

ANALYTIC SCORING RUBRICS AS EFFECTIVE MEANS OF ASSESSING ESSAYS

Vardanyan Lusik

Candidate of Philological Sciences, Vanadzor State University

Key Words: *essay, scale, analytic rubric, assessment, objectivity, effectiveness, feedback, criterion, stimulating means.*

“Talent is helpful in writing, but guts are absolutely necessary.”

Jessamyn West

I fully espouse this adage. Guts - the will and courage to do something - is much more important and helpful in writing than talent is; it may be difficult or challenging though.

Some, if not all, university-level students view the act of writing as mysterious and adhere to the belief that writing is a natural gift that some have, while others do not. This holds true for my students, too. I've been teaching “Writing Skills” to undergraduate students of the English Department at Vanadzor State University for 8 years already. During all these years, not once have I been told by my students, more specifically my first-year students, that the ability to convey ideas, feelings and emotions through writing is beyond their capacity and that the capacity to write is innate. In my estimation, this is an obviously false belief and a more realistic attitude towards writing must be cultivated on the idea that writing is a skill that anyone can acquire through practice. And this attitude needs to be instilled in students from at least high school years.

While it is supposed and expected that students are admitted to universities with sufficient writing competences, the truth is that in many cases this assumption is false. Early in the academic year, I always ask my first-year students to write an essay about their first impressions of student life at university. To be frank, it is really hard work to wade through the essay of a student who either has not been taught anything about essay writing in high school or has a limited or superficial knowledge of basic writing strategies and techniques. I think this gap primarily stems from the disproportionate approach to four basic language skills in school curricula. Judging by my students' essay results, I can assume that in schools more attention is paid to spelling, grammar, and syntax. As regards rhetorical focus – organization, style, coherence, or unity - either little or no attention is paid to. The result is the existing huge discrepancy and inconsistency between the rhetorical focus and the language focus, which are equally important in paragraph and essay writing processes. This is a really big problem I am confronted with at the beginning of each academic year: first-year students have very poor writing skills and in writing paragraphs or essays they primarily focus on content, spelling and grammatical accuracy. By contrast, they know very little about the three general stages of the writing process (prewriting, writing, rewriting), nor do they know much about the main perspectives from which a writing process is to be analyzed (topic, audience, purpose, tone, style, form). Therefore, it is very difficult, indeed, to explain to

them what is considered “good writing” and to teach them how to write effective paragraphs and essays in only one semester. In our University “Writing Skills” is a one-semester course that focuses on developing academic writing skills in English, with a special emphasis on paragraph and essay writing. And the short duration of the course is the main reason why it is difficult to evaluate students’ writing tasks in a way so that there is a close alignment between the three equally important elements of the learning process: learning outcomes, learning activities, and learning assessment.

At its most basic level, assessment at university aims at evaluating student performance and their achievement of intended learning outcomes; at its peripheral level, assessment is needed for continuous improvement of student learning. To make assessment much more efficient and useful it is essential to ascribe another no less important role to the assessment activity, that of facilitating and fostering the teaching process. Since both teaching and assessing are sequential stages of learning and are inextricably interwoven, they shouldn’t be applied separately - assessment should contribute to evaluating student performance, meeting identified learning needs, and enhancing teaching process simultaneously. However, it took me at least a 6-year teaching practice to realize that the scoring rubrics I had been using didn’t fully accomplish this threefold mission and that those scoring tools needed a radical overhaul in terms of the right choice of assessment categories in the first place and the maintenance of academic objectivity in the second place. I needed to design “hybrid” rubrics which would allow me to grade my students’ works more objectively, would provide feedback to my students on broader dimensions, and would be based not only on one assessment method but on a combination of different assessment categories: formative and summative; holistic and analytic; self and peer; criterion-referenced and norm-referenced. My own observations about rubric advantages and disadvantages also helped me realize that there was a need for a fundamental re-thinking of approaches to assessment activity.

