

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

Turning a Rubric into a Grade

As rubrics have evolved and become more useful as ways to evaluate student work and to communicate progress, the conflicts with grading have become increasingly troublesome. More and more we encounter rubrics with no point value as teachers strive to make the rubric a tool that communicates a continuum of quality rather than a grade. While that type of continuum is a desired result in many circumstances, it is a fact that a majority of schools still require the assignment of a score or letter grade. Since rubrics are well suited for evaluating student performances in an assessment setting, their convertibility to grades must be clearly defined.

Many teachers struggle with interpretation of the rubric for grading purposes. Most articles about rubrics focus on the importance of identifying traits to be evaluated and writing clear descriptions of the quality of the trait. The importance of well-identified traits and clear descriptions cannot be overstated but the logical next step of defining the rubric for grades deserves attention. Few articles about rubrics contain concrete guides to using the rubric in a grading environment. Here, we provide two examples of that "next step" to using rubrics in the classroom when grades must be assigned. The process requires more than averaging numeric ratings. Using trait rubrics to their strongest advantage requires descriptions of how the traits translate to a grade.

In the following samples, the descriptors have been removed so that you can focus on the translation to a grade that follows the rubrics. The traits used in the evaluation have been left so that it is obvious how many traits are being evaluated for each product or performance.

The example below describes the use of a particular rubric to determine a numeric grade. Students are prompted to create a timeline of events related to a specific historical time period. They must provide a graphic representation of the time period, the events that take place within the time period, the people who participated at various points, and the change in political party power in the time period. In this example, *each of the traits is valued to the same extent.*

	Proficient	Basic	Needs Improvement
Accuracy of representation of time period			
Events on time line			
People on time line			
Political Party Power changes			
Final Score	10 pts.— Proficient on all traits 9 pts.— Proficient on 3 traits; no rating less than Basic 8 pts.— Proficient on 2 traits; no rating less than Basic	7 pts.— Proficient on 1 trait, no rating less than Basic 6 pts.— All ratings of Basic 5 pts.— At least 1 Proficient rating, but also 1 NI rating	4 pts.— 3 Basic ratings and 1 NI rating. 3 pts.— 2 NI ratings. 2 pts.— 3 NI ratings. 1 pt.— 4 NI ratings

High school English teachers in a CLI-client district developed the following method of interpreting rubric ratings as percentage grades. The teachers felt that some of the traits had *more importance* in the overall quality of the product than others and described how those traits would be more strongly reflected in the grade.

Notice that the “Focus and Organization” and “Support and Elaboration” traits have a greater impact on the translation to a grade but a student can easily identify the qualities on which he/she might need to improve.

<i>ENG 10</i>	Exceeds	Proficient	Progressing	Beginning	Product does not allow for rating
Focus and Organization					
Support and Elaboration of Ideas					
Style					
Conventions					
Format					

Grade Translation	General Criteria for Assessment
95	Exceeds in both: “Focus and Organization” and “Support and Elaboration” Proficient in all other traits
90	Exceeds in either: “Focus and Organization” or “Support and Elaboration” Proficient in all other traits
85	Does not Exceed in either “Focus and Organization” or “Support and Elaboration” but is at least proficient on all traits (may Exceed in Style, Conventions, or Format)
80	Proficient in both: “Focus and Organization” and “Support and Elaboration” No trait rating less than Progressing
75	Proficient in either: “Focus and Organization” or “Support and Elaboration” (the other trait is at least Progressing) Progressing in at least two remaining traits
65	Majority of traits fall into Progressing
55	Majority of traits fall into Beginning

Clearly written descriptors allow teachers to rate the qualities of the essay and the translation of the rubric allow teachers to quickly convert the results to a grade to be recorded.