

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

CREATING RUBRICS

Creating a rubric can initially be a time consuming process, but educators will benefit when they have an efficient and well-defined tool for assessment. Creating a rubric follows three basic steps. First, brainstorm a list of qualities associated with the outcome. Next, the brainstormed list is condensed into the essential qualities necessary for student success. The list is then converted into statements that describe the performance at various levels. Usually it is best to describe the "acceptable" level of performance first. Then, it is easy to determine descriptors for performances of higher and lower quality. Using this method, rubrics can be created by individual teachers, by small groups of instructors at the same grade level, by Subject Area Committees, or by the students themselves. Let's look at each of these steps using the following fourth grade language arts outcome:

Students will demonstrate effective oral reading skills including fluency, appropriate rate, expression, and projection.

Step One, Brainstorming

The first step to writing a rubric for this outcome is to brainstorm a list of qualities of good oral readers. The list may look something like this:

1. fluent, reads smoothly
2. changes voice with characters
3. speeds up for exciting parts
4. projects voice
5. uses accents when appropriate
6. understandable
7. clear voice
8. rate is not too fast or too slow
9. uses expression
10. slows down to create tension
11. doesn't stumble over words
12. makes story come alive
13. reads to punctuation

Step Two, Identifying Essential Qualities

The next task is to combine elements of the brainstormed list into a smaller set of essential qualities of good oral readers. In the above example, items 1, 6, and 11 all have to do with fluency. Items 3, 8, and 10 all discuss rate. Items 2, 4, 5, and 12 all relate to using expression in a story. Items 4 and 7 both relate to voice projection. Item 13, reading to punctuation, could relate to fluency, or if it is an important enough skill that students still need to master, it could stand alone. Therefore, the list of essential skills would be:

fluency
rate
expression
projecting voice
reading to punctuation

Step Three, Defining Responses

A. Defining proficient or acceptable response. A proficient response should be a description of a performance that is acceptable for this particular skill. In some circumstances, words such as *sometimes*, *occasionally*, or *some* may be used to indicate acceptable mastery of concepts. The essential skills list is now used to write a description. The teacher may want to look back at the brainstormed list for ideas on how to write the description. Remember that the rubric will be used by students as well as the instructor, so the descriptions should be phrased to maximize student understanding of each desired quality. For example:

A medium quality oral reader...
 reads with fluency but occasionally stumbles over words.
 usually reads at the right speed but is sometimes too fast or too slow.
 reads with some expression and tries to make the story come alive.
 projects his or her voice in some places but not in others.
 reads with meaning for some of the punctuation and frequently pauses when appropriate.

B. *Defining a higher quality response.* The acceptable level descriptors are now used to write a description of a high quality oral reader, based on the same five qualities. For example:

A high quality oral reader...
 reads with fluency; the words flow smoothly.
 reads at the right speed for the action in the story.
 uses expression and voices to make the words and characters come alive.
 projects his/her voice so that it can be heard clearly.
 makes short and long pauses and changes tone for punctuation when appropriate.

C. *Defining lower quality responses.* Define a low quality response based on the same qualities as the proficient and high level responses. The descriptions for a lower quality response should indicate little or no mastery of the essential skills. Notice that each quality is defined in the same order and in similar language as in the other responses.

A low quality oral reader...
 reads with little or no fluency; stumbles over words, and his or her reading seems rough and bumpy.
 reads too fast or too slow.
 reads without expression or meaning.
 does not project his or her voice.
 ignores punctuation and does not pause when appropriate.

These steps could lead us to a rubric that is used holistically as it is written above. However, we often find that students with highly developed skills in one area may have less well developed skills in another. This condition frequently makes using a holistic rubric difficult. Therefore, the well defined traits above could provide the descriptors for an analytic rubric on which each trait is measured independently of the others. The instructor would then have the task of determining a rating that is acceptable. Would a student have to reach the proficient level on each trait? Even if so, the student, and eventually the parent, would know in which areas the student needs extra practice and help.

Trait	A high quality reader...	A proficient reader...	A reader making progress...
Fluency	reads with fluency; the words flow smoothly.	reads with fluency but occasionally stumbles over words	reads with little or no fluency; stumbles over words, and his or her reading seems rough and bumpy.
Rate	reads at the right speed for the action in the story	usually reads at the right speed but is sometimes too fast or too slow	reads too fast or too slow
Expression	uses expression and voices to make the words and characters come alive	reads with some expression and tries to make the story come alive	reads the words without expression or meaning
Projecting voice	projects his/her voice so that it can be heard clearly	projects his or her voice in some places but not in others	does not project his or her voice
Reading to Punctuation	makes short and long pauses and changes tone for punctuation when appropriate	reads with meaning for some of the punctuation and frequently pauses when appropriate	ignores punctuation and does not pause when appropriate

A Word of Caution

In the example above, words such as *occasionally*, *usually*, or *some* were used in the descriptors – as mentioned in “Step Two.” These words are acceptable as long as the rest of the wording provides *enough distinction* between levels. For example, look at the first trait:

Trait	A high quality reader...	A proficient reader...	A reader making progress...
Fluency	reads with fluency; the words flow smoothly.	reads with fluency but occasionally stumbles over words	reads with little or no fluency; stumbles over words, and his or her reading seems rough and bumpy.

It should not be difficult for the teacher to distinguish these performances. If the student’s words don’t “flow smoothly,” is he *occasionally* stumbling over words, or is he stumbling to the degree that the “reading seems rough and bumpy”?

In other circumstances, words of frequency are too close in meaning to be helpful. Here is an example from a public speaking outcome:

Trait	High quality	Proficient	In progress
Establishes eye contact	Frequently makes eye contact with audience	Often makes eye contact with audience	Rarely makes eye contact with audience

How do we distinguish between *frequently* and *often*? Instead, we should be as specific as possible in our descriptive word choices.

Trait	High quality	Proficient	In progress
Establishes eye contact	Consistently maintains eye contact throughout the speech & includes all sections of audience	Periodically makes eye contact throughout the speech, including one or more audience sections	Rarely or never makes eye contact with any part of audience

The same is true for words of quantity:

Trait	High quality	Proficient	In progress
Includes examples of style used	Includes many examples	Includes some examples	Includes no examples

Where do we draw the line between *many* and *some*? Is four enough to be considered "many," or six... or does it take more than that? Avoid vague references; be specific:

Trait	High quality	Proficient	In progress
Includes examples of style used	Includes 5 or more examples	Includes 1-4 examples	Includes no examples