When I started teaching “Writing Skills”, my choice of scoring rubrics (holistic and analytic) mainly depended on the purpose of the writing assignment (summative and formative), the type of the feedback provided (numerical and narrative), and the time required for the evaluation. I mainly used holistic rubrics for formative assessments and analytic rubrics for summative assessments. I thought that my choice was right because of the main distinction existing between formative and summative assessments, the former being referred to as “assessment for learning” and the latter being referred to as “assessment of learning” respectively. Being diagnostic in nature, formative assessment is carried out throughout the course; therefore, it does not necessarily get used for grading purposes. Besides, as compared with summative assignments, formative assignments prevail in number and take a lot of time to grade. Holistic rubrics undoubtedly save time and, most probably, that was the main reason why I gave my preference to holistic rubrics for formative assessments. It was not easy to grade approximately 40-45 essays each week; hence, I had to use holistic rubrics when my time for grading was quite limited. This approach was not right, of course, because holistic rubrics give an overall judgment of performance; as a result, I couldn’t assess my students’ performance on each criterion, nor could I provide specific feedback to my students about their strengths and

weaknesses in detail. Another no less essential reason for switching to analytic rubrics for formative assessments was my students' not taking formative assignments very seriously. Most of my students worked to the best of their ability to perform well on summative tests and, consequently, very often they met their performance goals to the detriment of their learning goals. In order to motivate my students to take formative assessments more seriously, I changed my approach to formative assessment and feedback and replaced holistic rubrics by analytic ones.

Two Different Approaches to Formative Assessment

Former Approach	Current Approach	
<p>Holistic Rubric</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is based on the scale of 0-5; • is based on the teacher's general impression of the overall quality of the essay; • is a quick means of evaluating a large number of essays; • does not provide detailed feedback for the student 	<p>Analytic Rubric 1:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is based on the scale of 0-100; • is designed for both paragraph and essay assessment; • focuses on one specific criterion at a time; • is divided into sub-rubrics and sub-sub-rubrics; • includes descriptors: pragmatic and rhetorical in nature; • identifies levels of performance; • has scores or values rating each criterion; • provides students with constructive, narrative feedback; • has a repeated use; • is suited for self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher (individual and group) assessment; • motivates students to improve their writing skills
	<p>Analytic Rubric 2:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is based on the scale of 0-100; • is designed for essay assessment; • focuses on all criteria simultaneously; • is not divided into sub-rubrics and sub-sub-rubrics; • does not necessarily include descriptors; • identifies levels of performance; • has scores or values rating each criterion; • provides students with critical feedback; • has a limited use; • is better suited for teacher (individual and group) assessment

Table 1: Former and current approaches to formative assessment.

As is seen from the table, the two types of analytic rubrics are both designed for formative assessments. Analytic rubrics take more time to score as compared with holistic ones, but they definitely provide more detailed feedback. At first sight, there seems to be no clear-cut demarcation between analytic rubric 1 and analytic rubric 2: both are criterion-referenced scoring guides designed to measure students' performance

against a fixed set of predetermined criteria. In actual fact, there are a number of differences between them.

Analytic Rubric 1:

While creating analytic rubrics of this kind I have analyzed each criterion and sometimes sub-criterion separately so that it would be possible to provide my students with understandable, constructive and supportive feedback, which, in turn, would ensure grading consistency and objectivity. Six criteria (formatting; mechanics; content; organization, grammar; style and sentence structure) have been chosen as the key dimensions to be measured. For each of the criteria, a special rubric has been designed, except for organization for which sub-rubrics and sub-sub-rubrics have been developed.

As a result, five analytic rubrics are being applied for the following criteria:

- one for formatting (5 points);
- one for mechanics (5 points);
- one for content (20 points);
- one for grammar (10 points);
- one for style and sentence structure (20 points).

