



Guidelines for a Rubric or Scoring Scale

with thanks to Carolyn Haynes

A scoring rubric or scale offers benefits for students and instructors. It can make grading more consistent and it can offer students more specific information about what they do well and where they are deficient. Also, once it is created, it can reduce the amount of time instructors spend responding to student papers.

Here's how to create a rubric or scale.

- Start with your knowledge of past student performance on similar assignments. Jot down, from memory, the typical strengths and weaknesses you see in student work. Use them as a starter for developing the scale.
- Identify your main categories. Categories are generally put in noun or noun phrase form, such as "Organization," "Choice of Information," "Thesis Statement," or "Analysis." The number and type of categories depends upon the nature of the course and the assignment.
- For each category or trait, construct a two- to five-point scale. These are descriptive statements. For example, in a five-point scale under the category of "Thesis," a "5" thesis is limited enough to treat the scope of the essay and is clear to the reader. It enters the dialogue of the discipline as reflected in the student's sources, and it does so at a level that shows original thought and synthesis.
- Weight the traits and scales. How much will each category and trait be worth?
- Try out the scale with a sample student paper or review with team members, and revise for better accuracy. Remember these scales or rubrics are works in progress. You will need to revise until you believe that you are offering students grades and comments that accurately reflect your high standards.

Here's a portion of a Sample 4-Point Scale for a Science Report:

Student Name:		
Title of Paper:		
Introduction		
	4	Hypothesis clearly recognized or well crafted and elegantly stated in testable form. Hypothesis cleverly embedded in context.
	3	Hypothesis recognized or well stated. Contextual connections evident.
	2	Hypothesis detectable but may not be stated in testable form. Contextual connections tenuous.
	1	Hypothesis undetectable or garbled so as to violate scientific principles. Context absent or ignored.

Materials and Methods		
	4	Procedures clear, need no interpretation. Appropriate details present.
	3	Procedures easily interpreted. Relevant information dominates.
	2	Procedures unclear but interpretable. Irrelevant information interferes.
	1	Procedures scrambled. Irrelevant information predominates.

Here's a portion of a Sample 5-Point Scale for a Humanities Essay:

Student Name:		
Title of Paper:		
Thesis		
	5	The thesis and purpose are clear to the reader. The author develops an authentic, fresh insight that challenges the reader's thinking. The paper shows a complex, curious mind at work.
	4	The thesis and purpose are clear to the reader, and the thesis is somewhat insightful.
	3	The thesis and purpose are clear to the reader, but the thesis is obvious or unimaginative.
	2	The thesis is trite, obvious and shows no original take on the material at hand.
	1	The thesis and purpose are not clear to the reader.
Organization		
	5	The essay is organized in a way that fully and imaginatively supports the thesis and purpose. The sequence of ideas is effective, given the writer's thesis and purpose. The reader always feels that the writer is in control of the organization, even when the organizational plan is complex, surprising, or unusual. The subpoints serve to open and explore the writer's insight in the most productive way.
	4	Falls short of the "5" range in one or two ways.
	3	The essay is organized in a way that competently supports the thesis and purpose. The sequence of ideas is effective, given the writer's thesis and purpose. The reader almost always feels that the writer is in control of the organization, even when the organizational plan is complex, surprising, or unusual. The subpoints serve to open up and explore the writer's insight in a productive way.
	2	The organizational plan is inappropriate to the thesis; it does not offer effective support or explanation of the writer's ideas.
	1	The organizational plan is not clear to the reader.