COLLEGE WRITING RUBRICS

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ABSTRACT

The discussion will describe how rubrics can help to provide effective assessment criteria for evaluating written assignments in college undergraduate classes. A student-centered theory focus will highlight how valuable teacher/student communication can help lead to improving student writing. Rubrics can be a practical way to improve feedback, reduce student grade issues and provide accurate and timely information on student writing skills.

Keywords: Assessment, Rubrics, Feedback, Grades, Personalize Education.

INTRODUCTION

The teacher's assessment strategies provide a relational prompt for students who gain insights into their work, whether it be in-class assignments or homework. Evaluating the teaching and learning process involves a host of activities such as creating course objectives, gathering data from various sources and often assigning grades for student work. Relevant assessment methods should accurately inform both the teacher and student about the quality of the learning experiences. Assessments should produce a rich understanding of student learning and provide the necessary information to improve future educational experiences. It requires asking questions that help to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching practices and curriculum plans (Huba & Freed 2000). One such method is a grading rubric that documents an instructor's objectives for a student. The learner feels confident in what their teacher is requiring of their work and has a positive outlook of the grading process.

The student-centered model of learning encourages teachers to view their students as academic partners who work together to produce dynamic learning experiences. Teachers must be willing to adapt their instructional methods to meet student learning needs. Boud (1995, p. 42) encouraged teachers to "become researchers of student perceptions, designers of multifaceted assessment strategies, managers of assessment processes and consultants assisting students in the interpretation of rich information about their learning." The student-centered learning model challenges teachers

use descriptive language in their written and verbal comments to their students. Teachers must cultivate dialogues with their students that foster open minded learning attitudes. The language of assessment must be caring and honest while providing insights that helps the individual have a clear picture of their academic work (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Paulos & Mahoney, 2008).

Teacher's Perspective

The instructor's rubrics can help improve communication about the nature and value of the assessment and the grading of student work (Rasheed, Aslam, & Sarwar, 2010). A student-center philosophy, using rubrics, and having learners review their feedback will help them better understand assessment practices and goals. Learners of any age will work as hard as expected by their instructors, if the expectations are clearly expressed and demonstrated. The learners want to understand what a teacher is looking for in a paper or an assignment. Rubrics can provide the needed structure, guidelines and support. A rubric can help the learners understand what the teacher wants while creating a sound basis for productive teacher and student interaction (Fluckiger, 2010).

If a teacher has never taught a particular group of students, it is crucial to present a rubric already designed and discuss the expectations of each area of criteria with the students. This provides an opportunity for learners to ask questions that reflect on their individual styles of writing. If, however, the students are in their second or third course with an instructor, students can be invited to help

create a new rubric because they are familiar with the intellectual expectations. The students at this stage in their academic careers can help to create a very demanding and extensive rubric. After developing the grading standards based on teacher input and approval, students can recognize that grading is not subjective; instead it is analytical (Fluckiger, 2010). Rubrics encourage students to play an active role in their education. Montgomery (2002, p. 35) argues that "cognitive learning theory and its constructivist approach to knowledge acquisition support the need to use assessment methods that move away from passive responses by students to active construction of meaning."

Rubrics Defined

Rubrics are a set of practical performance criteria that illustrate different levels of proficiency in writing both structurally and grammatically (Stiggins, 2001). According to Stiggins (2001) having a grading objective list like a rubric creates a quality standard of assignments (Fluckiger, 2010). There are various types of rubrics; to name just a few include check lists, a before and after chart, a criteria, a grid rubric, also a points and comments rubric. The check list rubric has a chronological list of objectives. A successful paper will meet the majority of those objectives. The before and after chart are similar to the check lists; there are two lists, one for before the writer starts and one to make sure that the document is edited and checked for completion. Grid rubrics are more of a chart. The grid has various objectives with levels of acceptable achievement levels. The rubric format establishes the guidelines to earn points (Andrade, 2005).

There are several types of rubrics that can be consistently used in the classroom. Different elements make the two styles of rubrics effective. They are the grid rubric and the criteria, point value and individual comments rubric. The grid rubric is for the new students and those learning how to develop their writing skills. This grid gives the student five areas of content criteria to work on while developing and editing their papers. The criteria are: clearly stated topic, use of supporting details throughout the body of the paper, a solid conclusion that supports the claims or answers the question of the paper, APA writing and formatting guidelines adhered to, and grammar and spelling errors (Table 1). A top row of the grid explains a variety of standards with a point range and demonstrates how individuals have earned their grades. This is a positive model of a rubric because of the explanation of expectations for the paper, according to the directions that are given in the syllabus. Students have found few weaknesses with this approach except that is might seem overwhelming at first. Once students have their questions answered, they appreciate the rubric's clarity and respect the grading process. The bottom section is denoted for individual paper comments which helps the students recognize perpetual challenges or issues that new writers need to work on.