For organization (40)

3 sub-rubrics are being applied for the following sub-criteria:

- one for introduction (5);
- one for body (30);
- one for conclusion (5);

2 sub-sub-rubrics are being applied for the following sub-sub-criteria:

- one for unity (5);
- one for coherence (5).

This approach to the assessment process has definitely enhanced the objectivity level of my evaluation and feedback. As it would be nearly impossible to include all the analytic rubrics, sub-rubrics and sub-sub-rubrics for evaluating essays in one article, here are presented only three rubrics for the first three criteria (formatting, mechanics, and content) and one sub-rubric for introduction.

Analytic Rubric 1a: Formatting (5 points)

Student: _____ **Date:** _____

Criterion	Descriptors	Level of Performance	Score	Description
Formatting	Title centered Indenting/Skipping Margins on both sides	Excellent Standard (Exceeds expectations)	5	Professional format
		Good Standard (Meets Expectations)	4	Structured format
		Acceptable Standard (Needs improvement)	3	Acceptable format
		Poor Standard (Needs much improvement)	2	Rambling format
		Failing (Inadequate)	1	No or poor format
Comments: (____ out of 5 points)				

Table 2: Analytic Rubric designed to assess formatting.

Analytic Rubric 1b: Mechanics (5 points)

Student: _____ Date: _____

Criterion	Descriptors	Level of Performance	Score	Description
Mechanics	Spelling Punctuation Capitalization Paragraphing Typing	Excellent Standard (Exceeds expectations)	5	No errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing
		Good Standard (Meets Expectations)	4	Errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing are few, but meaning understood
		Acceptable Standard (Needs improvement)	3	Some errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing, poor typing, meaning confused
		Poor Standard (Needs much improvement)	2	More frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing, poor typing, meaning not understood
		Failing (Inadequate)	1	Too many errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization and paragraphing that interfere with understanding of topic, poor typing
Comments: (_____ out of 5 points)				

Table 3: Analytic Rubric designed to assess mechanics.

Analytic Rubric 1c: Content (20 points)

The analytic rubric designed to assess content has been analyzed from two different perspectives: pragmatic and rhetorical. The former is based on P. Grice's cooperative principle and conversational maxims, and the latter is based on the rhetorical appeals.

In "Logic and Conversation" Grice argues that in order to communicate people need to cooperate while exchanging verbal information and proposes the "Cooperative Principle": "Make your conversational contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted direction or purpose of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1975:45). The Gricean cooperative principle is subdivided into 4 context-related maxims:

➤ Maxims of Quantity:

1. Make your contribution as informative as required for the current purposes of

the exchange.

2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

➤ Maxims of Quality:

1. Try to make your contribution one that is true.

2. Do not say what you believe to be false.

3. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

➤ Maxim of Relation:

Be relevant.

➤ Maxims of Manner:

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.

2. Avoid ambiguity.

3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

4. Be orderly.

As is well known, the three basic rhetorical appeals that are used to persuade the audience are logos (appeals based on logic and reason); ethos (appeals based on credibility); and pathos (appeals based on emotion). All these appeals are interconnected and work together to best address the audience. That is why I have chosen these appeals and conversational maxims as appropriate descriptors for evaluating the content of an essay.

Student: _____

Date: _____

Criterion	Descriptors	Level of Performance	Score	Description
Content	Pragmatic devices: Maxim of quantity Maxim of quality Maxim of relation Maxim of manner Rhetorical appeals: Logos Ethos Pathos	Excellent Standard (Exceeds expectations)	20-18	The essay successfully fulfills the requirements of the assignment. There is one clear, well-focused topic. Main ideas are clear and are well supported by detailed and accurate information. Strategic and appropriate use of rhetorical appeals (pathos, logos, ethos) and developmental strategies (definition, cause/effect, description, narration, etc). Abundance of evidence of critical, careful thought and insight.

