

Writing Across the Curriculum

Scoring Guides and Rubrics: Suggestions from Writing Studies Research

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What Does Writing Studies Research Say?

Bean (2011, p. 292) suggested that the more clearly instructors define their marking criteria at the outset of an assignment, the better the final product they will receive. Instructors should define, in advance, their writing assignment expectations, and put them into scoring guides to help make those expectations explicit to students. Students then get a feel for what instructors are looking for and can self-correct as they write the assignment (Glenn, Goldthwaite, & Conners, 2003).

Thaiss and Zawacki (2006) and Nowacek (2009) remind us that assumptions and opinions about good writing vary widely between instructors and students. Scoring guides can eliminate that variance by creating norms of what constitutes good writing. For instance, Diederich's (1974) study asked 53 professionals in six different occupational fields to grade 300 essays on a scale of one (1) to nine (9). Every essay received at least five different grades and one-third of those essays received every grade on the scale. Diederich was able to train readers to score accurately and more consistently through the use of scoring guides and rubrics.

Carefully designed rubrics can increase reliability and consistency in marking assignments and reduce marking time (Lindemann, 2001). Generic rubrics are of limited use because they do not give specific information to students about the requirements for each assignment.

Specialized or customized rubrics enable the student to self-regulate and the marker to assess more precisely the degree to which the criteria have been satisfied by the student. Instructors looking for a time-effective marking system may want to consider using customized rubrics to explain specific expectations, moderate feedback to students, and reduce marking time for everyone involved.

Five Suggestions When Using Rubrics:

- 1. Explicitly define your criteria.** Students want to know how marks are awarded for each assignment.
- 2. Provide criteria at the outset.** You may receive a better final product.
- 3. Train readers to use the scoring guide.** The marking will be accurate and more consistent.
- 4. Customize rubrics for each assignment.** Task-specific rubrics can save time and energy.
- 5. Decide what works for you.** Your specific expectations can be categorized in simple or highly specified rubrics.

Six Implications For Instructors

1. Communicate grading criteria to students.
2. Identify the level of detail you want in your criteria and provide that to students.
3. Include a range of achievement or performance for each criteria level.
4. Create scoring guides for each assignment.
5. Choose between holistic and analytic scoring guides.
6. Revisit and revise your scoring guides to ensure the guide specifies what you value in student writing.

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