GRADING SCHEMES

Rubrics * Contract Grading * Specs Grading

Jennifer Dickinson
Director, Center for Teaching and Learning
Associate Professor, Anthropology
University of Vermont

Today:

- **The importance of clear grading criteria**

- **Three inter-related approaches to grading:**
  – *Rubrics*
  – *Contract grading*
  – *Specs grading (competency-based grading)*

- **The value of grading schemes**

Clear grading criteria

- **Helps students understand what you are looking for**
  - *Provides a guideline for students*
  - *Helps students ask better questions*
  - *Provides a reference for the faculty member*
- **Provides information about how much credit is given/lost for particular component or issues**
  - *Reduces questions about grading, why credit was lost*
  - *Helps the faculty member be fair across different assignments*
- **Provides general guidelines for achieving a particular grade**
  - *Reduces the amount of time faculty spend assigning partial credit*

Idea #1: Rubrics

■ Rubrics are charts that outline a points system for levels of achievement on the assignment being graded, and describe each level in detail (e.g. "excellent" "very good" etc.)

There are two main types of rubrics:

■ Holistic rubrics: describe the general features of an assignment at different levels of achievement

■ Analytic rubrics: Analytic rubrics provide variable points for several different components, each one described and graded separately

Holistic rubric

Points	Description of level
4	Assignment uses more than the minimum number of sources. Thesis is clearly presented and outlines a complex argument that is supported throughout using properly cited information from all sources included.
3	Assignment uses at least the minimum number of sources. Thesis is presented clearly and supported using properly cited information from all cited sources. Some parts of the argument are better supported or clearer than others. Minor errors in citation may be present.
2	Assignment uses at least the minimum number of sources. Thesis is present, but may be unclear, not well-aligned to the data presented, or not fully supported in places by use of citations. Numerous errors in citation practices are present.
1	Assignment uses the minimum number of sources or fewer. Thesis argument is unclear or only partially presented, with uneven support of the argument

Analytic rubrics

Component	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor
Number of sources	5 – more than required	4 – at least as many as required	3 – minimum required	2 – fewer than required but good quality	1 – fewer than required; quality issues
Thesis	10 – outlines clear, supportable argument	8 – clear and outlines solid argument	6 – clear, but outlined argument has weak points	4 – somewhat unclear; outline argument will be difficult to support	2 – unclear and/or outlines weak argument
Clarity of argument	10 Clear argumentation that is easy to follow and strongly supports thesis	8 Clear argumentation that supports thesis but only moderately supports thesis	6. Argumentation is generally clear; some points are weakly supported	4 Argumentation is unclear at points or fails to fully support thesis	2 Argumentation is difficult to follow and does not make use of evidence
Support of argument using sources	10 All sources are used to strongly support argument	8 All sources used, but quality of use varies	6 Some sources used only in passing	4 One cited source not used; others used well	2 Several cited sources not used or used poorly
Citation practices	5 – only very minor errors	4 - modest errors	3 One or two serious errors	2 Several serious errors	1 Many errors
Maximum:	40 points				

Name	Rubric for short assignment #2
Description	This rubric will be used to grade short assignment #2 (Short theoretical essay)

Rubric Detail

Levels of Achievement

Criteria	Novice	Competent	Proficient	Highly proficient
Introduction	0 Points	**8 Points** Identifies readings and indicates how you will use them	**9 Points** Identifies readings and outlines a clear link between the readings and interpretations of objects	**10 Points** Identifies readings and lays out your original approach to them in a museum setting
Organization	0 Points	**3 Points** Readable, but with some organization issues that affect clarity	**4 Points** Clear and generally well organized with some issues like very long paragraphs or abrupt transitions	**5 Points** Clear and well-organized with no organizational issues that disrupt the flow of the argument
Use of readings	0 Points	**10 Points** Both readings are used to support argument. One may be used somewhat less, or less well.	**13 Points** Both readings are used to support argument. Understanding of both readings is clearly evident. Conclusions are drawn from both readings, but the readings are not synthesized.	**15 Points** Readings are used in a sophisticated way that demonstrates deep understanding of both readings. Conclusions are drawn from a synthesis of the readings.
Argumentation and support of conclusion	0 Points	**10 Points** Essay has a clear argument, but readings are not used to full advantage and some aspects of the conclusion may not be clear, or may not draw fully on cited readings.	**13 Points** Argumentation is clear and follows from aspects of the readings that are cited. Conclusion follows directly from the arguments presented in the body of the essay	**15 Points** Conclusions are original and follow clearly from the argumentation in the essay.
Reflective paragraph	0 Points Missing.	**3 Points** Shows reflection on how reading and applied work have contributed to understanding of museums.	**4 Points** Shows reflection and cites specific examples of how applied work and readings for class have contributed to understanding of museums.	**5 Points** Shows reflection that flows directly out applied work and readings for class, demonstrates how these have contributed to understanding of museums.