Developing the criteria, points, and comments rubric for more advanced writing students will have unique expertise (Table 2). As advanced writing students, which are students that have completed a basic writing course series or are writing majors, having a better understanding and set standards for their quality. It is for these students that teachers spend more time allowing them to express their grading expectations. The activity helps students focus on content while learning the value of editing to produce a high quality document. When the document is graded the students usually receive a lengthy rubric back because of the extensive teacher notes.

Teachers have often found that students can learn how to improve their writing and grades by reviewing major mistakes by simply reading the feedback that the teacher leaves them. The challenge is that many students acknowledge their grade, not necessarily the written notes on their paper from their instructor. If the instructor has a separate document (rubric) attached to the students work then the learner can study how they earned their points for different sections. According to Stiggins (2001) there are various ways to provide feedback. Feedback can be shared in four basic ways:

- Points assigned to each part of each response
- Brief written rationale for the score, suggesting factors they might have overlooked
- The total number of points summed over all exercises

Content	Does not meet expectations	Partially meets expectations	Meets expectations	Exceeds expectations (full points)
Clearly stated topic	Topic is not clearly stated (0-11 pts. possible)	Paper seems to have a topic but is not very clear, reader has questions (up to 14 pts.)	Topic is stated well enough to understand without question (up to 17 pts.)	Topic is expressed in a clear manner and is thought provoking (up to 20pts.)
Use of supporting details throughout the body of the paper	There are few if any supporting details in the paper (0-11 pts. possible)	There are supporting details but not in a chronological order or flow (up to 14 pts.)	The supporting details explain the topic and answer any questions (up to 17 pts.)	Supporting details clearly express an understanding of the topic and is thought provoking (up to 20 pts.)
A solid conclusion that supports the claims or answers the question of the paper.	There is not a solid conclusion that summarizes or answers research questions in the document (0-11 pts. possible)	There is a summary sentence or two but not a proper conclusion to the paper (up to 14 pts.)	There is a clear paragraph that summarizes the paper (up to 17 pts.)	The paper has an expressive and detailed summary and conclusion of the topic (up to 20pts.)
APA writing and formatting guidelines adhered to	APA writing guidelines were not followed (0-11 pts. possible)	There were consistent formatting or reference page errors (up to 14 pts.)	There were a few minor errors with the formatting or the references provided (up to 17 pts.)	The strict APA writing and formatting guidelines are followed and there are no errors (up to 20 pts.)
Grammar/Spelling	The paper has many spelling and grammar mistakes throughout the document (0-11 pts possible)	There were more than five grammar spelling or more errors in the document (up to 14 pts.)	The document has one or two spelling or grammar errors (up to 17 pts.)	There are not spelling mistakes or grammatical errors (up to 20 pts.)

Specific comments about the document that include the areas of content:

Table 1. The Grid Rubric (Skelton, 2010)

- A grade based on comparing the total score to a predetermined set of cutoff scores for each grade (Stiggins, 2001, P. 159).

Instructors can become frustrated when students continue to make the same mistakes on their papers because they have neglected to apply the feedback to their next assignment. However, having a student-centered method of review can help to elevate such tensions. Reviewing a student's paper with them individually will provide valuable feedback that transcends receiving comments in a Word document. The presence of the instructor has a form of shock value for students who do not usually meet with their teachers. Students will pay close attention to the teacher's comments, take notes and have the opportunity to ask questions. Reading feedback with a student gives the personal attention that is beneficial to teachers as well as the students. Teachers acquire a better understanding of their writing needs and help students to develop writing skills and goals (Rasheed, Aslam, & Sarwar, 2010).

Conclusion

Teachers can create a rich learning environment through a student-centered method of assignment evaluation. Assessments can blend important course information and improve future educational experiences. One method of eliminating teacher/student miscommunication over grading is by using rubrics and discussions over assignment feedback. Teacher-designed rubrics creates a more cohesive learning environment and generates positive student attitudes toward assessment. Rubrics help students understand grades while offering an accurate picture of their academic abilities.

References

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Criteria	Point Value	Comments
The document adheres to the academic guidelines for formatting.		
Correct citations are used of original works within the body of the paper.		
The content is concise and clear with the topic and supporting details.		
Tables and charts are labeled and cited correctly.		
Transition sentences are used appropriately to guide from one topic to another from paragraph to paragraph.		
Rules of grammar, usage, and punctuation are followed.		
Sentences are complete, clear, concise, and varied.		
Spelling is correct.		

Table 2. Criteria, Point Value and Individual Comments Rubric (Skelton, 2010)

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