Classroom Use of Criteria/Rubrics

I. Use of Different Kinds of Assessment Strategies to Assess Different Things

Table 1 is an excerpt from the syllabus of one of the courses I teach, to which I have added a fourth assessment column.

Table 1. Grade Determination (Syllabus Excerpt, ENGL 301 Scientific and Technical Writing)

Category	***Components***	***Weight***	***Assesses***
Daily Classwork & Reflections		25%	Active class participation & perceptions
Collaboration		5%	Teamwork Skills
Homework (Exercise Central)		10%	Conventional Skills (capitalization, grammar, punctuation, spelling)
	A1: Relevance and Motivation ***(Persuasive Essay)***	40%	Performance; application of concepts, ideas to real-world tasks
	A2: Field-Specific Document Analysis ***(Printed Instruction Set)***		
	A3: Environmental Challenge ***(Recommendation Report + Memorandum of Agreement)***		
	A4: Resume		
Quizzes & Final Exam		20%	Recall of concepts, ideas
Total		100%	

II. Use of Criteria/Rubrics for Assessing Student Performance

Criterion	**= statement of quality**
Rubric	**= scale by which the quality is measured**

The terms are often used interchangeably.

A. Criteria/Rubrics establish standards for high quality.

- Every field has shared standards/expectations for what work in the field should look like.
- Technical communication standards exist for all written documents and for each genre.

B. Criteria/Rubrics minimize comparison of students to each other.

C. Criteria/Rubrics allow assessment of individual student* performance *(as opposed to information recall).

See Table 2 for samples of typical questions assessing student recall of facts and Table 3 for samples of criteria to assess student performance or application of concepts.

Table 2. Sample Recall Questions

1. Technical communication is defined by your textbook author as the process of managing information in ways that allow [people to take action].

2. Which of the following should be considered when analyzing the rhetorical situation? (Check all that apply.)

	Student Response	Value	Correct Answer	Feedback
a.	Producer/author constraints	33%		
b.	Consumer/reader needs, values, and attitudes	33%		
c.	Context in which the document will be read/used	34%		

Table 3. Sample Performance Questions (5 = outstanding, 3 = satisfactory, 1 = poor)

	Category	Criteria	Score	Weighted Value
Required Components	Evidence of Original Work	. Endnote and/or Excel data files	5 4 3 2 1	x 2 = ___/10
		. Field-specific documentation style	5 4 3 2 1	
		. Complete analysis charts (reader, context) . Multiple drafts or peer editor comments	5 4 3 2 1	

Essay	Content Quantity & Quality	. Amount and kind of information suitable for audience & purpose	5 4 3 2 1	X 5 = ___/25
	Organization	. Information arrangement . Navigational aides	5 4 3 2 1	5
	Convention	. Abbreviation, capitalization, grammar, punctuation, and spelling	5 4 3 2 1	5
	Credibility/ References	. Credibility (a variety of types of sources, triangulation of data) . Citations and references . Field-specific documentation style	5 4 3 2 1	5
Total				**___/50**

D. Criteria/Rubrics shift student focus from "guessing what the teacher wants" to developing high-quality work.

E. Criteria/Rubrics provide guidance for improving submitted and future work.

III. Basic Guidelines for Developing Rubrics

A. Steps

This simple six-step process can guide the development of rubrics.

1. Select assignment/project.
2. Identify required components (standards).
3. Determine indicators of quality for each component.
4. Decide the relative importance of each component.
5. Add Likert scale.
6. Pilot and modify as needed

B. Challenges

- Determine the specific targeted standard important for a student to attain. (What should s/he be able to *do*?)
- Settle on the appropriate level of detail.
  The criteria should be short enough to contain the indicator of quality but not so long that a student feels overwhelmed.
- Change the criteria to align with what is being taught at a given time.
  It simply is not realistic to score students on everything all the time.

IV. Student Perceptions of Criteria/Rubric Use

I first began to use criteria/rubrics when students in my honors sections of technical writing requested specific feedback on how to improve their print and electronic documents. Nearly a decade later, here is what my students say.

A. The Data

At the end of each semester, as part of the class participation/reflection score, I solicit recommendations on the way the course functions. Students mark items listing each activity conducted during the course as follows: K for keep, M for modify, and S for scrap. While I do not read the results until after grades are posted, I use the data to modify the course each semester. This past two semester's data from four sections appears in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Student Recommendations Summer & Fall 2006

Category: ***Feedback/Assessment***	***Item:*** ***Use of criteria sheets for assignment scoring***
K	52/65 = 80.0%
M	9/65 = 14%
S	4/65 = 6%

B. The Grade Complaints

Grade complaints are virtually nonexistent and *never* deal with project quality issues.

C. The Comments

A drawback to using rubrics is that I routinely get the label of being a "harsh grader." However, when you consider the opposite (being an "easy grader"), I'm content with the moniker.

In end-of-course reflections, one student from last term who suggested that I modify the criteria offered this rather sage advice:

> *Don't adhere too strictly to set standards. You'll make everybody's work too much the same. Plus, it is possible to have excellent work without strict adherence to things such as parallelism.*