

## DEVELOPING RUBRICS FOR STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

*Jeffrey Andersen—Department of Humanities*

One of the learner-centered activities I have used in my humanities classes at BYU–Idaho is a group project where three to four students work together in researching a topic and presenting their findings to the rest of the class. This group project has proved valuable in developing knowledge, as well as a number of important skills such as working cooperatively. Project learning is founded on the assumption that students learn about a particular subject by completing a project and that the project is an accurate reflection of the learning that has taken place. However, in assigning my students to do a group presentation, I have assumed that they intuitively knew what was necessary to research a topic and create an effective presentation. I have often been disappointed by the quality of student presentations, and have concluded that the main problem is not that students didn't learn anything, but that they did not know how to professionally present (or teach) what they had learned to the rest of the class. My method of grading the presentation has been too subjective and not transparent enough to students. Consequently, I decided to develop a rubric for student presentations that would address my two main concerns: help the students understand the elements of an effective presentation and provide a more objective means of evaluating the degree of learning that the presentations represent.

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### DEVELOPMENT OF THE METHOD

The concept of rubrics was not new to me—I had experienced them in classes and attempted to use them in some of mine—but my research on the topic demonstrated the great importance of design in determining the quality and effectiveness of a rubric. Certain basic criteria should be considered in the design of a rubric: levels of achievement and specific criteria to assess or, in other words, elements essential to a high quality group presentation.

My first task was to determine how many levels of achievement to include. Most rubrics have three to five levels of achievement. My decision to have only three levels was based on several factors. First, instructors in the University of Idaho Education Ph.D. program give only three grades: Superior, Satisfactory, or Unsatisfactory. This system sets the expectation that students will work toward meeting specified standards of acceptability. Doing the minimum required just to “pass the class” is not an option. Secondly, developing specific criteria to distinguish among four or five levels of achievement is difficult and often leads to the

vagueness and subjectivity a rubric is meant to eliminate. Such rubrics included descriptions such as “unorganized,” “somewhat organized,” “mostly organized,” “logically organized” that do not help the student in learning the specific qualities of organization expected in the presentation or the teacher in evaluating the presentation.

After determining three levels of achievement, naming the levels was the next step. Considerable variation was used in the titles of achievement in the rubrics I sampled. Some simply contained numbers for each level; some had a version of “Excellent,” “Good,” “Satisfactory,” and “Unsatisfactory.” Others attempted to separate the assessment of learning from grading by using less threatening terms such as “Exemplary,” “Accomplished,” “Developing,” and “Beginning.” Consequently, I settled on the terms “Effective,” “Adequate,” and “Ineffective” as a positive way of describing the three levels.

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One challenge was identifying the specific criteria that were essential in any group presentation. Listing the qualities of excellent presentations, I found seven criteria relating to four main types of learning: mastery of a particular body of knowledge derived from several sources and reflecting varied points of view (Content and Scholarship & Professionalism), the ability to synthesize and organize the content so that others could access it (Clarity and Organization), learning to cooperate with others in producing a product (Group Collaboration), and presenting the information in a stimulating and comprehensible manner (Learning/Interest Aids and Delivery). Looking at other rubrics was helpful in determining the wording of my criteria and in identifying specific features of achievement.

The final and most difficult step in the design of the rubric was to compose clear descriptions of each level of achievement for each of the presentation criteria, differentiating between what was ineffective, adequate, and effective. Describing the features of an ineffective and an effective presentation was rather simple. Determining what was adequate and differentiating that from what was effective was more difficult.

## EVALUATION AND REFINEMENT OF THE METHOD

I submitted the rubric to a colleague for constructive criticism. He suggested some minor modifications in wording but was enthusiastic about the assessment method and wanted to use it in his own classes. As we discussed the rubric, we speculated about its usefulness for summative evaluation of student presentations aside from assisting their formative creation.

I attached numeric values to each performance level for each of the seven criteria with a maximum score of 100. Making each of the seven criteria numerically equal proved unsatisfactory for two reasons: first, 7 does not divide equally into 100, and second, the criteria were not of equal

importance in the learning activity. The numeric value of each criterion was weighted according to its importance in the project. Since this was not a speech class where delivery and visual aids are a primary focus, these criteria were not weighted equally with content or professionalism. A range of scores was included for each level because even within three levels of achievement there is a degree of effectiveness as one presentation compares to another. The scores for the effective category fell in the 90-100 percent of the maximum range; the adequate category merited 75-85 percent; and the ineffective category encompassed a range from 10-60 percent of the maximum. With these modifications, the refined rubric was submitted to the scrutiny of students (see Appendix A).

