

Rubrics, Marking Criteria and Assessment Criteria

Category: Assessment, Feedback and Learning

Assessment criteria identify the qualities or dimensions on which work will be judged. Marking criteria is often used for operational statements that guide the allocation of marks, although terminology varies across institutions. A rubric combines criteria with descriptions of performance at two or more levels, and may be analytic or holistic.

A table with marks is not necessarily a sound rubric. Criteria must represent the intended learning, level descriptions must distinguish meaningful differences in quality, and weighting should reflect educational importance. Exemplars and dialogue are often needed because words cannot fully encode disciplinary judgement ([Brookhart, 2018](#)).

Criteria and Rubric Design

1. **Select qualities:** Derive a small set of relevant criteria from outcomes and the assessment construct.
2. **Define levels:** Describe observable differences in quality rather than relying on vague adjectives.
3. **Choose structure:** Use analytic scoring for separate dimensions or holistic judgement when integration matters.
4. **Test interpretation:** Apply the rubric to varied samples and discuss disagreement through moderation.
5. **Support learning:** Use criteria with exemplars, self-assessment and feedback before final submission.

Examples in Practice

For an oral defence, criteria address use of evidence, reasoning, response to challenge and communication. Assessors trial descriptors on recordings and discuss boundary cases; students use annotated examples to understand how the qualities interact.

Why It Matters

Clear criteria can support transparency, feedback and consistency, but over-detailed rubrics may fragment complex performance or create false precision. Defensible judgement combines explicit criteria with assessor expertise, moderation and space to recognise the quality of the whole. Accessibility assumptions should be reviewed across criteria, descriptors and examples ([Sadler, 2009](#)).

Further Reading

6. Brookhart, S. M. (2018). [Appropriate criteria: Key to effective rubrics](#). *Frontiers in Education*, 3, 22.
7. Reddy, Y. M., & Andrade, H. (2010). [A review of rubric use in higher education](#). *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35(4), 435–448.
8. Sadler, D. R. (2009). [Indeterminacy in the use of preset criteria for assessment and grading](#). *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 34(2), 159–179.

Related Terms: Success Criteria | Grading | Moderation | Assessment Reliability