Rubric Detail

Criteria	Levels of Achievement				
	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Outstanding
Proposal essay ⌄	**0 to 18 points** Missing or does not reference course readings. Show idea is very poorly conceived.	**19 to 23 points** Has only one course reading reference. Essay offers a clear show idea but it is not well-conceived or described in relation to course materials or can not be completed with available objects.	**23 to 26 points** Description is clear; two readings referenced show ability to bring in theoretical concepts; show idea is good	**27 to 28 points** Description is clear; two readings referenced show facility with theoretical concepts; show idea is excellent and makes some innovative use of objects.	**28 to 30 points** Description shows the ability to integrate theoretical readings in a sophisticated way. Show idea makes innovative use of the collection of objects to make something "completely new"
Short checklist ⌄	**0 to 18 points** Missing or very incomplete. Object choices seem random.	**19 to 23 points** Too few or too many objects; some information may be missing; object choices show lack of planning of the total show	**23 to 26 points** Correct number of objects; information reflects what is available on course space; checklist is complete; object choices are a good fit for the described show.	**27 to 28 points** Correct number of objects; information reflects what is available on course space; checklist is complete; object choices interesting and show an advanced understanding of how to execute the show theme.	**28 to 30 points** Correct number of objects; information reflects what is available on course space; checklist is complete with some possible errors; some object choices may not be a best fit for the show
Main text and label evaluation ⌄	**0 to 18 points** Missing text or label evaluation. Very poorly written or not proofread.	**19 to 23 points** Main text has proofreading errors and/or is unclear in places. Text is very long or short, or does not match proposal description.	**23 to 26 points** Text may be somewhat too long with a few small errors. Text is clear and easy to read and represents the show theme accurately. Label evaluation covers main points.	**27 to 28 points** Text is 200 words with no proofreading issues. Text is well-written, engaging, and captures show theme/idea well. Label evaluation is accurate and well thought out.	**28 to 30 points** Text is "exhibit ready" and represents the proposed show in a striking and engaging way. Label evaluation shows deep understanding of how objects will be represented differently in this exhibit.
Budget, audience description and outreach plan ⌄	**0 to 18 points** Missing major components or shows little understanding of what each entails.	**19 to 23 points** One component is missing or done in a cursory manner. Budget or outreach plan is unrealistic. Programming poorly conceived or problematic in places.	**23 to 26 points** All elements are complete and reflect a realistic vision of for the show. Outreach and budget plans show good understanding of how to connect the show to an audience.	**27 to 28 points** All items are complete, clear and show evidence of careful thought and planning for the success of the exhibit. Ideas are all of high quality.	**28 to 30 points** All items are complete, clear and show evidence of careful thought and planning for the success of the exhibit. Ideas are all of high quality and go beyond the standard "go to" programming and outreach ideas.
Exhibit layout sketch ⌄	**0 to 18 points** Missing.	**19 to 23 points** Does not include all items in checklist; shows lack of thought about groupings and themes.	**23 to 26 points** Layout is complete and demonstrates good use of space and organization of objects.	**27 to 28 points** Detailed, demonstrating excellent use of space to highlight themes and showcase key objects	**28 to 30 points** Very detailed with innovative use of space to highlight themes and achieve show objectives.

Rubric tips:

- Create the rubric when you create the assignment, then share it with students along with the instructions
  - *Choose whether you will offer individual comments on components or just overall comments at this point*

- One suggestion is to put the highest points on the left side, so students focus on the "best" first

- Using rubrics in Moodle can help reduce grading time – the computer adds up all of the points for you

- Think carefully about how to weight components

Resources for Rubrics:

- A step-by-step guide to creating a rubric: https://www.thoughtco.com/how-to-create-a-rubric-4061367

- A list of examples and resources: https://uwf.edu/offices/cutla/supporting-pages/examples-of-rubrics/

- Examples of rubrics used for different types of grading (participation, papers, design projects): https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/rubrics.html

