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## Module 7 – Rubrics Activities 1a & 1b

These activities will help you answer the essential question:

➤ **What is a rubric?**

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### Activity 1a

*You may complete this activity individually or in groups.*

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Read the excerpt from the article “Understanding Rubrics” that appears on the following pages. Respond to each of the following:

- How do rubrics define quality? What is the impact on teaching and learning?
- Respond to the quote from teacher Christine Hall that appears at the conclusion of this excerpt.
- Discuss how rubrics can accommodate *heterogeneous classes*.
- Explain why each of the following statements is true:
- Rubrics help improve student performance.
- Rubrics provide students with informative feedback.
- Rubrics promote thinking and learning.

The following is an excerpt from the paper, “Understanding Rubrics” by Heidi Goodrich Andrade. This article is available on the Internet in its entirety from Harvard University at:

<http://learnweb.harvard.edu/alps/thinking/docs/rubricar.htm>.

Retrieved January 9, 2011.

### Understanding Rubrics by Heidi Goodrich Andrade

Authentic assessments tend to use *rubrics* to describe student achievement. At last, here’s clarity on the term.

Every time I introduce rubrics to a group of teachers the reaction is the same — instant appeal (“Yes, this is what I need!”) followed closely by panic (“Good grief, how can I be expected to develop a rubric for everything?”). When you learn what rubrics do—and why—you can create and use them to support and assess student learning without losing your sanity.

### What Is a Rubric?

A rubric is a scoring tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work, or “what counts” (for example, purpose, organization, details, voice, and mechanics are often what count in a piece of writing); it also articulates gradations of quality for each criterion, from excellent to poor. The term defies a dictionary definition, but it seems to have established itself, so I continue to use it.

The example in Figure 1 (adapted from Perkins et al 1994) lists the criteria and gradations of quality for verbal, written, or graphic reports on student inventions — for instance, inventions designed to ease the Westward journey for 19th century pioneers for instance, or to solve a local environmental problem, or to represent an imaginary culture and its inhabitants, or anything else students might invent.

This rubric lists the criteria in the column on the left: The report must explain (1) the purposes of the invention, (2) the features or parts of the invention and how they help it serve its purposes, (3) the pros and cons of the design, and (4) how the design connects to other things past, present, and future. The rubric could easily include criteria related to presentation style and effectiveness, the mechanics of written pieces, and the quality of the invention itself.

The four columns to the right of the criteria describe varying degrees of quality, from excellent to poor. As concisely as possible, these columns explain what makes a good piece of work good and a bad one bad.

Figure 1 Rubric for an Invention Report				
Criteria	Quality			
<b>Purposes</b>	The report explains the key purposes of the invention and points out less obvious ones as well.	The report explains all of the key purposes of the invention.	The report explains some of the purposes of the invention but misses key purposes.	The report does not refer to the purposes of the invention.
<b>Features</b>	The report details both key and hidden features of the invention and explains how they serve several purposes.	The report details the key features of the invention and explains the purposes they serve.	The report neglects some features of the invention or the purposes they serve.	The report does not detail the features of the invention or the purposes they serve.
<b>Critique</b>	The report discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the invention, and suggests ways in which it can be improved.	The report discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the invention.	The report discusses either the strengths or weaknesses of the invention but not both.	The report does not mention the strengths or the weaknesses of the invention.
<b>Connections</b>	The report makes appropriate connections between the purposes and features of the invention and many different kinds of phenomena.	The report makes appropriate connections between the purposes and features of the invention and one or two phenomena.	The report makes unclear or inappropriate connections between the invention and other phenomena.	The report makes no connections between the invention and other things.

## Why Use Rubrics?

Rubrics appeal to teachers and students for many reasons. First, they are powerful tools for both teaching and assessment. Rubrics can improve student performance, as well as monitor it, by making teachers' expectations clear and by showing students how to meet these expectations. The result is often marked improvements in the quality of student work and in learning. Thus, the most common argument for using

rubrics is they help define “quality.” One student actually *didn’t* like rubrics for this very reason: “If you get something wrong,” she said, “your teacher can prove you knew what you were supposed to do!” (Marcus 1995).

A second reason that rubrics are useful is that they help students become more thoughtful judges of the quality of their own and others’ work. When rubrics are used to guide self- and peer-assessment, students become increasingly able to spot and solve problems in their own and one another’s work. Repeated practice with peer-assessment, and especially self-assessment, increases students’ sense of responsibility for their own work and cuts down on the number of “Am I done yet?” questions.

Third, rubrics reduce the amount of time teachers spend evaluating student work. Teachers tend to find that by the time a piece has been self- and peer-assessed according to a rubric, they have little left to say about it. When they do have something to say, they can often simply circle an item in the rubric, rather than struggling to explain the flaw or strength they have noticed and figuring out what to suggest in terms of improvements. Rubrics provide students with more informative feedback about their strengths and areas in need of improvement.

Fourth, teachers appreciate rubrics because their “accordion” nature allows them to accommodate heterogeneous classes. The examples here have three or four gradations of quality, but there is no reason they can’t be “stretched” to reflect the work of both gifted and those with learning disabilities.

Finally, rubrics are easy to use and to explain. Christine Hall, a fourth grade teacher, reflected on how both students and parents responded to her use of rubrics:

*Students were able to articulate what they had learned, and by the end of the year could be accurate with their evaluations. Parents were very excited about the use of rubrics. During parent conferences I used sample rubrics to explain to parents their purpose, and how they were used in class. The reaction of parents was very encouraging. They knew exactly what their child needed to do to be successful.*

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### Activity 1b

*To complete this activity you will need a computer with Internet access. You may complete this activity individually or in groups.*

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1. Go to the website Thinkfinity available at <http://www.thinkfinity.org>. \*



In the search field located on the right hand side of the screen type in the word rubrics. Click “go.”

\*If you are a post-secondary educator, go to the University of West Florida Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment: <http://uwf.edu/cutla/rubricexamples.cfm>

- How many rubrics are available?
  - For what subject areas?
  - What are some of the organizations providing the rubrics?
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2. Scroll down to “Refine Your Search.” Click on the grade level you teach. Click the “Search” button.

- How many rubrics are available for the grade level you teach?
  - For what subject areas?
  - Select a rubric that you might use in your teaching. Examine the rubric by answering the following questions:
    - Are there teaching goals and targets identified in this rubric?
    - What are those teaching goals or targets?
    - How could this rubric help you communicate with your students?
    - How could this rubric guide your teaching?
    - How could this rubric guide your students’ learning?
    - How is this rubric different from a simple checklist?
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