

Use of Rubrics in Writing Instruction

Research indicates that students attain greater understanding of curricular goals and deepen their personal investment in achieving these goals if they have some say in developing the rubrics for the assignments on which they will be assessed. This project examines the role of rubrics in writing instruction. I approached this project within our existing service committee structure, incorporating faculty from our Professional Development Committee, First-Year Writing Committee, and Upper Division Committee.

Our faculty continue to provide individualized feedback to students on drafts of their work and on final projects even though teaching loads have increased. Some faculty view grading rubrics as generic feedback systems that do not allow for the complexity needed for individualized instruction. Others view rubrics as providing transparency for students while also streamlining the delivery of feedback. With these disparate views in mind we began a discussion of the use of rubrics in our Professional Development Committee in which we reviewed research on the use of rubrics in writing instruction. Sources included those that focused on rubrics for assessing student use of research (Jastram, Leebaw and Tompkins), student attitudes towards assessment criteria (Morozov), and how rubrics can aid faculty in course design (Richlin). This project culminates in a workshop for PWR faculty to be held in May 2019, after the close of the spring semester, as part of a larger three-day faculty seminar focused on pedagogy. As of this writing, sixteen faculty have signed up to attend.

Four faculty will present a variety of approaches to using rubrics in writing instruction. Since all of our classes seek to help students focus on and improve their writing process through revision and peer review, the first faculty member will introduce a rubric that explains his feedback process in an upper-division course, with attention to the transition from the first rhetorical analysis assignment to later assignments that incorporate peer review and individual instructor-student conferences. A second faculty member will present a rubric she uses for presentations given by first-year students. A third faculty member will cover how he introduces evaluation in his professional writing courses and how he facilitates student development of rubrics for self and peer evaluation. I will present rubrics aimed at faculty to facilitate syllabus design and communication of course goals to students. After faculty present their materials in the first half of the workshop, the second half will center on faculty discussion of the various rubrics and approaches.

Our writing courses help students focus on and improve their writing process as well as the end-products they produce, be they a researched paper, a website, or an ePortfolio of their work. In the Program for Writing and Rhetoric faculty endeavor to teach students how to deepen ideas and improve their critical thinking by bringing the process of revision into the curriculum so that students do not approach writing as a “one-and-done” endeavor completed the night before an assignment is due but instead as a recursive process in which they revisit the scope and content of their work. I envision that this is the start, not the end, of a program-wide discussion on assessment transparency and on how to communicate curricular goals to students. We will be able to continue this discussion into the next academic year via our PWR “cafés,” which are monthly meetings focused on pedagogy.

Works Cited

- Jastram, Iris, Danya Leebaw, and Heather Tompkins. “Situating Information Literacy Within the Curriculum: Using a Rubric to Shape a Program.” *Libraries and the Academy*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2014, pp. 165–186.
- Morozov, Andrew. “Student Attitudes Toward the Assessment Criteria in Writing-Intensive College Courses.” *Assessing Writing*, vol. 16, 2011, 6–31.
- Richlin, Laurie. *Blueprint for Learning: Constructing College Courses to Facilitate, Assess, and Document Learning*. Stylus, 2006.