An Efficient Rubric for Minimal Assessment

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Introduction

Opinions about the value of providing students written feedback on assignments vary widely. Some instructors believe written feedback is a necessary part of effective teaching, but others conclude students don't utilize their feedback to improve or simply ignore comments altogether (Bailey & Garner, 2010). For the latter group of instructors, commenting extensively on student assignments may be perceived as an onerous and discouraging task. This latter group may understandably wonder:

If students rarely inquire about my written feedback, and if there is little or no evidence it improves student work, is written feedback helpful to students and worth my time?

The efficient rubric I propose below is designed to facilitate rapid and holistic assessment of assignments without the use of written feedback. It was inspired by the "minimalist grading" perspective that suggests extensive written responses to assignments is not a useful or necessary practice (Elbow, 1997; see also Kohn, 2018; Walvoord & Anderson, 2010, p. 103).

As is the case with other types of rubrics (see Tomaswick, 2017), the efficient rubric offers students grading criteria that can be used to inform and develop their assignments prior to submission. Like other rubrics, it offers instructors clear guidelines for gauging student performance. Unlike other rubrics, the efficient rubric involves instructors only providing students with a summary mark and corresponding percent grade on each assignment. *Importantly, this saves instructors time they can reallocate to research, creative activity, service work, and other important aspects of teaching.*

Implementation

1) **Pick** an efficient rubric. You could use the example rubric provided in the resources section of this document, or adapt one you've come across. The style and format can differ. However, the rubric must facilitate minimal assessment. Specifically, the rubric's performance standards must allow instructors to quickly evaluate an assignment using simple summary marks—e.g., "check plus," "check," "check minus," and "zero"—and corresponding percent grades. In the example rubric I provide, the summary marks utilize a "check" system. However, you can easily modify the rubric's standards. For instance, rather than use a "check" system, instructors might use:

    a) Exemplary, Proficient, Marginal, Unacceptable -OR-
    b) Met, Partially Met, Not Met -OR-
    c) Pass / Fail

    You can also modify the efficient rubric's grading categories and criteria as needed. Once all modifications are made, the rubric can be appended to a course syllabus.

2) **Determine** what will count as an overall check plus, check, check minus and zero score on an assignment. For instance, you might state that if a student's assignment adheres to the "check plus" performance standard in 3 out of 4 grading categories, the summary mark for the work is a

"check plus" with a corresponding percent grade in the range specified (e.g., 95%). On the other hand, if a student receives a check plus in one category, a check in another, and two check minuses in two other categories, what summary mark and percent grade would they receive? You must clearly establish these rules prior to implementing the rubric in your course.

3) **Discuss** why you are using the efficient rubric and how it works at the beginning of the semester or term. You should be honest and direct regarding your rationale for its implementation: 'more efficient,' 'former students rarely utilized written feedback.' Also, be sure to fully explain how you will use rubric criteria to decide on an overall summary mark and percent grade. Both guidelines – why you're using the rubric and how it works – must be clearly defined at the outset for the efficient rubric to work effectively. Importantly, you should also encourage students to seek your guidance if a grade is unclear or if they'd like one-on-one feedback.

4) **Be prepared** to explain summary grades and provide feedback in face-to-face (or virtual face-to-face) meetings with students throughout the semester. Some students will undoubtedly have questions about their summary marks and how to improve future work. The instructor must make themselves available, during office hours or otherwise, to respond to student inquiries. Critically, these one-on-one meetings give the instructor an opportunity to (1) explain why the student received their summary grade and (2) identify areas for the student to improve. While written assignment feedback affords only top-down, one-way communication, these meetings should involve constructive exchanges between instructor and student.

