Developing assessment rubrics

Guidelines for JCU Subject Coordinators

A marking rubric helps you to communicate the standards of the assessment task to your students and markers. It is an effective way to implement standards-based assessment. A marking rubric contains descriptors of the standards for a number of criteria, usually in the form of a grid or matrix.

	STANDARDS ↓				
	HD	**D**	**C**	**P**	**N**
Knowledge and understanding					
Critical thinking skills					
Research skills					
Communication skills					
↑ CRITERIA			↑ DESCRIPTORS		

- ***Criteria*** *are the properties or characteristics by which to judge the quality of the assessment task. The criteria do not offer anything, or make any assumptions about, actual quality.*
- ***Standards*** *are definite levels of achievement or performance.*
- ***Descriptors*** *describe the qualities required to demonstrate achievement of each standard for each criterion.*

Step 1: Develop criteria.

Assessment criteria enhance the transparency of assessment by outlining for students the aspects for consideration in the making of judgments. If criteria such as 'creativity' or 'use of writing conventions (e.g. spelling, punctuation)' are considered to be important to the assessment judgment, they should be included in the criteria. Here are some pointers when developing criteria:

- *Focus on what is most relevant to the learning outcomes.*
- *State the criteria as simply and concisely as possible (e.g. knowledge and understanding, research skills).*
- *Deal with only one property or characteristic in each criterion.*
- *Avoid reference to quality in the criteria, by way of avoiding adjectives (e.g. effective) and adverbs (e.g. logically).*
- *Keep criteria to a manageable number (e.g. 4-5).*
- *Criteria need to be 'unpacked' before writing standards to identify relevant component attributes.*

Step 2: Identify standards.

Developing verbal descriptions of standards that make adequate distinctions between each of the five levels of the JCU grading scheme may be challenging. Most examples find it sufficient to describe four standards in answer to the following questions:

- *What is the best possible standard that can be anticipated in this learning environment?*
- *What is the least standard that will be considered acceptable [threshold]?*
- *What standard lies between these two?*
- *What standard will be considered as unacceptable?*

So, your marking rubric may be developed as below. The standards still follow the cut off points of the JCU Grading system (Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy Item 5.22.1):

	Outstanding *(Upper-range D to HD; 80-100%)*	***Sound*** *(C to mid-range D; 65-79%)*	***Satisfactory*** *(P; 50-64%)*	***Unsatisfactory*** *(N; 0-49%)*
CRITERIA ↓	***Best possible standard***	*Standard that lies between these*	***Least/threshold standard***	*Unacceptable standard*

Note: The number of standards will depend on: (1) the ability of the assessment task to make fine distinctions in a reliable way; and (2) the degree to which discrimination is required (e.g. a competency approach means a "Pass" standard only is required). While some schemes avoid describing a "Fail" standard, this can be quite useful in helping students identify behaviours that they should eliminate from their practice.

Step 3: Develop standards descriptors.

Standards must be pitched at a reasonable level. They should be neither so hard that no student can succeed nor so low that all students succeed at the highest level. High standards will often incorporate additional attributes such as metacognitive understandings or originality of perspective.

Descriptors must be described in brief, clear, specific language that is accessible to students. Accept that standards will never be able to capture all of the detail of the explicit and implicit understandings to be developed by your students. Attempting to achieve levels of precision that remove all subjectivity from assessment judgements of complex learning will result in rubrics that are unfit for purpose through their length and obtuseness.

Here are some pointers when developing criteria:

- *Pitch descriptors at a reasonable level (i.e. not unachievable but not too easy): Note that pass is an achievement standard.*
- *Frame standards positively (i.e. what is required rather than what is to be avoided) so that students know what they are aiming for.*
- *Aim to be precise and specific, however, avoid becoming overly complex or trivialising complex learning outcomes (e.g. avoid counting errors).*
- *Use language likely to be understood by students (e.g. "demonstrates comprehensive and detailed knowledge of major facts, concepts and procedures addressed in course materials").*
- *Specify demonstrable qualities (e.g. "rephrases problems in own words and identifies major issues").*
- *Use adjectives or adverbs to define achievement at the different standards (e.g. much, some, key, appropriate).*

Marks can be assigned to the descriptors as illustrated here:

	Outstanding *(Upper-range D to HD; 80-100%)*	***Sound*** *(C to mid-range D; 65-79%)*	***Satisfactory*** *(P; 50-64%)*	***Unsatisfactory*** *(N; 0-49%)*
Criterion 1 *[20 marks]*	*Descriptor [16-20 marks]*	*Descriptor [13-15.5 marks]*	*Descriptor [10-12.5 marks]*	*Descriptor [0-9.5 marks]*
Criterion 2 *[10 marks]*	*Descriptor [8-10 marks]*	*Descriptor [6.5-7.5 marks]*	*Descriptor [5-6 marks]*	*Descriptor [0-4.5 marks]*

Alternatively, the overall grade for the assessment task may be arrived at by way of generating a formula (e.g. **HD**: HD on 3 criteria; no less than D on other criterion; **D**: D on 3 criteria; no less than a C on other criterion, etc.).

