

Program-Level Assessment

Designing Assignments and Scoring Guides

Designing Assignments

Assignments from a course are an excellent choice to measure student learning, especially of skills. Assignments and instructor-created exams are the most common measures used for course-level assessment and assessment within the Integrative Core Curriculum. Assignments are also very commonly used for program-level assessment.

An assignment that is useful for measuring student learning should present students with a task that is meaningful, a worthwhile use of learning time, and a direct match with the appropriate learning goals. The topic, student process, and intended product should be clearly defined, so as to aim students at the desired outcome.

Assignment Design Process Suggestions

First, list the learning goals this assignment will measure, then draft a prompt that will allow students to demonstrate their ability to meet the learning goals. Use the prompt and the learning goals to create evaluative criteria (a scoring guide), then revise the prompt to elicit the work described in the criteria of the scoring guide.

A helpful resource is Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment in College by Barbara A. Walvoord and Virginia Johnson Anderson. John C. Bean's Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom also contains a number of good model assignments. Copies are available to borrow from the Faculty Lounge or from the Office of Academic Assessment.

Designing Scoring Guides

Developing a formal scoring guide which is provided to students prior to beginning work on the assignment is important for a number of reasons. A scoring guide both clarifies instructor expectations to students and provides consistency in scoring across sections or multiple instructors. Scoring Guides can take a variety of forms. The simplest might be a checklist of the criteria for successful completion of the assignment. A slightly more complex variation might use the list of criteria as categories which are assigned points. A rating scale takes the checklist with its point values and assigns certain point values to different levels of performance. A rubric provides a description of each level of performance for each of the evaluative criteria. It is important to remember that, especially during the first use with real student work, the findings of the assessment process may include a need to refine or alter the rubric to better reflect student performance. A rubric does not have to be set in stone. This also highlights the need to “try out” a new rubric on authentic student work where possible.

The example that follows is adapted from Stevens, D. D. & Levi, A. J. (2005). *Introduction to Rubrics*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Press. The students' prompt is as follows:

Each student will make a 5 minute presentation on the changes in one Portland community over the past 30 years. The student may focus the presentation in any way s/he wishes, but there needs to be a thesis of some sort, not just a chronological exposition. The presentation should include appropriate photographs, maps, graphs, and other visual aids for the audience.

Checklist

Knowledge/Understanding
Thinking/Inquiry
Communication
Use of visual aids
Presentation skills

Checklist with Points

Knowledge/Understanding (20 points)
Thinking/Inquiry (30 points)
Communication (20 points)
Use of visual aids (20 points)
Presentation skills (10 points)

Rating Scale

Knowledge/Understanding (Excellent: 20 points; Competent 18 points; Needs work: 15 points)
Thinking/Inquiry (Excellent: 30 points; Competent 15 points; Needs work: 10 points)
Communication (Excellent 20 points; Competent 15 points; Needs work: 10 points)
Use of visual aids (Excellent: 20 points; Competent 18 points; Needs work: 15 points)
Presentation skills (Excellent: 10 points; Competent 8 points; Needs work: 5 points)

