Attributes of a Quality Rubric[[1]](#footnote-1)

A novice user may be daunted by the plethora of types and styles of rubrics available (Coxon, 2004). The following attributes of a quality rubric can help novices and experts alike to assess the quality of a rubric (Arter, et al., 2001; Wiggins, 1998).

# 1. Clear Criteria

The rubric must have clear criteria. Wiggins (1998) states that we must be careful to ensure that the criteria are necessary and, as a set, be sufficient for meeting the targeted achievement. The criteria should define a comprehensive set of behaviors that make up the [performance](http://cetl.matcmadison.edu/efgb/glossary.htm#Performance). The criteria defining each level of performance must be significant and should be mapped according a consistent scale.

Before deciding on the performance criteria, it is important to clearly define what will be measured, and then to [research](http://cetl.matcmadison.edu/efgb/glossary.htm#Research) the best criteria (or best practices) in the areas to be measured. For example, the measurer has to determine what the “problem-solving experts” would identify as high-performing and low-performing criteria about this skill. The same holds true for any performance, work product, or learning skill.

It is important that the [rubric](http://cetl.matcmadison.edu/efgb/glossary.htm#Rubric) covers the features that indicate quality performance because the relationship between performance criteria and rubrics is key to improved student learning (Arter, et al., 2001; Huba & Freed, 2000). For example, a rubric designed to assess a student’s ability to write a persuasive paragraph should not be designed predominately around the number of grammar, spelling, and typographical errors.

# 2. Rich, Descriptive Language

The rubric must include rich and descriptive language. Students and multiple instructors need to understand the definitions, indicators, and samples of work (Arter, et al., 2001) so that they can use the rubric to improve [learning](http://cetl.matcmadison.edu/efgb/glossary.htm#Learning) and [assessment](http://cetl.matcmadison.edu/efgb/glossary.htm#Assessment). The descriptors that differentiate quality should be user-friendly to students. A rubric should always describe the different levels of performance in tangible, [qualitative](http://cetl.matcmadison.edu/efgb/glossary.htm#Qualitative) terms in each descriptor. Therefore, when using comparative language to differentiate quality, the rubric must compare a relative quality, not an arbitrary quantity (Wiggins, 1998).

The organization of a rubric should be effectively sequenced to flow with the natural steps in the performance. Related aspects should be clustered. Descriptive labels for levels of performance enhance the creation and application of rubrics.

# 3. Positive Attainment

The rubric should focus on the attainment of the desired performance. The rubric should also describe the levels of performance in positive language. The narrative should clearly describe positive attainment rather than lack of attainment. For example, instead of stating that a performer is “inaudible,” the rubric should state that the performer “needs to project his or her voice loudly so all in the audience can hear.” The description for each level should help both the learner and measurer to clearly distinguish the differences in levels of performance.

# 4. Differentiation of Performance and Product

The rubric should clearly measure the desired performance (i.e., problem-solving, dribbling, oral communication) and not just the effort. This requires very clear and specific performance criteria and observable descriptors at each level of performance. One should not confuse effort or product with actual performance. For example, in physical education, it is common to see rubrics that make shooting three out of four foul shots an exemplary performance. This rubric example is describing the product: the student made the foul shot.

What the above description does not capture is the quality of the performance. A description that helps the measurer distinguish between levels of performance might include proper technique, hand placement, location on the court, etc. Based on a “quantity versus quality” description, the student could have kicked the ball into the hoop with his or her feet to complete three out of four foul shots. Rubrics should clearly state the [evidence](http://cetl.matcmadison.edu/efgb/glossary.htm#Evidence) that will be used to measure the performance. This evidence should distinguish between “just doing it” (a yes/no checklist type performance) and being able to differentiate quality levels of performance.

# 5. Universal Validity and Reliability

A rubric should be easy for both instructors and students to interpret. Both should be able to use the rubric for instruction, [assessment](http://cetl.matcmadison.edu/efgb/glossary.htm#Assessment), and [evaluation](http://cetl.matcmadison.edu/efgb/glossary.htm#Evaluation). Rubrics should be valid and reliable. A valid [rubric](http://cetl.matcmadison.edu/efgb/glossary.htm#Rubric) measures key aspects central to the quality of the [performance](http://cetl.matcmadison.edu/efgb/glossary.htm#Performance). A reliable rubric yields consistent results for different users. Reliability is increased by using rich, descriptive language. A rubric should also be fair to all students in regards to reading level, language, and examples.

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