Quick Guide: Types of Rubrics for Program Assessment

This quick guide was prepared by the WSU Office of Assessment for Curricular Effectiveness (ACE) and is intended to help WSU programs and faculty consider types of rubrics for assessing student performance on program-level student learning outcomes (SLOs). ACE is also available to collaborate with WSU undergraduate degree programs to develop rubrics and use them to collect measures of student performance on program-level SLOs for program assessment. Contact us at ace.office@wsu.edu for more information.

Introduction

Effective program assessment typically includes the evaluation of student work products or performances using faculty-developed rubrics to measure student learning on program-level student learning outcomes (SLOs). In this context, a rubric is a scoring tool that identifies component skills and knowledge for the targeted program-level SLOs, with a rating scale that provides information about the level of student performance. For program assessment purposes, rubrics can help clarify shared faculty expectations around student performance on program-level SLOs and make evaluation more consistent.

Note: This resource focuses on rubrics for use in program-level SLO assessment. Designing rubrics for other purposes, such as for grading or placement, is beyond the scope of this resource.

Types of Rubrics

Rubrics come in many forms and vary to best meet the needs of a program. While the following sections provide descriptions and examples for three different types of rubrics (**analytic**, **holistic**, and **single point**), please note that each type of rubric can vary widely depending on the context of the program and assessment (e.g., the number of program-level SLOs included, the level of detail or breakdown of the component skills and knowledge, and the granularity of the rating scale). WSU encourages programs to choose rubrics that provide useful information to their faculty and fit with disciplinary expectations.

Analytic Rubrics

Description: Analytic rubrics include succinct, explicit descriptions of each rating scale performance level for each component trait/criterion for the targeted program-level SLOs. Rows identify component skills and knowledge, and faculty and/or other professionals score student work on each row.

Example: (sample display with two program-level SLOs; also see Appendix A)

	Scale Level 1	Scale Level 2	Scale Level 3	Scale Level 4	Scale Level 5
Program SLO 1					
Criterion A	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*
Criterion B	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*
Criterion C	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*
Program SLO 2					
Criterion A	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*
Criterion B	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*

Advantages:

- Provide detailed evaluation of specific skills and knowledge, indicating areas of strength and weakness for each of the targeted program-level SLOs
- May be useful when many faculty and/or other professionals will be rating student work, as descriptors can support consistency

Limitations:

- Can be time-consuming to develop and refine
- Can be time-consuming for raters to use (especially for new raters)
- May be difficult to compare overall performance on multiple program-level SLOs (depending on the rubric, weighting of criteria, approach to data analysis, etc.)

Holistic Rubrics

Description: Holistic rubrics include short descriptions of each rating scale performance level for each program-level SLO *as a whole*, enabling faculty to make an overall judgment about the quality of work for each targeted program-level SLO. While the short descriptions typically include information about component traits/criteria, faculty and/or other professionals provide evaluation by assigning a single *overall* score for each of the targeted program-level SLOs based on the performance level description that best fits the work.

Example: (sample display with two program-level SLOs; also see Appendix B)

	Scale Level 1	**Scale Level 2**	**Scale Level 3**	**Scale Level 4**	**Scale Level 5**
Program SLO 1	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*
Program SLO 2	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*	*Description of performance*

Advantages:

- Provide overall evaluation of performance on targeted program-level SLOs, and may indicate relative strength and weakness between program-level SLOs if multiple SLOs are evaluated
- Are fairly short and relatively easy to develop and to use
- Can save time by minimizing the number of decisions raters must make, and may be useful when evaluating a high volume of student work or complex student work (e.g., a portfolio)

Limitations:

- Do not provide information on strengths and weaknesses (or where improvement is needed) within a single program-level SLO, since different component skills or characteristics are grouped together into a single score
- Can be difficult for raters to use consistently, as few pieces of student work will meet any one performance level description precisely

Single Point Rubrics

Description: Single point rubrics describe one critical level of performance on the rating scale (generally *meets expectations*), focusing evaluation relative to that performance level. Single point rubrics also include space for raters to provide qualitative comments when the student work falls at other performance levels on the rating scale. These rubrics can be more or less detailed, collecting one overall score for each targeted program-level SLO (similar to a holistic rubric) or separate scores for component skills and knowledge (similar to an analytic rubric).

