Developing Rubrics: Tips for Best Practice

Why use rubrics?
The UWA Assessment Policy requires us to mark according to a marking scheme which is criterion-referenced and set before the assessment takes place. A rubric is a type of marking scheme which:

- Makes expectations clear to students;
- Allows you to mark more consistently;
- Reduces time spent on moderation;
- Provides feedback to students;
- Increases transparency and defensibility;
- Improves marking efficiency;
- Develops self-assessment skills in students.

(Ashton & Davies, 2015; Brookhart, 2013; Brookhart & Chen, 2015; Yuan, et. al, 2016)

A rubric states “a coherent set of criteria for students’ work that includes descriptions of levels of performance quality” against each criteria (Brookhart & Chen, 2015). Rubrics often take the form of a table or matrix. Rubrics are often used in assessments which:

- Have several distinct criteria;
- Assess higher-order skills;
- Are complex, open-ended tasks (such as a final report on a semester-long project).

Rubrics are suitable for a wide range of assessment tasks, but they are not the only option.

Steps in developing a rubric
1. **Determine the criteria** – What skills are you assessing?
2. **Set the levels of performance** – How much are you differentiating?
3. **Weigh the criteria** – Which skills are more important?
4. **Write the descriptors** – What do you expect of students at this level of performance?
5. **Evaluate the rubric** – Does this rubric work?
6. **Upload** the rubric to Turnitin.

Descriptors: it’s all in the details
Writing good descriptors is probably the most difficult step in developing rubrics. For a rubric to work effectively, it is critical that descriptors:

A) Distinguish between levels of performance;
B) Do not overlap with one another;
C) Are descriptive, not prescriptive.

Start by considering what the standard for satisfactory performance (50%) for this assignment looks like.

Remember: You want to assess the quality of an assignment. Write descriptors that articulate what quality looks like at each level, with room for creativity!

Tips for writing descriptors
✓ Use words like “and”, “or” and “plus” to differentiate between levels
✓ Consider adjectives carefully when using them to differentiate
✓ Refer to UWA’s Grading System (Assessment Policy, 30.4) when writing your descriptors
✓ Be numeric where possible (e.g. “Used more than five scholarly references”)

Further resources
- Five common problems with rubrics and how to fix them: https://bit.ly/2SnGYTv

Contact your Faculty EEU team

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