# What are rubrics?

Rubrics are great tools to help assess student learning. Teachers everywhere are using rubrics to guide teaching and learning. Yet even the most experienced teachers commonly misinterpret rubric scores! Unknowingly, they are short-changing their students.

Rubrics are organized according to performance levels and assessment criteria. Rubrics with four or five levels are most common. The criteria included in the assessment vary widely, depending on the assignment and what skills the teacher is assessing.

**Types of Rubrics**
Formats of a rubric may include analytical and holistic. Some rubrics may also be weighted.

**Analytical Rubrics**
- Break down the various objectives of the final product into specified components
- Evaluate individual components independently
- Possess extra details that allow multiple grades to emphasize the same criteria

**Holistic Rubrics**
- Assess students' work globally "as a whole"
- Often use anchor points that assign value to specific descriptions or performances which contribute to the whole
- Have fewer details to analyze, and are easier to integrate into the schema of younger students
- Do not provide detailed information about students' performance in specified areas within the assignment

**Weighted Rubrics**
- Typically are a form of an analytical rubric
- Judge certain concepts more heavily than others
  For example, if a teacher stresses the plot of a story, he or she might consider weighing the plot segment of the rubric more heavily than the setting, character, or mechanics.
- Focus attention on specific aspects of an assignment

# How do rubric scores relate to percent grades?

Let's take a rubric with four levels and four criteria as an example. If a student's performance is at the bottom level (Level 1), that means the student has met basic expectations in a limited or unsatisfactory way. This effort should be considered a minimum passing grade. In the US, a minimum passing grade is generally 60%, so your student should receive a 60% for this assignment.

Likewise, if a student's performance is at the top level (in this case, Level 4), that means the student has met or exceeded expectations in an exceptional way. For

this excellent effort, a student should receive the highest possible grade, usually 100%.

## How do teachers make a simple error when converting to percent grades?

The problem is that a huge number of teachers are misusing and misinterpreting rubric scores. Forgetting that the lowest performance level represents a minimum pass, they are wrongly equating this bottom level with complete failure. **That means that countless students are receiving failing grades when they deserve to be passing!**

Consider the following example of a rubric that has been scored improperly.

## The Traditional Way

**PRESENTATION**

| | LEVEL 4 Exceptional | LEVEL 3 Effective | LEVEL 2 Acceptable | LEVEL 1 Developing |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Knowledge / Understanding** | | | | |
| Demonstrates an understanding of the topic | thorough understanding | considerable understanding ✓ | moderate understanding | emerging understanding |
| **Inquiry / Thinking** | | | | |
| Develops and supports an original idea or opinion about the topic | thorough development and support | considerable development and support | moderate development and support ✓ | emerging sense of development and support |
| **Communication** | | | | |
| Addresses audience and speaks clearly with fluency, structure, and purpose | high degree of fluency, structure, and purpose | considerable fluency, structure, and purpose ✓ | moderate fluency, structure, and purpose | emerging fluency and sense of structure and purpose ✓ |
| **Application** | | | | |
| Exercises rhetorical skills such as emphasis, timing, pacing, reasoning, and questioning | high degree of skill | considerable skill | moderate skill | emerging skill ✓ |

**Overall Grade:** $\dfrac{9}{16} = 56\%$

Does this look familiar? The teacher has added up the total score (here, 3 + 2 + 3 + 1 = 9 points), and simply divided this result by the maximum score (4 x 4 = 16 points). This is the way many teachers convert a rubric score into a percent grade. This method is wrong.

Think about it. In the above example, the student has scored well above the bottom level of performance, yet he or she has received a failing grade of 56%. Clearly that doesn't make sense.

Below is an example from a teacher who knows how to make this conversion.

## The New Way

### PRESENTATION

| | LEVEL 4 | LEVEL 3 | LEVEL 2 | LEVEL 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Exceptional | Effective | Acceptable | Developing |
| **Knowledge / Understanding** | | | | |
| Demonstrates an understanding of the topic | thorough understanding | considerable understanding | moderate understanding | emerging understanding |
| **Inquiry / Thinking** | | | | |
| Develops and supports an original idea or opinion about the topic | thorough development and support | considerable development and support | moderate development and support | emerging sense of development and support |
| **Communication** | | | | |
| Addresses audience and speaks clearly with fluency, structure, and purpose | high degree of fluency, structure, and purpose | considerable fluency, structure, and purpose | moderate fluency, structure, and purpose | emerging fluency and sense of structure and purpose |
| **Application** | | | | |
| Exercises rhetorical skills such as emphasis, timing, pacing, reasoning, and questioning | high degree of skill | considerable skill | moderate skill | emerging skill |
| | 100% | 87% | 73% | 60% |

**Overall Grade:** 9 (77%)

# What's the difference between the new way and the traditional way?

Look at the discrepancy between the "Traditional Way" and the "New Way". Whereas in the first case the student received a failing grade of 56%, in the second case he or she has received a passing grade of 77%. This score was generated by adding up the percentages and dividing by the scores received (87+87+73+60 = 307, 307/4 = 77%). That's a big difference.