Frequently Asked Questions

a) *How critical is it to introduce the efficient rubric at the beginning of the semester?* It is imperative that instructors clearly explain their motivations for using an efficient rubric and how the rubric will be used to assign grades in the first session, before any grades are assigned. Be honest and direct. Make sure to encourage students to meet with you if they have questions.

b) *Is it okay if students just email me or ask me after class about their summary mark?* No. If students have questions, they should plan to meet with the instructor face-to-face or virtually to review assignments. The goal is to avoid excessive written commenting.

c) *Do I have to put the rubric in my course syllabus?* No, but it's recommended. This allows students to easily check assignments against rubric criteria prior to submission.

d) *What if the time I spend fielding student questions and providing verbal feedback offsets the time I save in grading?* This is possible, but unlikely. Not all students will want feedback. For those who do, the instructor may find verbal feedback is far simpler to provide than is written.

e) *What can I do to encourage students to seek feedback?* You could require students to meet with you after the first or second assignment. Another way could be to have a future assignment prompt students to reflect on the mark they were given, why they believe they earned that mark, how that was similar or different to what was discussed during the debrief with the instructor, and what they could do in the future differently.

Other Resources

- A copy of the efficient rubric example (shown below) on Google Docs: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Qvhkmts9p4dDcv3ORMgJPa0sRi_ehya-hiA5GUNE4E0/edit?usp=sharing
- A list of standard rubrics: https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/rubrics.html
- Kaizena, a tool for efficient grading in Google docs: https://www.kaizena.com/

	✓ + (90-100%)	✓ (80-89%)	✓ - (70-79%)	0 (Zero %)
Content	- Assignment fully adheres to instructions. - Expresses compelling, novel, creative ideas. - Presents depth analysis that shows mastery of relevant course material. - Consistently presents accurate statements and/or numerical results.	- Assignment mainly adheres to instructions. - Some compelling, novel, or creative ideas expressed. - Some depth analysis that shows nuanced grasp of the related course material. - Presents mainly accurate statements and/or numerical results.	- Assignment somewhat adheres to instructions. - Few compelling, novel, or creative ideas expressed. - Superficial analysis that shows little/no knowledge of the related course material. - Statements and/or numerical results are frequently inaccurate.	- Little or no discernable effort to complete the assignment or demonstrate understanding of the material. -or- - Did not submit the assignment.
Application	- Assignment clearly and accurately incorporates course concepts. Connections to course materials (e.g., readings) are clear and appropriate. - Presents strong evidence of critical thinking in application of course concepts and materials.	- Course concepts somewhat clearly and accurately integrated in assignment. Some ideas connected to course materials, but these need to be made clearer. - Presents some evidence of critical thinking in application of course concepts and materials.	- Course concepts not clearly and accurately integrated in assignment. Few or no connections made to course materials, including readings. - Presents little or no evidence of critical thinking in application of course concepts and materials	- Little or no discernable effort to complete the assignment or demonstrate understanding of the material. -or- - Did not submit the assignment.
Structure	- A clear thesis or purpose is articulated at the outset. - There is strong organization throughout, with each point or component flowing logically to the next. - Consistently uses smooth transitions.	- Thesis or purpose is somewhat clearly stated. - Mainly strong organization, but not all points or components flow logically one to the next. - Occasionally uses smooth transition.	- Thesis or purpose not evident or is missing. - Problematic organization, with many points or components illogically connected. - Infrequently uses smooth transitions.	- Little or no discernable effort to complete the assignment or demonstrate understanding of the material. -or- - Did not submit the assignment.
Mechanics	- Few/no grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors. - Writing is consistently clear and lucid. - Quotes are properly attributed and referenced. - Fully adheres to the relevant style (e.g., APA).	- Some grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors. - Writing is mainly clear and lucid. - Quotes are mostly properly attributed and referenced. - Somewhat adheres to the relevant style.	- Frequent grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors. - The writing is frequently unclear. - Many quotes are misattributed or not properly referenced. - Little or no adherence to the relevant style.	- Little or no discernable effort to complete the assignment or demonstrate understanding of the material. -or- - Did not submit the assignment.

References

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Tomaswick, L. (2017). Assessing Student Learning - Rubrics. Kent State University Center for Teaching and Learning. Retrieved January 14, 2019 from https://www.kent.edu/ctl/rubrics/

Walvoord, B.E., & Anderson, V.J. (Eds.) (2010). *Effective grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment in College. (2nd Ed).* San Francisco, CA: Wiley.