed or linked to the thesis.	The presentation shows no analytical structure and no central thesis.
Communication 20%	The presentation is imaginative and effective in conveying ideas to the audience. The presenter responds effectively to audience reactions and questions.	Presentation techniques used are effective in conveying main ideas, but they are a bit unimaginative. Some questions from the audience remain unanswered.	The presentation fails to capture the interest of the audience and/or is confusing in what is to be communicated.
Use of visual aids 20%	The presentation includes appropriate and easily understood visual aids, which the presenter refers to and explains at appropriate moments in the presentation.	The presentation includes appropriate visual aids, but these are too few, are in a format that makes the difficult to use or understand, or the presenter does not refer to or explain them in the presentation.	The presentation includes no visual aids or includes visual aids that are inappropriate or too small or messy to be understood. The presenter makes no mention of them in the presentation.
Presentation skills 10%	The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard, using eye contact, a lively tone, gestures, and body language to engage the audience.	The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard but tends to drone or fails to use eye contact, gestures, and body language consistently or effectively at times.	The presenter cannot be heard or speaks so unclearly that she or he cannot be understood. There is no attempt to engage the audience through eye contact, gestures, or body language.

Four stages in constructing a rubric

1. *Reflecting*. In this stage, we take the time to reflect on what we want from the students, why we created this assignment, what happened the last time we gave it, and what our expectations are.
    a) Why did you create this assignment?
    b) Have you given this assignment or a similar assignment before?
    c) How does this assignment relate to the rest of what you are teaching?
    d) What skills will students need to have or develop to successfully complete this assignment?
    e) What exactly is the task assigned?

f) What evidence can students provide in this assignment that would show they have accomplished what you hoped they would accomplish when you created the assignment?
g) What are the highest expectations you have for student performance on this assignment overall?
h) What is the worst fulfillment of the assignment you can imagine short of simply not turning it in at all?

2. *Listing*. In this stage, we focus on the particular details of the assignment and what specific learning objectives we hope to see in the completed assignment.
   Answers to (d)-(e)-(f) above regarding skills required, the exact nature of the task, and the types of evidence of learning are most often a good starting point to generate this list. Once the learning goals have been listed, you add a description of the *highest* level of performance you expect for each learning goal. These will later contribute to the "Descriptions of Dimensions" on a finished rubric.

3. *Grouping and Labeling*. In this stage, we organize the results of our reflections in Stages 1 and 2, grouping similar expectations together in what will probably become the rubric dimensions. Start with the *highest* performance expectations completed in Stage 2 and group together items which are related. Once the performance descriptions are in groups of similar skills, read them and start to find out what is common across the group and label it. These labels will ultimately become dimensions on the rubric – it is important to keep them clear and neutral; e.g., "Organization", "Analysis", or "Citations".

4. *Application*. In this stage, we apply the dimensions and descriptions from Stage 3 to the final form of the rubric, utilizing the matrix/grid format.

Once you have identified what you are assessing; e.g., critical thinking, here are steps for creating holistic rubrics:

- Identify the characteristics of what you are assessing; e.g., appropriate use of evidence, recognition of logical fallacies
- Describe the best work you could expect using these characteristics – this describes the top category
- Describe the worst acceptable product using these characteristics – this describes the lowest acceptable category
- Describe an unacceptable product – this describes the lowest category
- Develop descriptions of intermediate-level products and assign them to intermediate categories. You might decide to develop a scale with five levels; e.g., unacceptable, marginal, acceptable, competent, outstanding, or three levels; e.g., novice, competent, exemplary, or any other set that is meaningful.
- Ask colleagues who were not involved in the rubric's development to apply it to some products or behaviors and revise as needed to eliminate ambiguities.

Example:

HOLISTIC rubric for assessing student essays (Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education by Allen 2004)	
Inadequate	The essay has at least one serious weakness. It may be unfocused, underdeveloped, or rambling. Problems with the use of language seriously interfere with the reader's ability to understand what is being communicated.
Developing competence	The essay may be somewhat unfocused, underdeveloped, or rambling, but it does have some coherence. Problems with the use of language occasionally interfere with the reader's ability to understand what is being communicated.
Acceptable	The essay is generally focused and contains some development of ideas, but the discussion may be simplistic or repetitive. The language lacks syntactic complexity and may contain occasional grammatical errors, but the reader is able to understand what is being communicated.
Sophisticated	The essay is focused and clearly organized, and it shows depth of development. The language is precise and shows syntactic variety, and ideas are clearly communicated to the reader.

Developing Useful Rubrics: Questions to Ask and Actions to Implement

(Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses: shifting the focus from teaching to learning by Huba and Freed 2000)

	Question	Action
1	What criteria or essential elements must be present in the student's work to ensure that it is high in quality? • These should be the criteria that distinguish good work from poor work	Include these as rows in your rubric
2	How many levels of achievement do I wish to illustrate for students? • The levels should generally describe a range of achievement varying from excellent to unacceptable o Example: exemplary, proficient, marginal, unacceptable o Example: sophisticated, competent, partly competent, not yet competent o Example: distinguished, proficient, intermediate, novice o Example: accomplished, average, developing, beginning	Include these as columns in your rubric and label them
3	For each criterion or essential element of quality, what is a clear description of performance at each achievement level? • Avoid undefined terms (e.g., "significant", "trivial", "shows considerable thought") • Avoid value-laden terms (e.g., "excellent", "poor") • Use objective descriptions that help provide guidance to the students for getting better when needed	Include descriptions in the appropriate cells of the rubric
4	What are the consequences of performing at each level of quality?	Add descriptions of consequences to the commentaries in the rubric
5	What rating scheme will I use in the rubric? • Some criteria may be weighted differently than others	Add this to the rubric in a way that fits in with your grading philosophy
6	When I use the rubric, what aspects work well and what aspects need improvement? • Does the rubric help you distinguish among the levels of quality in a student sample? • Do the criteria seem to be appropriate? • Are there too many or too few levels of achievement specified? • Are there any descriptions that are incomplete or unclear?	Revise the rubric accordingly
	Additional questions/actions when developing rubrics for specific assignments	
1	What content must students master in order to complete the task well?	Develop criteria that reflect knowledge and/or use of content and add them to the rubric
2	Are there any important aspects of the task that are specific to the context in which the assessment is set?	Identify skills and abilities that are necessary in this context and add related criteria to the rubric
3	In the task, is the *process* of achieving the outcome as important as the *outcome itself*?	Include and describe criteria that reflect important aspects of the process