

# Preface

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In recent years, many educators have demonstrated genuine interest in exploring authentic learning opportunities for their students. As individual schools and entire districts seek ways to incorporate this approach into the existing curriculum, a major concern is identifying and implementing a form of student assessment tailored to this learning style. The most frequently discussed option is rubrics.

A rubric is a grid or chart that expresses requirements of a task by dividing them into a range of achievement levels. It is an assessment method that identifies specific steps within a multistep process (e.g., constructing a Web page), then defines levels of performance for each step from minimal to optimal expectations based on student age and grade level. Rubrics make an excellent assessment tool for authentic learning tasks because they can include all critical steps as well as levels of performance for each step (Burke, 2006). Authentic learning seeks to replicate real-life experience with tasks that mirror what occurs in the real world. Authentic learning introduces skills that often fall outside the existing curriculum; therefore, assessment of authentic learning tasks requires a new system of measuring student understanding. Rubric assessment is ideal for the multitask nature of authentic learning because it allows for evaluation of several elements at the same time. For example, students participating in a debate can be evaluated on debate content as well as acceptable behaviors related to that type of oral presentation, such as “no interrupting” or “respecting time limits.”

Rubrics used to assess authentic learning provide students with a clear understanding of teacher expectations from the onset of the assignment. Rubrics can reduce or eliminate much of the subjectivity of assessment by clarifying for students the skills, knowledge, and behaviors they must demonstrate to attain a particular grade. When students know the teacher’s expectations before beginning a performance task, they are able to assume greater responsibility for both learning and assessment. All students can identify the highest performance level and set goals for attaining that level.

Although rubrics can assess a wide variety of tasks, one of their more attractive features is an ability to evaluate the performance of students involved in activities specific to an individual classroom or school district. For example, a teacher may develop and implement a simulation activity for students in a middle school government class. The simulation may involve role playing, math

computations, and debates as well as some written reflections about the experience. The teacher can design a rubric to cover each of these individual areas within the simulation, providing teacher and students with a more complete profile of overall performance. Instead of simply a letter or numerical grade, the rubric provides specific information about a student's strengths and weaknesses, a feature that helps students and teachers know the direction subsequent instruction should take.

A rubric allows teachers and districts to target areas of study specific to their district. For example, a school district may require students to demonstrate understanding of their state's government. A rubric can be designed to accommodate this situation. Students might participate in an authentic learning exercise, such as acting as state governor for a week. Teachers might evaluate this simulation on a number of levels, ranging from students' knowledge of the function of state government to the duties of the governor. By placing the district requirements on a rubric illustrating lowest to highest performance in each area, the teacher and students can see almost immediately those areas that require instruction and review.

In short, rubrics provide a comprehensive profile of student performance in highly readable results that offer teachers, administrators, parents, and students invaluable information for future planning. Using rubrics is a more complete assessment process than simply assigning overall letter grades because rubrics delineate all the tasks within a multitask procedure, and they identify criteria for mastery in each of these tasks.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

*Designing and Using Rubrics for Reading and Language Arts, K-6* was written with a dual purpose. One goal is to provide teachers in all settings with rubrics to assess student literacy. To that end, this book contains samples of rubrics for each of the literacy areas tailored to specific grade levels—primary (K-3) and intermediate (4-6)—so teachers can track student achievement with a realistic scale. The presence of multiple grade levels allows teachers to see what their students should know in their present grade level as well as what teachers will expect of them as they progress through the school system.

Accompanying each sample rubric are guidelines for using the rubrics. These how-to pages offer sample assignments as well as acceptable responses for these assignments. Although teachers should begin their review of rubrics with the grade level they teach, they should not overlook the materials and information available at the other grade levels. They should peruse the other rubrics and how-to pages for alternative activity ideas and assessment options, which may be useful for differentiating assignments to meet individual student needs.

Benchmarks for each level are included, as well as suggested activities in many areas. Each sample rubric shows a specific grading scale (93-100 = A; 87-92 = B; 78-86 = C; 70-77 = D; < 70 = F). Criteria in the rubrics are typical of those found in state standards. The appendix contains a list of Web sites that offer information on standards across the United States, helpful information on rubrics, and other useful teacher-related Web sites.

In addition to providing time-saving, preconstructed rubrics, the other goal of this book is to provide teachers with a step-by-step guide to constructing their own rubrics for any classroom performance task.

The major revisions to the second edition are twofold. First, the material has been reorganized to better meet the needs of teachers. The chapter on designing rubrics has been updated and moved to the front of the book. Second, several new rubrics have been added to reflect the expanding field of literacy and language arts education. Included in the new edition are rubrics that address narrative writing, persuasive writing, six-trait writing, comprehension monitoring, the use of presentation software, and information literacy skills. In addition, the book has been refocused to target educators in primary and intermediate classroom settings. In this way, the book remains an essential resource for teachers in those grades and adds information and rubrics to meet the new challenges facing these educators.

This new edition is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 offers a general overview of rubrics and explains why they have become such a popular assessment instrument. This chapter gives a detailed account of how and when rubrics are most effectively used. Chapter 2 provides a clear description of how to construct rubrics and offers several sample rubrics as well as methods for altering samples and developing rubrics that can assess specific classroom assignments. Chapter 3 gives educators tools for assessing students' reading comprehension. Concrete examples of activities and rubrics use are found throughout this section. Chapter 4 focuses on assessing students' understanding of fictional story elements. Many times, readers are able to decode and comprehend fictional stories but fail to see a connection between various works of fiction and the importance of such elements as characterization and theme. Chapter 5 provides ways for teachers to assess different forms of student writing. The chapter includes rubrics for the writing process and six-trait writing, as well as rubrics for specific assignments, such as letters and greeting cards. These rubrics, like all of the samples provided in the book, can be adapted by teachers as needed. Chapter 6 covers oral language skills, including oral reports and presentations. This chapter allows educators to focus on helping students learn effective presentation skills. Chapter 7 explores the research process and offers sample rubrics that enable educators to help students learn the skills necessary to advance to formal research projects in higher grades. Sample rubrics examine if students are able to use such research tools as a dictionary and an atlas effectively. Chapter 8 includes assessment of students' ability to use classroom technology to convey information to others. Sample rubrics in this chapter focus on information literacy skills and the use of presentation software to construct and deliver multimedia presentations.

Finally, although the primary focus of this book is the language arts of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, the assessment rubrics are also useful for content-focused assignments. For example, teachers can use the research rubrics when teaching social studies, the debate rubrics for science tasks, and the presentation rubrics for mathematics assignments.