Idea #2: Contract grading:

- Students sign a contract agreeing to a set of work and standards that must be completed at a particular level to achieve a desired grade (for example, revise 5 out of 6 papers, making substantive suggested changes, for a "B")

- The contract fully outlines what work must be completed and to what level

- Helps reduce grading time and student stress by clarifying expectations and limiting amount of feedback required

- Works best for courses that are focused on process and individual progress, rather than set achievements (e.g. a class that focuses on revising writing)

Resources on contract grading:

- A critical discussion and summary of contract grading can be found here: https://www.chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/using-grading-contracts/25916

- A more positive description and evaluation of contract grading can be found here: https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/just-visiting/i-have-seen-glories-grading-contract

Idea #3: "Specs grading"
or contract grading updated

- "Specs" grading involves creating "specs" or competency statements for each assignment

- Assignments and quizzes are graded "pass/no pass" – no grades

- Students must "pass" a certain number of assignments, quizzes and exams in order to get a particular final grade

- Students are usually given "tokens" they can trade for opportunities to retake a quiz, to miss a class, or for other purposes

"Specifications" are the key to specs grading

- Faculty identify a set of concrete skills or competencies that assignments and quizzes will test

- Sometimes a set of assignments and quizzes are part of a "bundle" testing similar skills – for each bundle, a student must pass a selection of items to pass the bundle. Grades are then determined on the number of bundles passed

- For each graded item, a selection of these competencies (adjusted if necessary for the exact point in the course where students are) are presented to students along with the assignment or in preparation for a quiz

- When the faculty member grades assignments, the student either passes (displays the competencies) or does not pass.

A variation on contracts

- Specs grading is sometimes considered a variation on contract grading because the level of work required to get a particular final grade is laid out at the beginning of the course

- Because the "contract" is provided at the start of the course, the faculty member must set up the complete grading structure before starting the course, and can not make significant changes once the course is running

- Most specs systems allow students to redo assignments for a "pass" – this can create work for faculty, although less time is spent deciding how much credit to give

An example of a final grade calculation:

To earn this grade:	Accomplish the following:
A	Earn **Satisfactory** marks on **19** Learning Targets; *and* complete **10 Challenge Problems** with at least an M mark, including at least five "E" marks.
B	Earn **Satisfactory** marks on **17** Learning Targets; *and* complete **7 Challenge Problems** with at least an M mark, including at least three "E" marks.
C	Earn **Satisfactory** marks on **15** Learning Targets; *and* complete **5 Challenge Problems** with at least an M mark. (No "E" marks required.)
D	Earn **Satisfactory** marks on **13** Learning Targets. (No Challenge Problems required.)

Specs grading "plusses"

- Faculty must go through a process of clarifying what is most important for students to learn in their course, and what knowledge students are actually demonstrating in the course (the "specifications")

- You can set the "bar" higher – so the "pass" level may be a higher level, pushing students to work harder

- Students have clear feedback on areas where they need to do better

- Students have more power to decide how much work to do to achieve the grade they want – they may only want a passing grade and are not motivated to improve significantly

Specs grading "minuses"

- Works best for classes where concrete skills and knowledge are learned and demonstrated; complex conceptual understanding or skills (critical thinking; argumentation) may be harder to divide into "specs"

- High achieving students may be disappointed or feel under-challenged by receiving just a "pass," not a high grade

- Since revision is an important part of spec grading there may be higher volume of grading (re-grading)

- Faculty must be well-organized and have a tracking system to track all of the grades, revised grades and "tokens" for students, as well as a way of easily calculating the final grade

Resources:

Here are links to examples for specs grading from several different university instructors:

http://rtalbert.org/specs-grading-iteration-winner/

https://justtv.wordpress.com/2016/03/21/first-update-on-my-specifications-grading-experiment/

https://www.stthomas.edu/fdc/synergia/fromthedirector/from-the-director-my-semester-with-specifications-grading.html

Summary: Grading and goals

- These grading systems can help promote a "learning orientation" for students where they are focused on meeting learning goals, not on "points"

- Clear expectations (rubrics, specs) communicate attainable goals to students and help them focus on self-assessment before and after completing an assignment

- Grading systems can help students feel like they have power and choices regarding their learning (even if we don't agree with them!)

- While it is difficult to reduce grading work, we can make it less exhausting by clarifying the goals of assignments, how important different elements are to those goals, and simplifying credit/points systems

QUESTIONS?