Note: To ensure that assessment judgements are defensible, consist and transparent, it is essential that criteria and standards are used in conjunction with **exemplars of student work** and **moderation processes**. Formative activities such as **practice marking**, **self and peer assessment**, **provision of feedback and structured reflection** are additional ways of using criteria and standards for the enhancement of student learning.

Checklist: My rubric has:

• *A manageable number of concisely stated criteria, aligned with SLOs?*	*Yes*
• *The number of standards required for the task, aligned with the JCU grading system?*	*Yes*
• *Standards that are reasonably pitched, framed positively and, where possible, focus on demonstrable qualities?*	*Yes*

Sample Task Rubric

Assessment task: First year oral presentation to panel and peers

Criteria	***Outstanding*** *(Upper D to HD)*	***Sound*** *(C to mid D)*	***Satisfactory*** *(P)*	***Unsatisfactory*** *(N)*
Understanding and critical thinking	*Analyses key and emerging aspects of the topic, bringing an originality of perspective*	*Analyses key aspects of the topic*	*Demonstrates some evidence of analytical thinking but largely describes aspects of the topic*	*Provides inaccurate explanations of aspects of the topic*
	Insightfully responds to panel questions, linking to broader relationships, implications and/or contexts	*Accurately responds to panel questions*	*Provides surface level responses to panel questions*	*Has difficulty in responding to and/or inaccurately responds to panel questions*
Research skills	*Draws upon relevant, reliable and current evidence from a wide range of sources*	*Draws upon relevant, current and reliable evidence from a range of sources*	*Draws upon relevant, current and reliable evidence albeit from a limited number of sources*	*Draws upon evidence that is irrelevant, unreliable and/or lacks currency*
Communication skills - oral	*Presents to audience with a high level of clarity using academic language and highly effective sequencing and explanatory techniques*	*Presents to audience with clarity using academic language and effective sequencing and explanatory techniques*	*Presents to audience in a generally clear manner using academic language and sequencing and explanatory techniques*	*Has difficulty conveying meaning to audience due to inappropriate language and lack of sequencing and explanatory techniques*
Communication skills - written	*Utilises well-designed support materials with accurately presented and referenced content*	*Utilises support materials wherein content is presented and referenced with few errors*	*Utilises support materials wherein content is presented and referenced albeit with some errors*	*Utilises support materials with inaccurately presented and referenced content and little attention to design*

Sample Course Learning Outcome Rubric

Learning outcome: Apply critical thinking to address IT related issues

Criteria	*Year 1: Introduced*	*Year 2: Developed*	*Year 3: Assured*
A – Identifies and explains issues	*Identifies and explains key issues in a routine IT related situation.*	*Identifies and explains key issues in a routine IT related situation, drawing upon relevant theory and real or hypothetical examples.*	*Identifies, explains and prioritises key issues in a complex IT related situation, drawing upon relevant theory and real or hypothetical examples.*
B – Analyses relevant evidence	*Analyses evidence from relevant sources, acknowledging more than one perspective and/or approach.*	*Analyses evidence from relevant sources, presenting various perspectives and/or approaches.*	*Analyses evidence from relevant sources, synthesising and evaluating various perspectives and/or approaches.*
C – Proposes solutions	*Proposes strategies or partial solutions.*	*Proposes one or more solutions that reflect understanding of the problem and consideration of contextual factors.*	*Proposes one or more solutions that reflect a deep understanding of the problem and consideration of contextual factors, as well as ethical, logical and/or cultural dimensions.*
D – Evaluates solutions	*Evaluates solutions outlining some advantages and disadvantages.*	*Evaluates solutions through critical review of feasibility, potential impacts and/or other relevant considerations.*	*Evaluates solutions through critical review of the history of the problem, logical reasoning, standardised measures, feasibility, potential impacts and/or other relevant considerations.*
E – Provides conclusions	*Provides conclusions that draw basic links to the solutions and information provided. Outlines some consequences and implications.*	*Provides conclusions that draw logical links to the solutions and information provided. Outlines key consequences and implications.*	*Provides conclusions that draw logical links to the full range of solutions and information provided, including opposing viewpoints. Clearly outlines key consequences and implications.*

Third module adapted from:

Hoadley, S. & Wood, L. (2013). How to embed discipline-specific discourse: Learning through curriculum. Macquarie University, Faculty of Business and Economics. Retrieved from https://researchers.mq.edu.au/en/publications/how-to-embed-discipline-specific-discourse-learning-through-commu

Hughes, C. (2013). Practical guidelines for designing rubrics. University of Queensland. Retrieved from https://elearning.uq.edu.au/guides/turnitin/practical-guidelines-designing-rubrics

Resources for rubric development:

Association of American Colleges and Universities. (n.d.). Value rubrics. Retrieved from https://www.aacu.org/value-rubrics

Cornell University. (n.d.). Using rubrics. Retrieved from https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/assessment-evaluation/using-rubrics

Orrell, J. (2003). A generic learning rubric. Retrieved from https://teaching.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/upload-files/GenericAssessmentRubric.pdf

University of Brighton. (2012). University marking/grading descriptors. Retrieved from https://staff.brighton.ac.uk/reg/acs/docs/Undergraduate%20marking-grading%20descriptors.pdf

University of Surrey. (n.d.). Grade descriptors: Undergraduate programmes. Retrieved from https://www.surrey.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/code-practice-assessment-feedback-2021-22.pdf