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INTRODUCTION

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: 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 (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. 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.

The use of rubrics to assess authentic learning provides 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 stating before students even begin an activity which skills, knowledge, and behaviors students must demonstrate to attain a particular grade. When students see the teacher's expectations at the outset, they must assume more responsibility for both learning and assessment. All students can identify the highest performance level and set goals for attaining that level.

While 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 just a letter or number grade, the rubric shows exactly the area of a student's strengths and weaknesses, which helps students and teachers know the direction remediation should take.

A rubric allows teachers or 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 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.

Rubrics can be developed for areas difficult to assess or incorporate into an overall grade by using other types of assessment such as listening skills. In short, rubrics provide a comprehensive profile of student performance in highly readable results that offer teachers, administrators, parents, and students invaluable information for lesson planning and reteaching exercises. Rubrics are more complete because they can cover all the tasks within a multitask procedure, and they identify what is considered mastery in each of these areas.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Designing Rubrics for Reading and Language Arts 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), intermediate (4–6), middle school (7, 8), and high school (9–12)—so teachers can track student achievement by using 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. While 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 considering that so many students are above and below the stated grade level.

Benchmarks for each level appear 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). Chapter 1 offers instructions for altering the scales to meet individual needs. Criteria in the rubrics are taken from the Illinois Board of Education Learning Standards for English and Language Arts (available at <http://www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/english/english.html>). The appendix contains a list of Internet sites that offers 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 to suit any classroom exercise. Guidelines appear in chapters 1 and 9.

Focusing on understanding and exploring the use of rubrics for assessment, *Designing Rubrics for Reading and Language Arts* consists of nine chapters.

Chapter 1, *Using Rubrics to Assess Literacy*, examines the anatomy of a rubric as well as the most appropriate time and situation for using this assessment tool.

Chapter 2, *Using Rubrics to Assess Reading Comprehension*, offers sample reading activities in the areas of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, biography, and instructions.

Chapter 3, *Literature and the Assessment Rubric*, focuses on the literary elements of plot, characterization, setting, and theme, providing sample activities and rubrics that measure student understanding of these elements.

Chapter 4, *Assessing Student Writing with Rubrics*, offers a general overview of how to assess the five-step writing process. Other features of this chapter are sample activities and rubrics for assessing student-authored poetry, fiction, greeting cards, autobiographies, informational brochures, and letters.

Chapter 5, *Using Rubrics to Assess Listening Skills*, uses the sample activities and rubrics format to assess students' listening skills in the areas of instructions, stories, guest speakers, and informational speeches.

Chapter 6, *Rubrics and Oral Language*, provides sample activities and rubrics for assessing debates, oral reports, storytelling, dramatic presentations, and discussions.

Chapter 7, *Rubrics and the Research Process*, provides sample activities and rubrics to measure students' ability to conduct research and process information gathered from reference materials and first-hand experiences. The chapter also contains activities and rubrics geared toward individual and collaborative research reports.

Chapter 8, *Rubrics and Classroom Technology*, offers sample activities and rubrics to assess student ability to conduct an Internet search or send an e-mail message. The chapter also contains guidelines and sample rubrics to measure student ability to construct a Web page, compile an audio collage, and complete a video presentation.

Chapter 9, *Constructing Rubrics*, offers a comprehensive guide for constructing assessment rubrics to fit individual curriculum needs.

The literature selections used as examples throughout *Designing Rubrics for Reading and Language Arts* represent the types of books teachers can use effectively with the activities. Such lists are available in a number of literature anthologies. Teachers can also use the sample rubrics to assess student-authored poetry and fiction.

Finally, while the primary focus of this book is the language arts of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, teachers of all content area subjects will also find the assessment rubrics useful in their classrooms. Social studies teachers can use debate and oral presentation rubrics to monitor student growth in those areas, and science and math teachers can make effective use of rubrics for instructions or those involving experiments and field trials.