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The Usefulness of Rubrics

by Kelly Donlan

(Education 1100)

Abstract

This paper explores five ways in which rubrics work as a positive aspect in schools. Six different articles that report on the increased use of rubrics are used to support the claims. These articles differ in their topics of why rubrics are beneficial, but all the articles conclude that rubrics are a positive contribution to assessment and grading. This paper discusses how rubrics are positive for teachers, students, and the students' parents. Educational professors and experts, such as Heidi Andrade, provide data and facts on how rubric use has positively affected grades and schoolwork in America. Quotes from students are used to prove that not only teachers, but also students appreciate the addition of rubrics for their assignments. This paper explains that rubrics are the most efficient and fair way to grade for all teachers in every grade level. The reader will be left with many examples on why rubrics have so many positive aspects.

When buying a new product, whether it is a new phone or new appliance, the buyer will most likely have some questions about how the product works and what to do. Luckily, almost every product comes with directions or an instructional book. These manuals are helpful because they emphasize how the product should be used and to explain why the inventor created it in the first place. Similarly, assignments in school are given with a guide that states the teacher's expectations and intentions. This guide is called a rubric. There are numerous positive aspects of giving and receiving rubrics for assignments in school. Rubrics benefit the students by clarifying expectations, giving the opportunity to self-assess, and the feedback helps students to improve for future assignments. Rubrics also create a common ground for teachers and provide communication to both students and parents.

Many people would agree that they prefer to know what is expected of them before getting involved with something. Rubrics define every expectation that the teacher wants for the assignment. This, in return, makes the students feel more confident and helps them start, continue, and finish their assignment. Any confusion the student may have about the content or points of the assignment are dismissed by the rubric. The *Journal of Teaching in Social Work* stated, "Rubrics communicated the instructor's expectations, clarified how to write course assignments, explained grad and point deductions and, in general, made course expectations clearer" (Genzie, Khaja, Chang, Adamek, & Johnsen, 2012, p. 421). Along with clarification, this demonstrates another expectation that rubrics inform students of: points. A rubric will specifically say what aspects of the assignment the teacher is looking for and how many points each section is worth. A few examples of sections that could be on a rubric include the following: grammar, comprehension, organization, content, and creativity. With this, students are able to determine what to include and determine what sections to focus most on based on point value. At the University of Albany, two undergraduate students created a project to determine student perspectives on rubrics. Their findings concluded, "Students' comments regarding rubric use were consistently positive. They liked the fact that rubrics let them know 'what's expected; and contrasted it with the 'guessing game' they felt they had to play when teachers did not provide a rubric or some sort of guidelines for an assignment" (Andrade & Du, 2005, p. 3). Rubrics help teachers express what they are expecting the students to submit. As a result, the students are more likely to produce better work because they knew the expectations without any guesswork from

the start.

Self-assessment is another positive aspect of rubrics. Self-assessment is an extremely effective way for students to identify and correct their own errors prior to submission. Since rubrics map out exactly how the teacher is going to grade the assignment, students can double-check their work before turning it in for formal grading. In an article titled, “Self-Assessment”, Education Professor Heidi Andrade explained, “During self-assessment, students reflect on the quality of their work, judge the degree to which it reflects explicitly stated goals or criteria, and revise” (Andrade, 2008, para. 2). After finishing a project or paper, a student can read over the rubric section-by-section to evaluate, correct, and add specifics to meet the standards that the rubric outlines. This routine creates a long-term habit of reviewing and correcting work before submitting. Beyond that, reading the rubrics and assessing their own work helps students to understand the task they were assigned. This idea is explained further in an educational magazine that said, “Montgomery stated that asking students to complete the same assessment that the teacher will use might give valuable clues to the students’ understanding of the task and readiness for self-reflection skills” (Jackson & Larkin, 2002, para. 2). The more a student self-assesses, the more likely it is that the student will understand the tasks they are given. Self-assessment also gives students a chance to approximate what grade they will receive. Being able to predict the grade the student will receive helps to eliminate the suspense of waiting to see the actual grade. In the end, if the teacher’s final grade is different from the grade the students predicted for themselves, this can lead to additional student-teacher discussion and student performance improvement.

