Rubrics in Support of Learning & Assessment

1. What is a rubric?

A rubric is an assessment instrument that gives students information on how a lecturer will assess their performance. A commonly used definition is that a rubric is a document that articulates the expectations for an assignment by listing the criteria related to what is important, and by describing levels of quality from excellent to poor (Reddy & Andrade, 2010; Arter & Chapuis, 2007). Marking scheme, criteria and scoring schemes may be interchangeably used with the term rubric. A rubric has four essential features: evaluation **criteria**; quality **descriptors** of which there can be several levels, and a scoring strategy that may incorporate a **scale** of points combined with **standards** as to how well criteria must be met.

Rubric feature	
Criteria	Describe the conditions that any performance must meet to be successful. Criteria should describe both strengths and errors.
Descriptors	Defines the level of performance that contains criteria and standards by which the performance will be evaluated.
Scale	Points assigned on a continuum of quality when scoring a piece of work. Higher points typically align with 'better' work.
Standards	Specify how well criteria must be met.

Students should ideally be given the rubric at the outset of the series or Module. Rubrics can be aligned with assignments, and with journal and other tools on Blackboard learn and made visible to students in the grade centre.
Assignments are evaluated and graded using the rubric as a guide i.e. rubrics are not rigid grading templates.

2. What are the benefits to learning and assessment?

As rubrics may be used to guide self, peer and/ or tutor assessment, they provide support for teaching and learning as well as for evaluation (Reddy & Andrade, 2010). Rubrics provide guidance to students seeking to improve the quality of their work and help them interpret grades received (Huball & Burt, 2004).

Rubric development forces detailed consideration of the purpose of the assignment, thereby increasing alignment between teaching, learning and assessment, and enabling a move from the current strong focus on assessment *of* learning, towards assessment *for* and *as* learning. Rubrics can increase transparency in assessment because they make public the criteria for judgment of student performance (Price et al, 2012; Reddy & Andrade, 2011). Provided assessors are trained, rubrics increase inter-rater reliability (Reddy & Andrade, 2011). Rubrics support programme evaluation, and help identify areas for improvement in teaching and instructional design. Online tools enable integration of rubrics with activities and grading.

Features of a good quality rubric	
Helps students understand:	Helps lecturers/ instructors to:
a. What is expected. b. What a quality performance looks like c. What they did well d. What to do differently next time	a. Plan teaching/ instruction b. Grade consistently c. Provide justifications for grades/ marks d. Provide a means of communication/ feedback with students

3. What are the pedagogical challenges?

It is important to connect the rubric criteria to learning or program outcomes so that your students know why the criteria are in place. The use of rubrics generally assumes that clearly defined objectives for the assessment have been articulated, and module learning outcomes and assessment are mapped to programme outcomes.

Variation(s) in assessment literacy amongst contributors and students may add to challenges when attempting to agree what constitutes assessment and feedback. Students must be 'taught to actively use a rubric for self and peer assessment, and revision, in order to reap the benefits' (Reddy & Andrade, 2010:445).

4. Example of an approach to the development of a rubric:

A step-by-step approach to rubric development, by an individual or by a team, might be structured as follows (adapted from: Arter & Chappuis, 2006; Stevens & Levi, 2005):

1. *Identify the outcome desired* from the assessment including the purpose of the activity or whether it is *for*, *of* or *as* learning, the stage of student development, and the programme/ module outcomes it is assessing.

2. *Identify whether* the knowledge, skills and/ or attributes being assessed are, for example, factual, conceptual, procedural, attitudinal, psychomotor or metacognitive, and specify key aspects of each criterion.

3. ***Group criteria according to components of the assignment***, ideally limiting to 4 or 5 criteria. A paper, presentation or laboratory report might include criteria as follows:
    a. A paper—content, introduction/conclusion, length, Citations, references.
    b. A presentation/ videoclip—content, creativity, use of media, speaking ability.
    c. A laboratory report—hypothesis, experimental design, results, conclusions.

4. ***Develop a grading scale*** in which levels align with institutional and programme specific progression and awards process, and describe each level. Examples commonly refer to pass/ fail or to pass, fail and excellent. Awards in Trinity commonly require at least three separate levels above a pass, grade. Examples of 6, 5 and 4 level grading scale include:
    a. exemplary, excellent, very good, acceptable, needs improvement, little/no engagement.
    b. Accomplished, competent, developing, novice, not engaged.
    c. Capstone milestone(s), benchmark, fail (e.g. AACU VALUE Rubric Development Project).

5. ***Assign weights*** if a percentage grade is required. Rubrics may assign equal percentages to each criterion, or may allocate less weighting to criteria not being prioritized by a particular programme - for example, grammar is commonly allocated less marks in science assignments than in English.

6. ***Share and discuss*** with students, with your peers, other contributors to the programme, and management and accreditation committee(s).

Title: Identify which learning outcome or Trinity Graduate Attribute is targeted (assume pass =40%)						
Criteria	Outstanding/ exemplary. Level 5 70% -100%	Excellent Level 4 60% to <70%	Very Good Level 3 50% to < 60%	Acceptable Level 2 40% to < 50%)	Needs improvement Level 1 30% to <40%	Little/ no engagement Level 0 < 30%
Criterion 1 e.g. creativity…	***Descriptor*** Meets all level 4 and is exemplary in..	Meets all in ideal response described	Meets most of ideal…	Demonstrates achievement of the learning outcomes…	Descriptor of what didn't meet required standard…	Behaviours not / minimally demonstrated.

References, resources and further reading:

- Arter, J. & Chappuis, J. (2006). Creating and recognizing quality rubrics. ETS: Portland, OR.
- Huball, H. and H. Burt. (2004). An Integrated Approach to Developing and Implementing Learning Centred Curricula. International Journal for Academic Development, May. 9(1), 51-65.
- Reddy, Y.M. and H. Andrade. (2010). A review of rubric use in higher education. Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, July, 35(4), 435-448.
- Price, M., R. Rust, B. O'Donovan, K. Handley and R. Bryant. (2012). Assessment literacy: The foundation for improving student learning, OCSLD: Oxford.
- Stevens, D.D. & Levi, A.J. (2005). Introduction to Rubrics. Sterling: stylus.

Websites

- AACU (Association of American colleges and universities): VALUE Rubric Development Project
- Blackboard rubrics page for instructors

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