Example: (sample display with two program-level SLOs; also see Appendix C)

Program SLO 1	**Scale Level 1**	**Scale Level 2**	**Scale Level 3** ***(Meets expectations)***	**Scale Level 4**
	Rater comments, if below expectations:		***Description of performance***	Rater comments, if above expectations:
Program SLO 2	**Scale Level 1**	**Scale Level 2**	**Scale Level 3** ***(Meets expectations)***	**Scale Level 4**
	Rater comments, if below expectations:		***Description of performance***	Rater comments, if above expectations:

Advantages:

- Emphasize a critical performance level (such as *meets expectations for a graduating senior)*
- Can be designed to provide overall evaluation of performance on targeted program-level SLOs or more detailed evaluation of specific component skills and knowledge
- Offer raters more flexibility in evaluation, including space to provide qualitative comments with concrete detail about student's strengths and weaknesses on specific program-level SLOs
- Are fairly short and relatively easy to develop and to use
- Minimize the amount of rubric text that raters must navigate, and may be useful when evaluating a high volume of student work or complex student work (e.g., a portfolio)

Challenges:

- Can be difficult for raters to score consistently, especially on scale levels where performance is not described
- Can be time-consuming for raters to provide comments, depending on the desired level of detail
- Compiling and interpreting qualitative comments may be difficult and time-consuming

Additional Considerations

- **Developing a new rubric:** This is an iterative process requiring effort to pilot, refine, and scale up to obtain results that are meaningful to faculty. Successful implementation of a new assessment measure typically requires ongoing efforts and regular attention over several semesters.
    - Determine the purpose for the new rubric, in addition to how and where it will be used. For example, programs may wish to evaluate student work using a rubric near the end of the program, to gauge the extent to which students are achieving the program's SLOs and to identify areas of strength and weakness that can contribute to decisions about curriculum and instruction.
    - Choose the type of rubric that will:
        - Be seen as credible to program faculty and the intended users of the results.
        - Provide useful information for program improvement.
        - Be feasible to use given the program's resources, and the amount of time faculty can devote to assessment activities.
    - Programs should also consider program size, status of any existing rubrics, program faculty familiarity with rubric-based assessment, the mode and complexity of student work to be assessed, and software/technology needed to collect ratings (and comments).

- **Choosing a rating scale**: When determining the rubric rating scale, programs should take into account: a) the level of granularity needed to provide useful results for program faculty to support decision-making; and b) the time and ease of using the rating scale to evaluate student work in the context of the assessment project (e.g., the number and types of student work to be evaluated).
    - For program-level SLO assessment, rubric rating scales typically have at least three and up to seven performance levels. ACE generally recommends rating scales with four or five levels of performance. Three levels (e.g., does not meet expectations, meets expectations, exceeds expectations) may not provide enough detail to contribute to faculty decisions about curriculum and instruction, while rating scales with more than five levels may be difficult for raters to use meaningfully and consistently.
    - Each level should include a brief descriptive name (not just a number) to help communicate and distinguish levels. There is no hard and fast rule on which rating scale to use; however, it's generally helpful to make clear which level represents the cut point, or minimally acceptable performance level (see ACE's Quick Guide to Setting Meaningful Performance Expectations for more information).
    - Examples of possible rating scales include:
        - Absent, Beginning, Developing, Proficient, Advanced
        - Below expectations, Approaching expectations, Minimally meets expectations, Solidly meets expectations, Exceeds expectations
        - Does not meet expectations, Partially meets expectations, Meets expectations, Exceeds expectations
        - Needs improvement, Adequate, Very good, Excellent
- **Approaches to evaluating student coursework using a rubric**: In the context of evaluating student coursework using a rubric for program level assessment, there are several approaches that programs can implement to measure student performance on program-level SLOs, depending on the context of the program, coursework, etc. See ACE's Quick Guide: Approaches to Evaluating Student Coursework for Program Assessment for more information.

Additional Resources

- Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2009). VALUE rubrics. https://www.aacu.org/initiatives/value-initiative/value-rubrics/
- Gonzales, J. (2014). Know your Terms: Holistic, Analytic, and Single Point Rubrics. Cult of Pedagogy Blog.
- Stevens, D. and Levi, A. (2013). Introduction to Rubrics. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Suskie, L. (2018). Chapter 15: Designing Rubrics to Plan and Assess Assignments. In Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Suskie, L. (2015). Two Simple Steps to Better Assessment. A Common Sense Approach to Assessment in Higher Education Blog.
- University of Hawaii at Manoa Assessment and Curriculum Support Center. Creating and Using Rubrics Webpage.

