

Rubric Criteria Video Script

This video aims to help you design more effective rubrics by highlighting four fundamental questions to keep in mind as you consider criteria for your rubric.

Rubrics have three main components, which in this video will be referred to as:

1. **Assessment criteria:** the key elements of the learning being assessed.
2. **Performance standards:** the levels of performance or in other words, the gradient of quality.
3. And, **Descriptions of performance standards:** the descriptions of how students will demonstrate achievement of the criteria at each level of quality. It is important to note that these descriptions focus on what is observable, as suggested by the term “performance.”

The most important but also the most challenging part of designing a rubric is identifying the criteria to assess. In this video, we will share an example of how to design a set of rubric criteria to effectively assess learning. We will guide you through the process by asking four questions intended to help ensure your criteria are valid and reliable.

By valid, we mean the criteria assess the intended learning outcomes. By reliable, we mean you, your students, and other graders can use the criteria with consistent results.

The first question to ask is **what learning outcomes am I assessing?** A learning outcome is what students should be able to demonstrate by the end of a learning sequence, such as a unit or module. We will explain using the example of a unit on desserts situated in a course on professional baking. The learning outcome to be assessed is:

By the end of this unit, students will be able to create a professional, customized, baked dessert.

The assessment task that will allow students to demonstrate that they've achieved this learning outcome is the creation of a custom, multi-tiered cake appropriate for a formal event.

A common mistake when developing criteria is to simply break the assessment task into components. In this example, students are making a cake, so the task components could be:

- Base + tiers
- Icing
- Decorations

But the task is not what you want students to learn. The task is how they *show achievement of the learning outcome*. Instead of listing task components, break the learning outcome into a series of smaller outcomes.

Ask the question: **What does it look like to fully achieve this learning outcome?** The answers will be your set of criteria.

Our example learning outcome is: By the end of this unit, students will be able to create a professional, customized, baked dessert. To achieve this outcome, students will learn to

- achieve good flavour
- develop appropriate texture
- design an attractive product
- demonstrate originality
- customize a dessert
- engineer the dessert structure

Notice that these same criteria could be applied to a variety of baked desserts, not just the cake. For a given learning outcome, there are many possible assessment tasks. To create a valid rubric, it is important that both the assessment task and the criteria are derived *directly* from the learning outcome.

The recommended number of criteria for a rubric is 3-5. More than that results in an unwieldy tool that can overwhelm users and does not focus on what is most important, thus potentially reducing the validity and reliability of your rubric. To distill the list to the 3-5 most important criteria, ask this question: **Am I focusing on what is most important?**

To help decide what is most important, we must keep the learning outcome in mind. We care about the dessert being professional and customized, so the customized criterion is clearly important. The other 5 criteria break down what it means to make a professional baked dessert. We need to narrow this down. To begin, the first two criteria are aspects of the same thing: professional desserts taste good, so we can combine those criteria into a single criterion: “creates a tasty dessert.”

Similarly, attractiveness and originality are both aspects of the concept of artistry, so let's replace those with one criterion: “designs an artistic product.”

The final question to ask is: **“Have I made the criteria understandable for students and graders?”** Regardless of how valid the criteria are, if they're confusing, the rubric will not be able to be reliably used by graders and students.

The criteria should be concise, clear, and written with language that is understandable to students and graders. In our example, we've kept the criteria short, each being four words or less, but we could be clearer about what we mean by engineering. When baking desserts, engineering is used to build a structure that won't collapse. So, it would be clearer to say: “engineers a stable structure.”

Don't worry about not having enough detail in your criteria. The descriptions of performance standards will provide the necessary detail for students and graders. For example, at the highest performance standard, a tasty cake can be described like this: The base tastes very good and is moist but not undercooked, with appropriate density. Icing complements the base flavour and is an appropriate thickness. Most decorations are edible and do not detract from overall flavour or texture.

By asking all four questions, we have now designed a valid and reliable set of criteria for our example learning outcome. Notice that throughout this process, we've been using action verbs to phrase our criteria. Action verbs remind us that the criteria list is a set of learning outcomes as opposed to the components of an assessment task.

As demonstrated, these four fundamental questions aim to help you create a rubric that is both valid and reliable. By focusing your criteria firmly on your learning outcomes, these questions help ensure that your rubric is assessing the learning you need it to assess. By refining the quantity and quality of the criteria, these questions help ensure that students, graders, and instructors can achieve consistency when using the rubric. Of course, no assessment tool is perfect the first time around. We encourage you to continue to adjust your rubric each time you use it.

References

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