

# About Rubrics and why to use them

## Blackboard 9.1

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### Before you begin – consider your course and assessment design

Designing and writing a rubric is a step that is part of your overall course and assessment design process and not a task that should be completed in isolation.

Important preceding steps include:

- ☞ Defining your course learning outcomes (usually 4-6 per course)
- ☞ Designing the assessment tasks to answer the question 'How will I know when a student has achieved the learning outcomes?'

Typically a learning outcome is performance-oriented and includes three elements:

- ☞ the action verb, that clearly indicates what the student will know, do or be
- ☞ the conditions or context in which the learning will occur, and
- ☞ the level of performance that is expected.

Each assessment task is a source of evidence from which to make judgements about how well a student has achieved the intended course learning outcomes.

A rubric is a tool used in assessment. Rubrics are also called a matrix, assessment grid or criteria sheet. Rubrics clearly outline the criteria (property or characteristic) required in completing the assessment task, along with providing standards (levels of quality) for reaching each level of performance.

Rubrics enable you to make fair, valid and reliable judgements. The assessment tasks, criteria and descriptors must all be aligned to the course learning outcomes - they need to reflect the learning outcomes and use similar language or key words. Creating alignment enhances students' sense of purpose, ensures that the assessment supports the teaching and learning activities and increases validity of any assessment undertaken. Developing rubrics in collaboration with colleagues is a good opportunity to undertake moderation and share perspectives on assessment. Initially rubrics may take some time to develop as defining the different levels of quality in a meaningful yet succinct way is challenging.

Be sure to consider the [USC Assessment Policy](#) in conjunction with your course and assessment design.

# About Rubrics and why to use them

## Blackboard 9.1

---

### Why use a rubric?

Rubrics have many advantages:

#### For students

- to know what they need to do to be successful
- provide explicit guidelines regarding task expectations
- use them as a tool to develop their own learning

#### For staff

- use rubric-based activities to engage students in formative feedback to improve their work before it is due
- provide common basis from which to make judgements for all markers
- provide justification which can be used as basis for further feedback

### How to write a rubric?

All rubrics have two features in common:

- A list of criteria- the assessable elements or characteristics, or what counts in the assessment task, and
- Levels of quality or standards with a scale of descriptors that can be used to judge student work

The grading scheme at USC uses five levels of quality:

- HD High Distinction,
- DN Distinction,
- CR Credit,
- PS Pass and
- FL Fail

These will be the most meaningful for students as they are the final grades awarded to students. The criteria and standards form the row and column headings in the example as shown.

In each cell a descriptor is given that expresses the level of quality that is required to achieve a particular standard. It is important to ensure the rubric meaningfully communicates to students the valued aspects of the task and what they will have to do/demonstrate to be successful.

# About Rubrics and why to use them

## Blackboard 9.1

Criteria	Standards: HD - FL				
Criteria	HD	DN	CR	PS	FL
Ability to structure and articulate your reflection for self and other audiences	Detailed attention to and successful execution of the conventions of self-reflection in a first person commentary including organisation, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices.	Demonstrates consistent use of important conventions of self-reflection in a first person commentary including organisation, presentation, and stylistic choices.	Demonstrates use of relevant conventions of self-reflection in a first person commentary including organisation, presentation, and stylistic choices.	Follows expectations appropriate to a self-reflection in a first person commentary for basic organisation, presentation, and stylistic choices.	Attempts to use a consistent voice in self-reflection and first person commentary. Basic organization and presentation of ideas.

Task specific *descriptors* of the expected STANDARDS of student learning

- 🔒 Two areas of strength.....
  - 🔒 Two areas for development.....
  - 🔒 General comments.....
- Provision for feedback

### The criteria

In writing criteria, you must consider the elements of the task that are assessable and about which a judgement can be made. The assessable elements are drawn from the learning outcomes and are the properties or characteristics that you, and other assessors, will use to determine the student’s level of performance. Criteria should not contain qualitative descriptors – good, excellent, etc.

If you are to make valid, reliable and fair decisions in relation to student learning the criteria must be constructively aligned to the task and the course learning outcomes. You should devise the criteria and the grading rubric at the time you design the assessment task – before the course begins. This way you can be assured that you are teaching the knowledge and skills that students will be assessed on.