		<p>Good Standard (Meets Expectations)</p>	17-14	<p>The essay effectively fulfills the requirements of the assignment. There is one clear, well-focused topic. Main ideas are clear but are not well supported by detailed information. Careful use of rhetorical appeals (pathos, logos, ethos) and developmental strategies (definition, cause/effect, description, narration, etc). Good evidence of critical, careful thought and insight.</p>
		<p>Acceptable Standard (Needs improvement)</p>	13-10	<p>The essay adequately fulfills the requirements of the assignment. There is one clear topic. Main ideas are clear but are not sufficiently supported by relevant information. Some use of rhetorical appeals (pathos, logos, ethos) and developmental strategies (definition, cause/effect, description, narration, etc). Sufficient evidence of critical, careful thought and insight.</p>
		<p>Poor Standard (Needs much improvement)</p>	9-6	<p>The essay partially fulfills the requirements of the assignment. There is one topic. Main ideas are somewhat clear. Limited use of rhetorical appeals (pathos, logos, ethos) and developmental strategies (definition, cause/effect, description, narration, etc). Limited evidence of critical, careful thought and insight.</p>

		Failing (Inadequate)	5-0	The essay does not fulfill the requirements of the assignment. The topic and main ideas are not clear. Little or no use of rhetorical appeals (pathos, logos, ethos) and developmental strategies (definition, cause/effect, description, narration, etc). Little or no evidence of critical, careful thought and insight.
Comments: (_____ out of 20 points)				

Table 4: Analytic Rubric designed to assess content.

Analytic Sub-Rubric 1: Introduction (sub-criterion of organization) - 5 points

Student: _____ **Date:** _____

Sub-Criterion	Descriptors	Level of Performance	Score	Description
Introduction	Hook Transitional signal Thesis Statement	Excellent Standard (Exceeds expectations)	5	Introduction demonstrates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organization (hook +transition + thesis); the hook is both interest- and thought- provoking and perfectly captures the reader's attention); • progression from general to specific is smooth (from hook to thesis); • development (the thesis is arguable, supportable, focused and demonstrates parallelism); • topical unity (the topic in the hook and the thesis are the same);

		<p>Good Standard (Meets Expectations)</p>	4	<p>Introduction demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organization (hook +transition + thesis); the hook is strong and captures the reader’s attention); • progression from general to specific is logical; • development (the thesis is clear and demonstrates parallelism); • topical unity (the topic in the hook and the thesis are the same);
		<p>Acceptable Standard (Needs improvement)</p>	3	<p>Introduction demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organization (hook +transition + thesis); the hook adequately captures the reader’s attention); • progression from general to specific is logical; • development (the thesis is adequate and demonstrates parallelism); • topical unity (the topic in the hook and the thesis are the same);
		<p>Poor Standard (Needs much improvement)</p>	2	<p>Introduction demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organization (hook +transition + thesis); the hook is weak and does not capture the reader’s attention); • progression from general to specific is not smooth; • development (thesis is buried, confused, unclear and lacks parallelism);

		Failing (Inadequate)	1	Introduction builds little context; it lacks a hook and thesis.
Comments: (____ out of 5 points)				

Table 5: Analytic Sub-Rubric designed to assess introduction.

What I find important to note is that before assigning an essay to my students, I always discuss rubrics with them thoroughly. I also show them some samples of checked essays so that they will understand essay requirements and each rubric peculiarities better. I am an advocate of peer-assessment, and from time to time I have my students evaluate their peers' essays using rubrics as effective assessment tools. I also have my students write their feedback in the "Comments Section". It is required that they provide their feedback with enough constructive criticism, in the meantime, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the work.

Analytic Rubric 2: (100 points)

As compared with analytic rubric 1, which covers only one criterion at a time, analytic rubric 2 is designed to measure student performance in writing against the most important criteria simultaneously and is, therefore, used once or twice during the course. Thus, analytic rubric 2 is somewhat the logical continuation of analytic rubrics of type 1 which are created for each of the criteria separately. This approach to rubric use has helped me a lot to provide my students with detailed narrative feedback first for each criterion separately and then for them all simultaneously. Below is presented analytic rubric 2 I've been using for more than five years.