A focus group from the class of one of my colleagues was extracted to examine the rubric and provide feedback in exchange for pizza. After some introductory questions about their experience with group projects and an explanation of the goals of the rubric, I posed four questions for discussion.

First, I asked for their reaction to the three achievement levels and the terms attached to them. All agreed that three categories were sufficient and that too many categories would only contribute to meaningless complexity. They also liked the terminology of *effective*, *adequate*, and *inadequate* and thought these terms were non-threatening as opposed to *excellent*, *good*, and *poor*, which can be taken all too personally.

Next I asked if there were too many criteria (7) or if they could suggest any additional criteria they thought were important. The focus group mostly accepted the seven criteria as natural and felt that any more would be overwhelming. One student asked about including an overall effectiveness category but was convinced by others that such was unnecessary because they all contributed to an overall evaluation. They also deftly noted that in grading, an overall category would allow for double evaluation of a particular weakness in the presentation.

The students then read through the criteria descriptions for each level and I asked if they clearly differentiated between levels of achievement. The students responded positively and commented that they liked seeing specific expectations for creating an effective presentation. One student even asked if she could keep a copy of the rubric as an aid to preparing future presentations. I asked if the wording and expectations were understandable, and again the group responded positively with no suggestions for modification.

Finally, I asked how the group felt about including a point valuation as part of the rubric or if it made them more concerned about grading than learning. The response took me by surprise—all agreed that they liked having the point system as part of the rubric. One student commented that she liked knowing exactly how the project would be evaluated. Another

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commented that the inclusion of the points helped students know what elements of the presentation were most important. She commented that as an introvert, she appreciated the fact that a maximum of only 10 points was awarded for delivery and 20 points for content mastery.

Based on this positive feedback from a colleague and the focus group and my own experience with group presentations in the past, I feel confident the rubric will help students prepare effective presentations and will be valuable as a more objective summative evaluation for grading purposes. I look forward to using the rubric in a real classroom setting. ☺

### Group Presentation Rubric

Criteria:	Effective	Adequate	Ineffective
Content	The group demonstrates broad understanding of the key concepts or issues important to the topic and can answer probing questions from the class. (14-20 points.)	Key issues are discussed in such a way as to give the class the big picture. Questions regarding basic facts are answered satisfactorily. (15-17 points.)	Essential concepts or issues are omitted; much time is dedicated to insignificant rather than major themes. (1-14 points.)
Clarity	Concepts are presented at a level appropriate to the class. Unfamiliar terms are fully explained and all aspects of controversial issues are fairly represented. (14-15 pts.)	Explanations of unfamiliar concepts and terms are appropriate to an uninformed audience. (12-13 points)	The presentation is too technical or too simple. New terms are not explained, or time is wasted explaining the obvious or trivial. (1-11 points)
Organization	Structure features an introduction, body, and conclusion. Information is presented in a logical, intuitive sequence with sufficient time allotted for questions and discussion. (14-15 points.)	The presentation of information follows an orderly sequence proceeding from simpler to more complex ideas. (12-13 points)	The presentation is disjointed and lacks any logical structure leading to audience confusion and frustration. Some sections of the presentation are unrelated to the rest. (1-11 points)
Group Collaboration	The presentation is divided equally among group members, each section building upon the previous by means of smooth transitions. (9-10 points)	All group members participate equally in the presentation. (7-8 points)	Group members present independent sections with no overall coherence; presentation time is distributed unequally. (1-6 points)
Learning/Interest Aids	Audience interest and comprehension are enhanced through the use of appropriate slides, diagrams, maps, video clips, etc., or by means of role plays, skits, props, or handouts. (14-15 points.)	Visual aids are used to enliven the topic and assist the audience to digest information. (12-13 points)	The presentation lacks learning aids or fails to engage the audience in the material presented. Aids may be mere gimmicks that might even distract from learning. (1-11 points)
Delivery	Presenters speak clearly, audibly, and energetically, maintaining eye contact and audience awareness. Speakers are poised (no fidgeting or other distracters). (9-10 points)	Presenters appear confident and well-rehearsed. They communicate effectively, avoiding slang and worn-out clichés. (7-8 points)	Presenters' speech may be too fast, garbled, inaudible, or repetitious. Speakers are nervous and disengaged from the audience. (1-6 points)
Scholarship & Professionalism	The presentation objectively balances opposing or varied views from several credible sources. (14-15 points.)	The presentation features reliable information from a variety of sources (i.e., books, periodicals, videos, etc., and not just internet sites). (12-13 points)	Information is derived from 1 or 2 sources. Bias, ignorance, or ethno-centrism produces a slanted overview of the topic. (1-11 points)