

Assessment FOR Learning - Examples of using rubrics

Rubrics are a great way to help students learn from their mistakes and to assess their own knowledge (#5 and #6 of the 6 Key AFL Ideas ^[1]).

In the typical high school setting, rubrics are most commonly used by English teachers to show students how they will be grading essays/papers. Other teachers will sometimes use them to show students how projects will be graded. Essentially these rubrics detail how the teacher breaks the assignment down into specific parts and then show how many points each part will be worth.

While there is nothing wrong at all with using rubrics this way, I would like to describe an additional way to incorporate rubrics into the classroom. The use of a rubric is a highly effective and easy to apply AFL strategy. In fact, I would contend that rubrics could be implemented into any content area and any classroom. If you teach content or skills then a rubric then you can use a rubric.

For just a moment forget about using a rubric as a way to show a student how he or she will be graded. Instead, think of a rubric as an overview of the key knowledge/skills that you will be teaching during a set period of time – whether it's a month-long, week-long, or even single-day unit.

In this model, students are given the rubric – the overview of content – at the beginning of the unit. At regular intervals – perhaps daily, perhaps every other day, perhaps every ½ hour – students are given an opportunity to look over either the entire rubric or a portion of it and use it to assess their understanding. Students will look over the portion of the rubric to which the teacher directs them and will then rate themselves in one of three categories:

1. Category 1 – Content the student knows/understands and will not forget
2. Category 2 – Content about which the student has questions
3. Category 3 – Content the student still doesn't know

One of the nice side benefits of using a rubric in this manner is that it helps the teacher stay focused on what is most important. Especially with a young teacher or with a teacher who is teaching a specific unit or class for the first time, it is very easy to get sidetracked. Sometimes the content plays itself out over the course of teaching the unit. Often by the end of a unit a teacher might look back and realize that the core content had not received the appropriate level of focus as compared to some less-essential knowledge. By creating a rubric that students get at the very beginning of the unit and by then referencing that rubric throughout the unit, the teacher will be more likely to focus on the key content and to create graded assessments based on that key content.

As students assess their understanding along the way, they become more aware of what they do and don't know. Awareness of what one doesn't know is a major step toward learning something. When it comes time to study for a summative assessment, the rubric becomes an excellent study guide. Students have rated their knowledge of the content and can spend their time focusing on the lower-rated items. While it is common for a teacher to hand a study guide to a student, it is less common - and much more effective - if a student has a personalized study guide that they have created and of which they have a sense of ownership.

Helpful Hints:

- The teacher will have to guide/train students about how to use the rubric in this manner. Don't expect magic the first time.
- This will work best if the teacher provides class time for the students to use their rubrics.
- The teacher might want to keep the rubrics in the classroom so that they do not get lost. Students might not take them home until the night before a large test/quiz/graded assignment.
- Be very explicit with your students about the purpose of the rubric. Don't let this become just another "thing". This could be yet another worksheet provided by a teacher but not effectively used by students. Instead help your students view self-assessment as a core learning strategy and something that they can apply to future classes/learning. Help them view the rubric as a key to success.

World War 1 Mastery Rubric

1 = I know it and will never forget it. 2 = I might not remember this one 3 = I really need help on this one

In the box to the right of each topic rate your understanding of the topic. You will have 3 chances to rate your knowledge per topic. Use the top box the first time and work your way down. Use the key at the top. In the box with the title write any thoughts that will help you remember what you need to know for that topic.

Causes	Key People	The War	Russian Revolution	US Enters	Outcomes
Militarism	Archduke Ferdinand	Trench Warfare	Marxism	Lusitania	Treaty of Versailles
Alliances	Blackhand	New Weapons	Communism	Zimmerman Telegram	Reparations
Imperialism	Kaiser Wilhelm II	Western Front	Russo-Japanese War	Submarine Warfare	German Guilt
Nationalism	Tsar Nicholas II	Eastern Front	Incompetent Leaders	Impact	League of Nations
Triple Entente	Woodrow Wilson	Schlieffen Plan	Landless Peasants		New Countries
Triple Alliance	Vladimir Lenin		Peace, Land, Bread		

Use this rubric as your personalized study guide. Focus most of your time on the items with the lowest rating.