Rubrics to the Rescue

Dr. Emily Richardson
LaSalle University
Professional Development
Do you ever find grading a time consuming or unpleasant task? Do students complain that they don’t know how to approach an assignment or dispute their grades? Do you sometimes find that it is difficult to give feedback on certain complex assignments? Rubrics can be an effective answer to these problems.
• What constitutes excellent work in your courses?
• Do your students know what you consider to be excellent?
• How would it affect student learning if you told students what qualities you look for in their work?
According to Webster, a rubric is “an authoritative rule... an explanation or introductory commentary”

It is the scoring “rules” for your course. The criteria against which the student work will be judged.

Defining a Rubric
My Story
• Helps students to make connections between their current course of study and life after graduation
  ◦ Standards of our discipline
  ◦ Example: use of appropriate language of the discipline
• Helps students to understand the differences in quality – they learn to self-assess and correct
• Can use rubrics to help students in setting their own standards
• Opens channels of communication with student
  ◦ Dialogue on the key components of a paper

Using Rubrics to Educate
• Gain information continuously – what the students don’t understand about our standards will become apparent
• Can share with colleagues – greater strength in the rubric; collaboration gains standards that can be used institution-wide
• Teach others (parents, practitioners in the field) about our intended learning outcomes

How we learn from Rubrics
- Levels of Mastery
  - Exemplary, Proficient Acceptable, Unacceptable
- Dimensions of Quality
  - Can be both discipline specific, as well as general education
    - Engineering skills + oral communication
- Organizational Groupings
  - Written communication (organization, grammar, etc.)
- Commentaries
  - Describes the defining features at each level of mastery
Let’s look at several rubrics!
What criteria or essential elements must be present in the student’s work to ensure that it is high in quality?

- This is not margins, or length
- Review an excellent example – what makes it so?
- Collective Decision Making
- Collaboration/Interchangeability
- Appreciation of Conflicts/Differences
- Balance of Participation
- Focus
- Open Communication
- Mutual Support
- Team Spirit

Example: Teamwork
How many levels of achievement do I wish to illustrate for students?
  ◦ Could be three, four, five
  ◦ Terms need to be discipline specific if possible

Step Two:
• Exemplary, Proficient, Acceptable, Unacceptable
• Advanced, Intermediate high, Intermediate, Novice
• Accomplished, Average, Developing, Beginning

Example: Teamwork
For each criterion or essential element of quality, what is a clear description of performance at each achievement level?

- Must determine qualitative differences – not just “less” of something
• Excellent: The group functions well. Peer review indicates good distribution of effort. All members are challenged and feel their contributions are valued.

• Good: The group functions fairly well. Some people in the group believe they are working harder (or less hard) than others, but everyone is contributing.

Example: Teamwork – group functioning
• What are the consequences of performing at each level of quality?
  ◦ Should be part of the descriptors
What rating scheme will I use in the rubric?
- Numbers
- Grades
- Weighting of factors

Step Five
• When I use the rubric, what aspects work well and what aspects need improvement?
  ◦ Revision every semester/year is critical
• Quality of discussion question
  ◦ Relevance to the material in the module
  ◦ Importance of issue in the chapter
  ◦ Ability to provoke thought
  ◦ Originality
  ◦ Timeliness
• Quality of the responses
• Depth of the discussion thread

Online Example – grading forum discussions
• Organization
  ◦ Introduction, conclusion
  ◦ Logical flow of ideas and thoughts
  ◦ Topic sentences
  ◦ Transitions
  ◦ Headings used when appropriate
• Content
  ◦ Information presented clearly
  ◦ Complete
  ◦ Accurate
  ◦ Citations
  ◦ Focus on subject