Remember: If you haven’t taught it, and given opportunity for practice, you should not assess it.

# About Rubrics and why to use them

## Blackboard 9.1

Intended learning outcome	Assessment task	Criteria
On successful completion of this course you should be able to:		
Critically reflect on and articulate your teaching practice at university	Self-reflection on your teaching and learning perspective	Ability to structure and articulate your reflection for self and other audiences

## The descriptors

You might think of the process of writing descriptors as following this internal dialogue:

*Begin with the Pass standard (PS)* – What would you accept as passing level, recognising that the student achieved the criteria as it was written, but has not gone beyond it? The main substance of the criteria is being addressed

*Next the High Distinction (HD) standard* - What is it possible for a student to achieve if they had thoroughly engaged with the learning that is associated with the task? Students at this level still need specific feedback on what they did well, so they can do it again. Yes, meaning the student has fully addressed the criteria plus done something beyond that or something you might not have expected.

*Next the Fail standard (FL)* – This would be what you might indicate to students prior to their submission about what not to do. You hope no-one ever produces work that matches this description. It is best to give a mix of descriptions and areas for improvement.

*Then go to the Credit (CR) and the Distinction (DN) standards* – these are usually the hardest to write, because you are referencing the standard on either side all the time. Sometimes the best thing is to write the descriptor based on the task, and then look at them in relation to each other.

Try to avoid just changing the adjective (consistent, thorough, satisfactory, limited, poor) because this does not have as much meaning, and does not provide a good basis for feedback

Once drafted, talk about your rubric to your teaching colleagues and students. Work it through and make adjustments based on language and complexity. Rubrics are dynamic and worth revisiting after each offer of the course, when you can make adjustments and refine your expression. It's important to accept that it's an ongoing process that takes time but will enhance student learning outcomes – your goal!!

# About Rubrics and why to use them

## Blackboard 9.1

Remember to ensure that assessment judgements are defensible, consistent and transparent, it is essential that criteria and standards are used in conjunction with exemplars of student work and moderation processes. Formative activities such as practice marking, double-blind review, self and peer assessment, provision of feedback and structure reflection are additional ways of using criteria and standards for the enhancement of student learning.

## Guidelines for developing descriptors

(Adapted from Hughes, C. 2010. Practical guidelines for writing assessment criteria and standards, Teaching & Educational Development Institute (TEDI), University of QLD)

When describing standards....	Preference for....	Rather than...
Specify demonstrable behaviour	<i>Rephrases problem in own words and identifies major issues</i>	<i>Understands and interprets problems</i>
Describe the behaviour – not the student	<i>The ideas of others are acknowledged in ways outside the conventions of this discipline</i>	<i>You are not good at referencing</i>
Describe what was done in demonstrating lower than optimal standards is often more supportive of learning than listing what was not	<i>Argument consists of a series of assertions only</i>	<i>No supporting evidence provided for arguments</i>
Avoid vague terms which are open to a wide range of subjective interpretation such as 'critical', 'appropriate', 'excellent', 'analytical'	<i>Evidence of familiarity with recommended readings</i>  <i>Analysis demonstrates an awareness of the implications in significant detail</i>	<i>Evidence of appropriate reading</i>  <i>Sophisticated analysis</i>
Use terms likely to be understood by students – avoid the obscure	<i>Demonstrates comprehensive and detailed knowledge of major facts, concepts and procedures addressed in course materials</i>	<i>Secure and pronounced knowledge</i>
Avoid relative terms – comparative are rarely helpful without a benchmark standard	<i>Major issues are identified with discrimination and without distraction by irrelevant materials</i>  <i>Solutions to problems are original and/or innovative without losing feasibility</i>	<i>Analysis is more analytical</i>  <i>More creative solutions offered to problems presented</i>
Ensure balance between validity and reliability	<i>References include here have limited relevance to the problems (low standard)</i>  <i>Discerning selection of references from within and beyond recommended course materials (high standard)</i>	<i>Includes two references (low standard)</i>  <i>Includes more than six references (high standard)</i>

# About Rubrics and why to use them

## Blackboard 9.1

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### Using rubrics in Blackboard

A Blackboard rubric can be created with or without allocated marks (can use points or percentages). If using a rubric with marks, you can select the appropriate cells and then the final mark will be calculated for you. If using a rubric without marks, you can still manually assign an overall mark that will be recorded in the Grade Centre.

