

FAST BUT FAIR **METHODS TO** **GRADE WRITING**

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WORKSHOP OBJECTIVE

- By the end of this workshop, you will be able to assess/grade your students' written work (and more) quickly, fairly, objectively, efficiently, and confidently using *holistic* grading methods.

More specifically, you be able to develop and use *rubrics* that will provide valuable feedback as well as solid justifications for your grading.

Use writing assignments, projects, portfolios, oral presentations, and essay exams to assess:

- **Application** (use, implement, give examples)
- **Analysis** (compare/contrast, test, examine)
- **Synthesis** (design, create, conclude from data)
- **Evaluation** (assess, judge)

NOT JUST

- **Knowledge** (regurgitate, describe)
- **Comprehension** (rephrase)

Bloom's taxonomy/hierarchy of cognitive operations

Methods for Grading Written Work, Projects, etc.

- ***Atomistic*** = analytical, normative, deductive
- ***Holistic*** = primary trait analysis, single impression, general impression
 - < 25 students
 - Any number of students

Atomistic Grading

- “Grading key” of analytic scale with assigned points (partial credit)
- Objective
- Best choice when “right answer” = knowledge or comprehension and has component parts.

Problems with Atomistic Grading

- **Usually slow**
 - Must attend to details, partial credit.
 - Must write what is wrong or missing on each paper.
- **Though objective, students will challenge anyway.**
 - Demand any grade challenges in *writing* with *justifications* within a tight time limit.

Holistic Grading

- Small Class

1. Read through and **rank-order** all papers relative to each other by putting each paper above or below the papers you've read.
2. Decide on grading distribution by grouping papers of very similar quality. Assign grades by group.

Holistic Grading – Small Class cont'd

3. Type up descriptions of the quality of each group of papers and give to students when returning papers.
4. Demand any grade challenges in ***writing*** with ***justifications*** within a tight time limit.

Holistic Grading

- Larger (or Any Size) Class

Create a **rubric** in 3 steps.

Rubric = an assessment/grading tool that lays out specific expectations for an assignment (e.g., writing, speaking, multimedia) and usually describes each level of performance quality on the selected assessment criteria.

To grade holistically and develop rubrics, you must accept that:

- You can't assess/grade student work on ***every*** criteria you can think of.
- Students can't work on improving their performance on every criteria you can think of. *They don't even know what those criteria are.*

What is worth assessing?

- Satisfying the assignment, following directions
- Memorization of facts, definitions, text material
- Proper use of technical terminology
- Understanding of the material, texts
- Proper references to texts, other research
- Organization, conformity to format
- Precision of measurement, quality of data
- Specification of limits, qualifications to results, conclusion
- Clarity of explanations, expression
- Strength/tightness of arguments (internal consistency, evidence, logic)
- Mechanics (spelling, grammar, punctuation)
- Writing style (as suitable to your discipline)
- Creativity of thinking, solution, design

Step 1 / Exercise 1

- Think of a key writing assignment or essay question that requires and assesses higher-order thinking. From the list of possible assessment criteria, **which 3, 4, or 5** are **most** important for your students to demonstrate?

*These should reflect the **level** and **student learning objectives** of the course.*

Step 2: Choose your assessment scale.

- Number of points
- Grades (A, B, C, etc. or 4.0, 3.7, 3.3, etc.)
- Descriptive level (e.g., high, average, low mastery; exemplary, competence, developing, unacceptable)

Exercise 2: Do this for your key writing assignment or essay question.

***Step 3: On each criteria,
describe the performance
for each level.***

- Number or range of points, letter grade, numerical grade range, descriptive level
- Sentences (often in paragraphs) or phrases (often in lists)
- See examples.

More sources of model rubrics

- Dannelle Stevens & Antonia Levi,
Introduction to Rubrics, Sterling, VA:
Stylus, 2005.
- <http://rubistar.4teachers.org>

- http://www.teach-nology.com/web_tools/rubrics/
- http://landmark-project.com/classweb/tools/rubric_builder.php3
- <http://edtech.kennesaw.edu/intech/rubrics.htm>

Exercise 3: Describe the performances for each level on each criteria.

- Choose your rubric format (paragraphs, lists, table, sentences, phrases, etc.)
- Write out descriptions of each level of performance on each assessment criteria.

Step 4. Use your rubric to teach.

Distribute and explain your rubric to students when:

- 1) you make an assignment — as part of the instructions;
- 2) you review for an exam.

Step 5. Use your rubric to assess/grade.

- Test the rubric on a few papers/essays.
- Modify the rubric if needed.
- Read and assess/grade papers/essays, writing only the grade – *no comments* except as time permits.
- Return papers/essays with a copy of the rubric – best if relevant descriptors are marked.
- Demand any grade challenges in ***writing*** with ***justifications*** within a tight time limit.

Individual-Pair Exercise:

- Select history or chemistry mini-essays to grade. Read the assignment and develop a simple rubric. Read and grade essays using **second** holistic method.
- Find a neighbor or two who graded the same essays. Compare grades, then rubrics.