# So what is the correct way to convert a rubric score into a percent grade?

That depends on several factors, including the number of levels in your rubric, the number of assessment criteria, and your minimum passing grade. To make the correct conversion, you must consider these factors for each rubric, and create a mathematical equation that will allow you to map a score on your rubric to a percent grade. Then you must apply the equation to each possible rubric score to determine the equivalent percent grade.

## Steps:

1. Determine the number of levels and assessment criteria in your rubric (4x4, 3x3, 5x4)

2. Decide on a grading scale for each level (90-100% = Level 4)

3. Assign the minimum and maximum passing grade percentage (minimum 60%, maximum 100%)

4. Divide the middle ranges so all levels are equal (60%, 80%, 100%)

5. Determine the overall grade by adding the percentages and dividing them by the amount of scores (87+73+73+100) = 333, 333/4 = 83%

6. Your set grading scale will determine what level the student scored

# More Examples:

## Opinion Writing Rubric - Grade 5

| | No Credit (0) | Emerging (1) | Developing (2) | Proficient (3) | Exemplary | Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Organization** | • Introduction is missing<br>• Transitions are missing or don't make sense<br>• There is no conclusion, or it is not about the opinion | • Introduction is unclear or incomplete<br>• Some transitions are used, but they don't connect ideas<br>• Conclusion is not about the opinion or is not a paragraph | • Introduction has opinion and fits part of the task or purpose<br>• Transitions are used to connect most body paragraphs and ideas; some are missing or repeated<br>• Conclusion paragraph restates the opinion | • Introduction has opinion and plan that clearly fits the task and purpose<br>• Transitions connect the body paragraphs and ideas in an order that mostly follows a plan<br>• Conclusion paragraph connects back to the opinion | • Introduction has a plan and presents an opinion in an interesting way that clearly fits the task and purpose; may include a lead<br>Different transitions are used to connect the body paragraphs and ideas in an order that follows a plan<br>• Strong conclusion paragraph connects back to the opinion in an interesting way | |
| **Ideas/Content** | • Reasons are missing, unclear, or don't support the opinion<br>• Details and facts are missing, not correct, or repeated<br>• Reader will not learn anything about the opinion | • Reasons don't support the opinion<br>• Body paragraphs may have few details and facts, or they are incorrect, or don't support reasons<br>• Reader may be confused about the opinion | • Some reasons support the opinion<br>• Body paragraphs may have some details and facts that support reasons<br>• Reader needs more information to understand the opinion | • Reasons support the opinion and answer the prompt<br>• Each body paragraph includes important details and facts that support reason<br>• Reader will understand the opinion | • Reasons support the opinion and answer the prompt completely<br>• Each body paragraph has many interesting and important details and facts that support reason<br>• Reader will understand the opinion in detail | |
| **Language/Style** | • Sentences are not complete; do not make sense<br>• Many words are repeated or not used correctly<br>• Not neat, can't be read | • Many sentences are not complete, making it difficult for reader to follow<br>• Some words are repeated or not used correctly<br>• Style does not fit the task and audience | • Sentences are mostly complete, but with little variety<br>• Words are used correctly and fit the topic<br>• Style fits the task and audience | • Sentences are complete and have some variety<br>• Includes some action verbs, precise words, or descriptions<br>• Style fits the task and audience | • Sentences are a variety of simple, compound, and complex<br>• Includes many action verbs, precise words, descriptions, or content vocabulary<br>• Style fits the task and audience well | |
| **Conventions** | • Because of mistakes in CUPS (Capitals, Usage, Punctuation, Spelling), the reader can't understand the writing<br>• Doesn't look like paragraphs<br>• Not neat, can't be read | • Many mistakes in CUPS (Capitals, Usage, Punctuation, Spelling), makes it hard for reader to understand the writing<br>• Attempts paragraph format<br>• Not neat, hard to read | • Several mistakes in CUPS (Capitals, Usage, Punctuation, Spelling), but the reader can understand the writing<br>• Clear effort to write in paragraph format<br>• Mostly neat, can be read | • A few mistakes in CUPS (Capitals, Usage, Punctuation, Spelling) that don't stop the reader from understanding the writing<br>• Writes neat, indented paragraphs<br>• Neat and easy to read | • Very few or no mistakes in CUPS (Capitals, Usage, Punctuation, Spelling)<br>• Clearly writes in essay/report format<br>• Very neat and easy to read | |
| | | | | | **Total Score (12 possible)** | /12 |

