

SELF-ASSESSMENT

Building Rubrics Democratically

Larry Davis

<i>Levels</i>	<i>High-intermediate to advanced</i>
<i>Aims</i>	<i>Have a voice in the assessment process</i> <i>Think about what successful performance should look like</i>
<i>Class Time</i>	<i>60 minutes</i>
<i>Preparation Time</i>	<i>10–15 minutes</i>
<i>Resources</i>	<i>Nothing additional</i>

Rubrics are useful tools for grading student performance, but each rubric also encodes a specific value system. In classrooms with a focus on “democratic learning” —where student input is key—the selection of the values represented in the rubric is an important area for discussion and collaborative decision making. Student participation in rubric creation also helps them think more carefully about what characterizes successful performance, which can then guide learning. This assessment activity describes one such process by which students take the lead in developing a scoring rubric. This activity is based on the “4x4” activity described in Stevens and Levi (2005, pp. 63–64).

PROCEDURE

1. Describe the assessment to the students. The nature of the assessment should be made clear, including (a) the instructional goal(s) that the assessment targets, (b) the assessment task, and (c) the purpose of the assessment (e.g., check mastery, provide feedback, encourage good study habits). It may also be necessary to briefly describe what a rubric is to students (see **Caveats and Options**, below).
2. Divide students into groups of 3–4. Have the groups discuss four features that they believe best represent a quality performance on the assessment task. These features will eventually form the scoring categories for the rubric, such as *content*, *pronunciation*, and *task completion*. It will also be helpful to provide guidance regarding the level of detail to be used in generating the rubric. For example, the assessment might target generalized language

skills (e.g., pronunciation, fluency, grammatical accuracy) or task-specific skills (e.g., salutation for a business letter). Finally, more or fewer features might be used depending on the nature of the assessment and time available for discussion. Fewer features will speed grading, while more features will provide greater feedback.

3. Each group presents their four features to the class, writing their list on the board. The teacher may facilitate this process by asking questions and comparing results among groups but should avoid making judgments.
4. The class selects the four features that best describe good performance through a vote or by consensus.
5. Back in groups, students discuss what different levels of performance would look like for each of the four features. Four levels of performance labelled 1–4 (1 being low, 4 being high) are described for each feature. Each group fills out its own rubric grid for presentation to the class (Appendix A). Alternatively, three levels of performance may be used, which may make writing descriptions easier and save time.
6. For each feature, each group presents their descriptions. Discussion may follow, with the top four descriptions chosen by vote or consensus.
7. The features and descriptions then become the rubric used for the assessment.

CAVEATS AND OPTIONS

1. This process requires a degree of sophistication on the part of the learners and is probably best used with students who have experience with the assessment task. Construction of rubrics in this manner also takes a fair amount of class time and so might be reserved for a more important assessment or a recurring assessment such as *participation*.
2. This activity will require students to understand what a rubric is. This knowledge might come from experience with rubrics in prior assessments, or from a brief teacher presentation describing them.
3. The teacher may reserve the authority to alter the final rubric as needed to ensure that it adequately addresses the target of the assessment. To maintain the collaborative nature of the process, however, it is advised that such alterations be kept to a minimum.
4. If there are doubts about the feasibility of having students produce a full rubric, then other less intensive approaches exist, such as asking students to write down the characteristics of good performance on slips of paper, which are then used by the teacher when constructing the rubric (see Stevens & Levi, 2005, pp. 58–65).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Stevens, D., & Levi, A. J. (2005). *Introduction to rubrics: An assessment tool to save grading time, convey effective feedback, and promote student learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

APPENDIX: Rubric Grid

		Features: What are the important parts of the assignment?			
		1. _____	2. _____	3. _____	4. _____
Levels: What does performance look like at different levels? (1 = low, 4 = high)	1				
	2				
	3				
	4				