A rubric is an explicit set of criteria for assessing a particular type of work or performance.

Why use rubrics?

Adapted from Educational Research Review:

- **Transparency of Grading**: A well-written rubric lists the criteria that will be used in assessing student work, explains how the criteria will be applied, and describes what different levels of work contain. This lack of ambiguity means students have at their disposal the same exact tool their instructor will use to determine how well they have completed the assignment. A well-written rubric should put an end to surprise grades.

- **Improved Student Engagement**: Student engagement for the purpose of this discussion is defined as learners participating and taking interest in their own learning process. A rubric promotes engagement because the student has a diagnostic tool they can use to evaluate their own work. This kind of formative self-assessment can give students the opportunity to address weaknesses in their work before submitting it for a grade.

- **Promotion of Active Learning**: Active learning occurs when students are engaged and take charge of their own learning process. Rubrics facilitate this by providing students with a method of formatively assessing their own work using the same assessment instrument the instructor will use. The main reason for this potential lies in the fact that rubrics make expectations and criteria explicit, which also facilitates feedback and self-assessment.

- **Increased Consistency in Scoring**: A published standard, available as a reference to faculty while grading, holds each work by each student to the same standard. The tendency to hold back on awarding the highest marks to any of the first papers graded to “leave room” for truly outstanding work is eliminated. Rubrics also help faculty resist “rounding up” or pushing students just a little higher to reach the next grading plateau. Also avoided is the “A for effort” syndrome where students who have not achieved competency are given credit for trying hard.

- **Facilitate Valid Judgment of Complex Competencies**: When judging a complex series of skills over time, retaining consistency from assignment to assignment and between draft and final versions can be challenging. Judging student portfolios for example, where different types of assignments are collected to form the proof of achievement for awarding a degree, can benefit from a detailed and explicit rubric that helps organize the material into smaller, more cohesive units for assessment then judges each portfolio by the same set of standards.
How are rubrics written?

There are three main components to rubrics:

- **Grading Criteria**: What will students be evaluated on? How much is each criterion worth in the final grade? Common criteria include formatting, organization, and grammar.

- **Levels of Achievement**: You need to determine what your levels of achievement are for each criterion (e.g., excellent, good, fair, poor). There should be three to five levels of achievement. Fewer than three levels do not provide enough variance, while more than five levels are difficult to distinguish among.

- **Descriptions**: For each criterion and level of achievement, there should be a measurable and brief description of what that looks like in practice. It’s often easiest to write the proficient (or A-level) descriptions first and then pare those down for the lower levels of achievement. You also need to add a weight to each description. In Blackboard, this can come in the form of points, percentages, or range values in points or percent.

What does a rubric look like?