Student: _____

Date: _____

Criteria	Descriptors	Level of Performance	Score	Comments
1. Formatting (5)	Title centered Indenting/Skipping Margins on both sides	Excellent Standard (Exceeds expectations)	5	Self assessment, peer and teacher feedback (individual and group)
		Good Standard (Meets Expectations)	4	
		Acceptable Standard (Needs improvement)	3	
		Poor Standard (Needs much improvement)	2	
		Failing (Inadequate)	1	
2. Mechanics (5)	Spelling Punctuation Capitalization Paragraphing Typing	Excellent Standard (Exceeds expectations)	5	
		Good Standard (Meets Expectations)	4	
		Acceptable Standard (Needs improvement)	3	
		Poor Standard (Needs much improvement)	2	
		Failing (Inadequate)	1	

3. Content (20)	Pragmatic devices: Maxim of quantity Maxim of quality Maxim of relation Maxim of manner Rhetorical appeals: Logos Ethos Pathos	Excellent Standard (Exceeds expectations) Good Standard (Meets Expectations) Acceptable Standard (Needs improvement) Poor Standard (Needs much improvement) Failing (Inadequate)	20-18 17-14 13-10 9-6 5-0	
4. Organization (40)	Introduction Hook Transitional signal Thesis statement Body Topic sentence Supporting sentences Unity Coherence Transitional signals Conclusion Conclusion signal Summary of the main points	Excellent Standard (Exceeds expectations) Good Standard (Meets Expectations) Acceptable Standard (Needs improvement) Poor Standard (Needs much improvement) Failing (Inadequate)	40-35 35-30 30-20 20-10 10-0	
5. Grammar (10)	Degree of grammatical accuracy Level of grammatical structures	Excellent Standard (Exceeds expectations) Good Standard (Meets Expectations) Acceptable Standard (Needs improvement) Poor Standard (Needs much improvement) Failing (Inadequate)	10-8 8-6 6-4 4-2 2-0	
6. Style and Sentence Structure (20)	Formal written English Restrictions upon vocabulary (colloquial, vulgar, slang) Parallel structures Sentence structure problems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence fragments • Choppy sentences • Run-on sentences • Comma splices • Stringy sentences • Redundancy • Dangling participles 	Excellent Standard (Exceeds expectations) Good Standard (Meets Expectations) Acceptable Standard (Needs improvement) Poor Standard (Needs much improvement) Failing (Inadequate)	20-18 17-14 13-10 9-6 5-0	

Table 6: Analytic Rubric 2 designed to assess an essay against 6 criteria simultaneously.

As for summative assessment, it is regarded as “assessment of learning” and not as “assessment for learning” which is primarily characteristic of formative assessment. Unlike formative assessment, summative assessment is not a learning activity by itself; it is mainly carried out at the end of the course; it rates students’ essays holistically without focusing on each criterion separately. For these reasons, they do not provide specific feedback to the students. In this regard, holistic rubrics are better suited for summative assessment inasmuch as they provide an overall judgment about the quality of the work.

To sum up, analytic scoring rubrics are effective and efficient assessment tools, which definitely help to increase the level of objectivity of both teacher and peer assessment. The wisely chosen criteria facilitate the grading process making it more transparent and fair for students. At the same time, they help students understand rubric criteria better and determine the extent to which they have achieved the expected learning goals.