Heidi Andrade said, “If students produce it, they can assess it; and if they can assess it, they can improve it.” One of the greatest benefits of rubrics is the opportunity to improve when the graded assignment and rubric is handed back to students. Rubrics explain to the students how they earned a certain grade, and this is very helpful because many students would admit that they have no idea how they earned the grade that they did. A magazine called *Teaching Exceptional Children* noted, “... Most students do not understand why they received a particular grade on an assignment. The students may reason that their being good or bad or the teacher’s perception of them is why they were given a particular grade” (Jackson & Larkin, 2002, para. 2). Letter grades communicate to students that they performed well or performed below expectations; however, rubrics explain to them why they performed well or below expectations. Reviewing the rubric makes students aware of what they need to improve on in the current assignment or in future assignments. The undergraduates at University at Albany also recorded one of the students who explained, “I think rubrics basically justify your grade because even if they do have like a grade and what you did wrong, this tells you exactly what you need or what you were lacking in” (Andrade & Du, 2005, Better, fairer grades section). Rubrics show what criteria the student met or exceeded, and what criteria require improvement. Rubrics guide the teacher to give clear and constructive feedback for the students. This is more effective than assigning an A, B, C, D, or F on the assignment. If needed, the teacher can write comments on the rubric that will emphasize the areas for improvement. An interesting thing that students can do is keeping all of their rubrics throughout the year to compare the scores on each assignment to see how they have improved over time. Rubric feedback will lead to an increased improvement of student performance as time goes on.

Rubrics not only benefit students because they also provide many positive aspects for teachers. In creating rubrics, teachers define the criteria they are looking for before assigning a project or paper. Defining the criteria beforehand saves time for the teacher while grading and creates consistency among teachers in grading expectations for students of similar grade and ability level. A doctor from Minia University explained, “When a common set of performance criteria and scoring guides are used throughout department and grade-level team, school, or district, this benefit is extended, increasing the consistency of judgement across teachers” (Wael, 2012, p. 214). A common ground is created among teachers with the use of a rubric. All the teachers are expecting the same

criteria from their students and that is what creates the consistency needed for education in general. Rubrics help defend the teacher's fairness in grading. Rubrics show that the grade a student is given is based on content and proves that there was neither favor nor disfavor for an individual student. Another positive feature for teachers is that rubrics can help them categorize student work. They can identify the skills in which students excel and what the teacher needs to work on with the students for further practice. Communication is key in education. Fortunately, rubrics trigger communication between the teacher and students, parents, and among teachers. An article in *Teaching Exceptional Children* informed readers, "The rubric also provides a guide for clear communication among teachers, parents, and students as expectations for academic success are clarified and refined toward the final product" (Jackson & Larkin, 2002, para. 5). The communication that a rubric creates is about the teacher's expectations and the reasoning for a certain grade after evaluation of the student's product. The communication through rubrics is beneficial for both ends (giver and receiver of the rubric) to eliminate any questions and produce the best possible grade. Overall, there are many positives of creating rubrics for teachers.

A huge influence on children's lives and schooling are the children's parents. Undoubtedly, every parent wants to make sure his or her child is doing well in school and will do whatever it takes for that success to happen. Therefore, the use of rubrics is a positive aspect for parents too. Rubrics act as a helpful tool that parents can look off of to help their child with schoolwork at any grade level. The article "Using Rubrics to Promote Thinking and Learning," said, "Rubrics make sense to people at a glance; they're concise and digestible. For these reasons, teachers like to use them to assess student work, parents appreciate them when helping their children with homework, and students often request them when given a new assignment" (Andrade, 2000, p. 13). If the child is stuck or wants his or her parents to look over an assignment, the parent can look at the rubric to get an idea on how to help them. Parents then can assess the work according to the rubric before their child turns in the assignment for grading. Another reason why rubrics are helpful to parents is because they can understand and visualize exactly how their child earned a specific grade. Andrade also provided a quote from an interviewee parent who reported this following scenario, " 'Look, you're a smart child, you've always done well in school. Two weeks ago I asked how you were doing in school and you said 'Fine, Dad.' How can you bring home this report card?' Sobbing, the child told him, 'Dad, I don't know what the grades count on.' " (Andrade, 2000, p. 13). Using rubrics resolve both problems in this situation. The child will know what criteria the grades are based upon and the parents will understand the child's grade and why they earned that grade. Rubrics will get rid of any speculation a parent might have of the teacher grading unfairly because the grade and points will be mapped out specifically on the rubric. Finally, after the child receives the assignment and graded rubric, the parent can go over it with the child to clarify strengths and weaknesses. A plan to improve any problem areas can then be determined between the parent and child with helpful teacher feedback.

With the never-ending positive outcomes rubrics have on all people involved, it is no wonder why rubric use in schools has increased greatly over time. Rubrics are beneficial to the teachers who make and give them and to the students who receive them to guide their learning. Rubrics help students by clarifying the teacher's expectations, letting them learn and excel in self-assessment, and helping the process of improvement over the course of time. Rubrics help teachers by making the grading process faster and consistent. Also, it creates a common ground among teachers between and within grade levels. Additionally, rubrics benefit parents by including them in their awareness of a grade and to show what to work on with their child. Rubrics help the quality of assignments tremendously and should be used worldwide in classrooms to produce the best possible student work.

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