Appendix A: Analytical Rubric Example *(for illustration only; criteria adapted from AAC&U's VALUE rubrics)*

	Advanced	Proficient	Developing	Beginning	Absent
Program SLO #1 – Students will be able to develop and express ideas in writing					
Context of and Purpose for Writing	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work.	Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context).	Demonstrates awareness of context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., begins to show awareness of audience's perceptions and assumptions).	Demonstrates minimal attention to context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., expectation of instructor or self as audience).	Does not demonstrate attention to context, audience, purpose, or to the assigned tasks(s).
Content Development	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and shaping the whole work.	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop simple ideas in some parts of the work.	Does not use appropriate and relevant content to develop ideas in the work.
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency and is virtually error-free.	Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers with few errors.	Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors.	Uses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage.	Uses language that frequently impedes meaning because of errors in usage.
Program SLO #2 – Students will be able to explore issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating opinions or conclusions					
Student's Position	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue.	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue.	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) acknowledges different sides of an issue.	Specific position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) is stated but is simplistic and obvious.	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is not stated.
Influence of Assumptions	Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes own and others' assumptions.	Identifies own and others' assumptions.	Questions some assumptions. May be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (or vice versa).	Shows an emerging awareness of present assumptions (sometimes labels assertions as assumptions).	Does not show an awareness of assumptions.
Conclusion	Conclusion is logical and reflects an informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives in priority order.	Conclusion is logically tied to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints.	Conclusion is logically tied to information (because information is chosen to fit the desired conclusion).	Conclusion is inconsistently tied to some of the information discussed.	Conclusion is not tied to the information discussed.

Appendix B: Holistic Rubric Example *(for illustration only; criteria adapted from AAC&U's VALUE rubrics)*

	Advanced	Proficient	Developing	Beginning	Absent
Program SLO #1 – Students will be able to develop and express ideas in writing	• Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work. • Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and shaping the whole work. • Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency and is virtually error-free.	• Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context). • Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work. • Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers with few errors.	• Demonstrates awareness of context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., begins to show awareness of audience's perceptions and assumptions). • Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work. • Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors.	• Demonstrates minimal attention to context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., expectation of instructor or self as audience). • Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop simple ideas in some parts of the work. • Uses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage.	• Does not demonstrate attention to context, audience, purpose, or to the assigned tasks(s). • Does not use appropriate and relevant content to develop ideas in the work. • Uses language that frequently impedes meaning because of errors in usage.
Program SLO #2 – Students will be able to explore issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating opinions or conclusions	• Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue. • Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes own and others' assumptions. • Conclusion is logical and reflects an informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives in priority order.	• Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue. • Identifies own and others' assumptions. • Conclusion is logically tied to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints.	• Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) acknowledges different sides of an issue. • Questions some assumptions. May be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (or vice versa). • Conclusion is logically tied to information (because information is chosen to fit the desired conclusion).	• Specific position (perspective, thesis/ hypothesis) is stated but is simplistic and obvious. • Shows an emerging awareness of present assumptions (sometimes labels assertions as assumptions). • Conclusion is inconsistently tied to some of the information discussed.	• Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is not stated. • Does not show an awareness of assumptions. • Conclusion is not tied to the information discussed.

Appendix C: Single Point Rubric Example *(for illustration only; criteria adapted from AAC&U's VALUE rubrics)*

Program SLO #1 – Students will be able to develop and express ideas in writing					
Context of and Purpose for Writing	**Advanced**	**Proficient**	**Developing**	**Beginning**	**Absent**
	Comments where performance exceeds expectations:	Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context).	*Comments where performance is below expectations:*		
Content Development	**Advanced**	**Proficient**	**Developing**	**Beginning**	**Absent**
	Comments where performance exceeds expectations:	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work.	*Comments where performance is below expectations:*		
Control of Syntax and Mechanics	**Advanced**	**Proficient**	**Developing**	**Beginning**	**Absent**
	Comments where performance exceeds expectations:	Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers with few errors.	*Comments where performance is below expectations:*		
Program SLO #2 – Students will be able to explore issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating opinions or conclusions					
Student's Position	**Advanced**	**Proficient**	**Developing**	**Beginning**	**Absent**
	Comments where performance exceeds expectations:	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue.	*Comments where performance is below expectations:*		
Influence of Assumptions	**Advanced**	**Proficient**	**Developing**	**Beginning**	**Absent**
	Comments where performance exceeds expectations:	Identifies own and others' assumptions.	*Comments where performance is below expectations:*		
Conclusion	**Advanced**	**Proficient**	**Developing**	**Beginning**	**Absent**
	Comments where performance exceeds expectations:	Conclusion is logically tied to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints.	*Comments where performance is below expectations:*		