

The Rubric: Frequently Voiced Questions & Concerns

- *Will the rubric complicate grading?*

No rubric is going to be perfect and until we use it numerous times and get used to it, it is going to seem cumbersome. We hope that no one is planning to use the rubric for every assignment; the students need to experience a variety of feedback methods. However, for the CFAs (aka QuickChecks), this rubric will provide a common way of scoring the writing samples.



- *Should the rubric dictate what percentage or points I give my students?*

The rubric should not be used to generate a percentage that results in a score. The rubric is a continuum that helps students and teachers figure out where they are currently, where instruction needs to occur, and hopefully, see where growth has occurred. How the writing portion of the CFU is applied to the grades of students is up to departments and/or teachers. For example, a department may decide that for the August CFA, they are just going to give 15 points to all students who completed the assignment. Another department might decide that a student who scores between such and such a score, gets a certain number of points, between such and such score gets a certain number of points, and so on. Or a department or teacher might decide on a different method now and a different method later when presumably, the students will be doing even better than they are now. The most important thing to remember is that the rubric is a continuum of progress, not a method of generating a percentage leading to a score.

- *We have to go back to “fix the score” to match the grade to which we would have assessed the paper.*

Please resist the urge to fix the score. The score the student achieves on the rubric is the score they have earned. Yes, you may have a strong sense of what a paper should earn; however, fixing the scores is a misunderstanding of the purpose of the rubric. It is okay to uphold rigor for our students. We don't want to discourage them, of course, but we do want them to see progress over the course of the year, and one way to do this, is to put aside our quite natural feelings of empathy and give them the score they have earned.

None of us likes being the bad guy and giving grades that are less than stellar. However, how much good do we do our students if we continue to sugarcoat their less than

stellar efforts? Sometimes we have to lay it out there for them and then provide the scaffolding or reinforcements they need in order to help them move forward. It is not the intention of this rubric to undermine any student's effort, but to help them realize where their areas of weakness lie so that they can pick up and do better next time, something every teacher strives to do.

- *The rubric may work better for other disciplines*

As you know, a main purpose of this rubric is to have a common language among all subject areas for the elements that make up good writing. We hope it works well for all disciplines. Again, we are not asking that teachers use this on every assignment, but to ignore the rubric in any class will undermine its usefulness throughout the entire system.

- *Content is weighed too heavily. (X4 is too much.)*

Organization and Conventions are indeed important, but not as important as Content, so while we recognize that the Content area is heavily weighted, we think it needs to be. That being said, the ELA departments from OJHS and OHS decided on the x4 weight.

While students may earn a 56% on the rubric, the teacher is in charge of how many points it is worth in the class. For example, if a student writing sample is poor because it lacks evidence and a closing argument, identify what is wrong with the writing and give them the appropriate score. However, make the assignment worth ten points rather than thirty and round up to 6 out of 10 points. This way, students get honest feedback which helps to identify what is missing, while not seeing the assignment as "making or breaking" the grade. If you want to make the assignment worth 100 points, that is always the teacher's prerogative as well. Teachers give the honest feedback, deciding its impact in the gradebook, and the student receives honest feedback.

- *This rubric doesn't work well when a teacher has asked students for a something particular like vocabulary, descriptive words, or register.*

Very true. However, for the purposes of this particular rubric, the teacher should not be asking for anything outside the parameters of the rubric. Vocabulary or descriptive words or other specifics could be given a separate score, or simply saved for another writing assignment. This rubric is very specifically meant to be general so that it fits multiple grade levels and subject areas.

After much deliberation, discussion, and feedback, we decided not to adopt the separate row of customizable boxes as it would both complicate the rubric and make it less 'common' to us all, which is one part of what we are trying to do in using the rubric in the first place.

- *Rubrics feels like a “hoop to jump through”*

The rubric has been developed as a tool for all teachers, across grade levels and subject areas including both secondary and elementary grades, to use in common. We very much appreciate your willingness to jump through the hoop together at least for CFAs, but hopefully an additional time or two each semester, so that the students see the elements of good writing included in the rubric are not just for one class, but for every class.

- *Using the rubric on the informative/explanatory essay was easier than the others, but a score of “F” on this prompt, for example, would not work in strategic classes*

Absolutely! And we do not expect teachers of strategic classes or resource classes to use this rubric without differentiating for those students. For example, especially for instructional purposes, a strategic English teacher might only focus on a clear topic sentence and use only that part of the rubric, putting less emphasis on Conventions and Organization as the students come up to speed on each section. A resource teacher may ask his/her students to use one piece of textual evidence in the paragraph, and use the rubric to focus only on that. The rubric does not need to be used in an all-or-nothing manner. Teachers are welcome to use it, especially as they introduce the rubric and teach the elements of strong writing to students, in the way that they think is best. The main goal is that the rubric actually be used periodically in all classes so that the students understand that good writing requires the same elements regardless of in which class they are doing the writing. When students complete the writing portions of the CFAs however, they should be held responsible for the entire rubric, but again, it need not be weighted as a make-or-break grade.

- *Can the rubric be used on papers of any length?*

This rubric can be used on both short and long assignments, realizing that for long-term assignments (i.e.: research papers) this may not be the most effective way to assess all the many elements required.

- *Is the rubric grade or age specific?*

The rubric is not grade/age specific although we are in the process of developing rubrics for grades 4-6 and 2-3. These would be very similar to the current rubric, but with elementary friendly lingo.