

**Making the Most of Rubrics:  
Assessment of Student Writing from Classroom to Program**

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**Abstract**

As instruments for assessing student writing, rubrics have enjoyed a lively success among assessment specialists. They have provoked suspicion among classroom teachers, especially in humanities disciplines, where rubrics are sometimes viewed as overly prescriptive, reductive, and restrictive of the teacher's ability to respond appropriately and helpfully to individual papers. Our position is that rubrics are useful not only because they offer a means of gaining a measure of consistency within courses and among different sections of the same course but also because they provide a way of assessing how different courses contribute to the overall learning outcomes of general programs.

### **Exemplary Educational Objectives (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)**

1. To demonstrate awareness of the scope and variety of works in the arts and humanities. (See Learning Outcome 1 below)
2. To understand those works as expressions of individual and human values within an historical and social context. (See Learning Outcome 3 below)
3. To respond critically to works in the arts and humanities. (See Learning Outcome 1 below)
4. To engage in the creative process or interpretive performance and comprehend the physical and intellectual demands required of the author or visual or performing artist. (See Learning Outcome 8 below)
5. To articulate an informed personal reaction to works in the arts and humanities. (See Learning Outcome 5 below)
6. To develop an appreciation for the aesthetic principles that guide or govern the humanities and arts.
7. To demonstrate knowledge of the influence of literature, philosophy, and/or the arts on intercultural experiences. (See Learning Outcome 4 below)

### **Learning Outcomes for Program in Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture**

1. Identify and demonstrate an understanding of key ideas, authors, and texts in the field.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of methods for studying texts and ideas.
3. Demonstrate an awareness of how cultural differences affect reading, writing, interpretation, and other forms of communication.
4. Apply methods and key ideas to the analysis or criticism of written texts, images, films, cultural practices, or other forms of communication and art from a variety of cultures.
5. Apply methods and key ideas to the improvement of your own writing and other communication practices.
6. Demonstrate an understanding of basic elements of communication; an appropriate competence in grammar, diction, and standard usage; and a willingness to revise and edit your papers as needed.
7. Demonstrate a general ability to interpret texts and construct explanations and arguments in writing (composing papers with a thesis, supporting evidence, appropriate documentation, and other elements of good academic writing).
8. Demonstrate creativity and critical insight in writing.

## Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture Program

### Rubric for Team Evaluation of Course Papers

PAPER # \_\_\_\_\_

The topics below are keyed to our program objectives. For each paper you evaluate, respond to all 10 items. Indicate whether you

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Somewhat Agree
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

From the evidence of this paper alone, the student seems able to

1. Identify key ideas, authors, and texts in the field.  

A	B	C	D	E
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2. Demonstrate an understanding of these key ideas, authors, and texts.  

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the methodology used in the formal study of these ideas, authors, and texts.  

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---
4. Articulate a personal response to these ideas, authors, and texts.  

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---
5. Demonstrate sensitivity to cultural differences.  

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---
6. Identify key issues or principles of rhetoric, writing, and/or cultural studies.  

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---
7. Apply key principles to the critical analysis of written texts, images, films, cultural practices, or other forms of communication and art.  

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---
8. Apply successfully these key issues/principles to his or her own communication practices.  

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---
9. Demonstrate an understanding of basic elements of communication and appropriate competence in grammar, diction, and standard usage.  

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---
10. Interpret and construct arguments.  

A	B	C	D	E
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## Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture Program

### Rubric for Team Evaluation of Course Papers

The topics rated below are keyed to our program objectives. Three raters used the rubric to evaluate ten random papers from each of three courses in the program. The raters did an individual evaluation first, then came together to agree on a total score. The numbers indicate how many papers from each course received which rating.

#### From the evidence of this paper alone, the student seems able to

1. Identify key ideas, authors, and texts in the field.

Course	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Question does not apply
201	5	3	2	0	0	0
353	7	2	1	0	0	0
354	3	3	4	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	15	8	7	0	0	0

2. Demonstrate an understanding of these key ideas, authors, and texts.

Course	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Question does not apply
201	3	4	1	2	0	0
353	4	4	2	0	0	0
354	3	4	2	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	10	12	5	3	0	0

3. Demonstrate an understanding of the methodology used in the formal study of these ideas, authors, and texts.

Course	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Question does not apply
201	1	5	2	2	0	0
353	3	3	3	1	0	0
354	2	2	5	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	6	10	10	4	0	0

## 4. Articulate a personal response to these ideas, authors, and texts.

Course	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Question does not apply
201	4	1	4	1	0	0
353	1	6	3	0	0	0
354	3	5	1	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	8	12	8	2	0	0

## 5. Demonstrate sensitivity to cultural differences.

Course	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Question does not apply
201	3	4	2	1	0	0
353	0	3	6	1	0	0
354	0	2	7	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	3	9	15	3	0	0

## 6. Identify key issues or principles of rhetoric, writing, and/or cultural studies.

Course	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Question does not apply
201	4	4	2	0	0	0
353	6	3	1	0	0	0
354	2	4	4	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	12	11	7	0	0	0

## 7. Apply key principles to the critical analysis of written texts, images, films, cultural practices, or other forms of communication and art.

Course	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Question does not apply
201	1	4	4	1	0	0
353	4	5	1	0	0	0
354	2	4	4	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	7	13	9	1	0	0

8. Apply successfully these key issues/principles to his or her own communication practices.

Course	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Question does not apply
201	1	5	2	2	0	0
353	0	6	4	0	0	0
354	2	4	4	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	3	15	10	2	0	0

9. Demonstrate an understanding of basic elements of communication and appropriate competence in grammar, diction, and standard usage.

Course	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Question does not apply
201	4	5	0	1	0	0
353	1	7	2	0	0	0
354	3	7	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	8	19	2	1	0	0

10. Interpret and construct arguments.

Course	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Question does not apply
201	2	5	0	2	1	0
353	0	3	7	0	0	0
354	1	4	4	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	3	12	11	3	1	0

**Excerpt from Assessment Report (sample interpretation):**

....The overall results suggest a high degree of demonstrated success in student written performance with a slight dip in the papers from the two rhetoric courses (353 and 354) on questions 3 (method), 5 (cultural awareness), 8 (applying principles to writing), and 10 (ability to argue). The findings suggest that when comprehension of theory becomes the focus of the course, it is more difficult to sustain goals that depart somewhat from this focus. Students may need more time for reading and discussion of ideas and thus end up neglecting the writing and culture components slightly.