Rubric

	Excellent	Competent	Needs Work
Knowledge/Understanding	<p>The presentation demonstrates a depth of historical understanding by using relevant and accurate detail to support the student's thesis. Research is thorough and goes beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned texts.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">20</p>	<p>The presentation uses knowledge which is generally accurate with only minor inaccuracies, and which is generally relevant to the student's thesis. Research is adequate but does not go much beyond what was presented in class or in the assigned text.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">18</p>	<p>The presentation uses little relevant or accurate information, not even that which was presented in class or in the assigned texts. Little or no research is apparent.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">15</p>
Thinking/Inquiry	<p>The presentation is centered around a thesis which shows a highly developed awareness of historiographic or social issues and a high level of conceptual ability.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">30</p>	<p>The presentation shows an analytical structure and a central thesis, but the analysis is not always fully developed and/or linked to the thesis.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">15</p>	<p>The presentation shows no analytical structure and no central thesis.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">10</p>
Communication	<p>The presentation is imaginative and effective in conveying ideas to the audience. The presenter responds effectively to audience reactions and questions</p> <p style="text-align: right;">20</p>	<p>Presentation techniques used are effective in conveying main ideas, but a bit unimaginative. Some questions from the audience remain unanswered.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">15</p>	<p>The presentation fails to capture the interest of the audience and/or is confusing in what is to be communicated.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">10</p>
Use of visual aids	<p>The presentation includes appropriate and easily understood visual aids which the presenter refers to and explains at appropriate moments in the presentation.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">20</p>	<p>The presentation includes appropriate visual aids, but these are too few, in a format that makes them difficult to use or understand, and/or the presenter does not refer to or explain them in the presentation.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">18</p>	<p>The presentation includes no visual aids or visual aids that are inappropriate, and/or too small or messy to be understood. The presenter makes no mention of them in the presentation.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">15</p>
Presentation skills	<p>The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard, using eye contact, a lively tone, gestures, and body language to engage the audience.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">10</p>	<p>The presenter speaks clearly and loudly enough to be heard, but tends to drone and/or fails to use eye contact, gestures, and body language consistently or effectively at times.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">8</p>	<p>The presenter cannot be heard and/or speaks so unclearly that s/he cannot be understood. There is no attempt to engage the audience through eye contact, gestures, or body language.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">5</p>

Holistic Rubric

An alternative to a fully analytic rubric (above) is a more holistic rubric—often used when grading speed is valuable, such as scoring a standardized exam (SAT Writing, some AP questions, etc.). It describes how an “A assignment” generally differs from a “B assignment.”

In an A essay, the text is analyzed in a coherent and sophisticated manner. The introduction leads skillfully to thesis statement, while specific references to the text and other supporting evidence are apt and demonstrate great insight into the work. The essay features superior organization, sophisticated language choices (with clear connections, smooth transitions), and precise usage and mechanics. The piece concludes skillfully rather than just stopping.

In a B essay, text analysis is thorough. The introduction leads to the thesis, while apt text references demonstrate understanding of the work. The essay features good organization, strong language usage (flows smoothly through connecting ideas and transitions), and mechanics. The conclusion is sufficient.

In a B- essay, text analysis is adequate. The essay introduces most of the context and orients reader to thesis, while text references show an adequate understanding of work. The essay is still organized, but inconsistent or imprecise usage and mechanics may appear.

In a C essay, the text analysis is surface. The essay relies on generalizations or summaries as opposed to text references and generally show limited understanding of the work. The essay’s organization is basic with inconsistent or imprecise usage and mechanics.

In a D essay, analysis of text shows minimal understanding of work. The essay may feature a weak or incomplete thesis, confusing or illogical structure, few or no text references. Generally, the essay lacks organization, sentence variety, or a strong grasp of mechanics.

Questions to Guide the Creation of Assignments and Scoring Guides

- Why are we giving students this assignment? What are its key learning goals? What do we want students to learn by completing it?
- What are the skills we want students to demonstrate in this assignment?
- What are the characteristics of good student work (good writing, a good presentation, a good lab report, good student teaching, etc.)?
- What specific characteristics do we want to see in completed assignments?

Additional Resources

On the website, there are links to a “meta-rubric:” a rubric for use in analyzing rubrics and the AAC&U VALUE rubrics, which tackle concepts (critical thinking, intercultural competency) often found in general education programs. A partially filled rubric template for your personal use is available upon request from the Office of Academic Assessment.

There are large number of online resources on rubrics. A few that I've found that are targeted at higher education rather than K-12 are listed below:

<http://course1.winona.edu/shatfield/air/rubrics.htm>

<http://ctal.udel.edu/assessment/resources/rubrics/>

<http://avillage.web.virginia.edu/iaas/assess/tools/rubrics.shtm>

<https://usm.maine.edu/assessment/rubric-examples>