In Blackboard, you can associate a rubric when creating the following assessment types:

- ☞ Assignments
- ☞ Discussion board forums and threads
- ☞ Bb Blogs
- ☞ Bb Journals
- ☞ Bb Wikis
- ☞ Test questions – short answer, essay, file response

You can also associate a rubric with a column that has been manually created in the Grade Centre.

Rubrics may be associated with assessment tasks such as:

- ☞ Presentations
- ☞ Practical exams/assessments
- ☞ Manually submitted assignments
- ☞ SafeAssignments\* (see below)

# About Rubrics and why to use them

## Blackboard 9.1

### Using rubrics with SafeAssign

Because SafeAssign is a building block plugged into Blackboard, you cannot associate a rubric when creating the SafeAssign submission link. However, once the submission column has been created in the Grade Centre, you can then add a rubric to that task. See the specific steps for adding the rubric or grading using the rubric below.

#### Adding the Rubric to a SafeAssignment

- 🔗 Create the SafeAssignment
- 🔗 Go to *Full Grade Centre* -> *Edit Column Information*
- 🔗 Add your rubric

#### Edit Column

Grade Columns represent any student effort that is measured. Columns for gradable items are added to the Grade Centre automatically. Work that is not automatically graded can be measured in the Grade Centre by creating a Grade Column. [More Help](#)

\* Indicates a required field.

Cancel Submit

##### 1. Column Information:

Item Name: SafeAssignment

Grade Centre Name:

Description: 

[Rich Text Editor]

Path: p

Primary Display:   
Grades must be entered using the selected format. Grades display in this format in both the Grade Centre and My Interim Results.

Secondary Display:   
This display option is shown in the Grade Centre only.

Category:

Points Possible:  \*

Associated Rubrics:

Name	Type	Date Last Edited	Show Rubric to Students
Rubric For SafeAssignment	Lead for Grading	03/May/2013 13:08:28	Yes (With Rubric Scores)

Students will now be able to see the Rubric in My Interim Results (and once graded, the grade and feedback).

# About Rubrics and why to use them

## Blackboard 9.1

### Grading using the Rubric

- ☞ Go to *Grade Centre*
- ☞ Click on the chevron in the cell where the Safe Assignment submission has been made
- ☞ Select *View Grade Details*
- ☞ The assignment opens and you will have access to *View Rubric*, *Grade Attempt* and *Edit Grade* buttons

#### Grade Details

User USC1 USC1 (usc1) < > Column SafeAssignment (SafeAssignment) < >

Current Grade: **8.00** out of 10 points **Exempt**  
Grade based on null  
Due: None

Attempts Manual Override Column Details Grade History

Date Created	Date Submitted (or Saved)	Value	Feedback to User	Grading Notes	Actions
03-May-2013 10:40:06	03-May-2013 10:40:06 (Completed)	8.00 <a href="#">View Rubric</a>	thank you for your submission.		<a href="#">Grade Attempt</a> <a href="#">Edit Grade</a>

- ☞ You will see a *View Rubric* button (that you can use as part of the Grading process) once you click on *Grade Attempt* or *Edit Grade*

User USC1 USC1 (usc1) < > Column SafeAssignment (SafeAssignment) < >

Current Grade: **8.00** out of 10 points **Exempt**  
Grade based on null  
Due: None

Attempts Manual Override Column Details Grade History

Date Created	Date Submitted (or Saved)	Value	Feedback to User
		<b>8.00</b> <a href="#">View Rubric</a>	

Feedback to User

thank you for your submission.

For more information visit Blackboard help: Rubrics

[https://help.blackboard.com/en-us/Learn/9.1\\_SP\\_12\\_and\\_SP\\_13/Instructor/120\\_Student\\_Performance/040\\_Rubrics](https://help.blackboard.com/en-us/Learn/9.1_SP_12_and_SP_13/Instructor/120_Student_Performance/040_Rubrics)