| Traditional Method: | New Method: |
|---|---|
| Scale:<br><br>3, 2, 1, 0 per criteria<br><br>1 + 2 + 3 + 3 = 9<br><br>9/12 = 75%   or   9/4 = 2.25 | Scale:<br><br>3 = 100%, 2 = 80%, 1 = 60%, 0 = 0%<br><br>60 + 80 + 100 + 100 = 340<br><br>340/4 = 85%     or      2 |

## Opinion Writing Rubric - Grade 1

| | No Credit (0) | Emerging (1) | Developing (2) | Proficient (3) | Exemplary | Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Organization** | • No writing produced | • No opinion is stated on the topic | • Opinion on the topic is somewhat unclear | • Opinion and topic is identified<br>• A sense of closure is provided | • Opinion is clearly stated in a topic sentence<br>• A concluding statement or section is provided<br>• Transitions link ideas | |
| **Ideas/Content** | • No writing produced | • Reason(s) are not related to the opinion | • Reason(s) are related to the opinion, but are unclear | • Provides at least one reason that support the opinion | • Reasons and details support the opinion | |
| **Language/Style** | • No writing produced | • Uses incomplete sentences and run-on sentences<br>• Words do not fit the topic | • Uses mostly complete sentences<br>• Some words fit, others are unclear or incorrectly used | • Uses complete sentences<br>• Uses words that fit the topic | • Uses a variety of complete sentences<br>• Uses some action verbs and sensory description | |
| **Conventions** | • No writing produced | • Handwriting is difficult to read<br>• Initial capitals are missing<br>• Ending punctuation is missing<br>• Taught words misspelled; other spelling is random (not based on phonetic knowledge) | • Handwriting is mostly readable<br>• Mostly uses initial capitals<br>• Mostly uses ending punctuation<br>• Spells some taught words correctly; estimates spelling based on phonetic knowledge | • Readable handwriting<br>• Uses initial capitals<br>• Uses ending punctuation<br>• Spells most taught words correctly; estimates other spelling based on phonetic knowledge | • Readable handwriting and neat paper<br>• Uses capitalization correctly, including inital caps, proper names, and dates<br>• Uses ending punctuation correctly; demonstrates understanding of commas and apostrophes<br>• Spells taught words correctly; estimates other spelling based on phonetic knowledge | |
| | | | | | Total Score (12 possible) | /12 |

| Traditional Method: | New Method: |
|---|---|
| Scale:<br><br>3, 2, 1, 0 per criteria<br><br>2 + 2 + 3 + 3 = 10<br><br>10/12 = 83%    or   10/4 = 2.5 | Scale:<br><br>3 = 100%, 2 = 80%, 1 = 60%, 0 = 0%<br><br>80 + 80 + 100 + 100 = 360<br><br>360/4 = 90%    or     3 |

To provide consistency, there needs to be a scale to determine what percentage falls within a 1, 2, or 3 grade on the report card.

| Letter Grade | GPA | Percentage |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| A+ | 4.3 | 100+ |
| A | 4.0 | 94 - 100 |
| A- | 3.7 | 90 - 93 |
| B+ | 3.3 | 87 - 89 |
| B | 3.0 | 83 - 86 |
| B- | 2.7 | 80 - 82 |
| C+ | 2.3 | 77 - 79 |
| C | 2.0 | 73 - 76 |
| C- | 1.7 | 70 - 72 |
| D+ | 1.3 | 67 - 69 |
| D | 1.0 | 63 - 66 |
| D- | 0.7 | 60 - 62 |
| F | 0.0 | 0 -59 |

## Committee Consensus:

Rather than use a percentage, the team has decided to use the following scale for grades 1-5.

0–5 = 1     Emerging

6–9 = 2     Developing

10–12 = 3   Proficient