REFERENCES

1. Վարդումյան Ս., Հարությունյան Լ., Ջաղինյան Ն., և այլք, Ժամանակակից մանկավարժական մոտեցումներ. տեսություններ, մեթոդներ, գնահատում, ձեռնարկ մանկավարժների և ուսանողների համար, Երևան, «Նոյան Տապան» հրատ., 2003, 404 էջ:
2. Alice Oshima & Ann Hogue, Writing Academic English. Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 2006, 337p.
3. Anderson, R.S., Why Talk about Different Ways to Grade? The shift from traditional assessment to alternative assessment. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 74, 5-16.
4. Andrew Churches, A Guide to Formative and Summative Assessment and Rubric Development. 21st Century Fluency Project.
5. Light, R.J., Making the most of college: Students speak their minds. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.
6. Marine Kharatyan & Lusine Vardanyan, Develop Your Writing Skills. A student handbook for effective writing. Yerevan “ART”, 206, 152p.
7. Ross Miller & Andrea Leskes, Levels of Assessment (From the student to the institution), A Greater Expectations Publication, Association of American Colleges and Universities.
8. Susan M. Brookhart, How to Create and Use rubrics for Formative Assessment and Grading. Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 2013.

**ՎԵՐԼՈՒԾԱԿԱՆ ԳՆԱՀԱՏՄԱՆ ՄԱՆԴՂԱԿՆԵՐԸ (ՌՈՒԲՐԻԿՆԵՐԸ)՝
ՇԱՐԱԴՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ՍՏՈՒԳՄԱՆ ԱՐԴՅՈՒՆԱՎԵՏ ՄԻՋՈՑ**

Վարդանյան Լուսիկ

**բ. գ. թ., Վանաձորի պետական համալսարան
ԱՍՓՈՓՈՒՄ**

Հանգուցային բառեր. շարադրություն, սանդղակ, վերլուծական ռուբրիկ, գնահատում, արդարացիություն, անկողմնակալություն, հետադարձ կապ, չափանիշ, խթանող միջոցներ

Հոդվածում ներկայացված են վերլուծական գնահատման ռուբրիկները՝ որպես ուսումնասիրությունն ու մտածողությունը խթանող միջոցներ: Ռուբրիկներն ապահովում են ոչ միայն շարադրությունների գնահատման արդարացիությունն ու անկողմնակալությունը, այլ նաև ապահովում են արդյունավետ, բազմակողմանի և անմիջական հետադարձ կապ ուսանողների հետ: Հոդվածում առանձնացված են վերլուծական գնահատման ռուբրիկների երկու տեսակ, որոնք ունեն երկու ընդհանուր հատկանիշ: Երկուսն էլ գնահատման և ուսուցման արդյունավետ գործիքներ են, որոնք իրականացնում են գնահատումն ըստ վեց չափանիշների և ըստ յուրաքանչյուր չափանիշի համար պահանջվող որակի աստիճանների: Նրանց միջև եղած հիմնական տարբերությունը ռուբրիկներում ներառված չափանիշների քանակի մեջ է. առաջին տեսակը շարադրության գնահատումն իրականացնում է ըստ մեկ չափանիշի, այսինքն՝ անդրադառնում է չափանիշներին առանձին-առանձին, մինչդեռ երկրորդն անդրադառնում է վեց չափանիշներին միաժամանակ:

**ДИФФЕРЕНЦИРОВАННАЯ ШКАЛА ОЦЕНИВАНИЯ (РУБРИКИ) КАК
ЭФФЕКТИВНЫЙ МЕТОД ПРОВЕРКИ СОЧИНЕНИЙ**

Варданян Лусик

**к. ф. н., Ванадзорский государственный университет
РЕЗЮМЕ**

Ключевые слова: сочинение, шкала, аналитическая рубрика, оценивание, объективность, эффективность, обратная связь, критерий, стимулирующие средства.

В статье рассматриваются аналитические рубрики оценивания в качестве стимулирующего средства в процессе обучения. Рубрики обеспечивают не только справедливость и объективность оценивания сочинений, но и их эффективность, разносторонность и непосредственную обратную связь со студентом. В статье выделены два типа оценивания с помощью рубрик, которые имеют два общих признака. Они оба весьма эффективны при оценивании и обучении, реализуются с учетом шести критериев, и к каждому из них соответствует степень качества. Существующее между типами рубрик основное различие заключается, прежде всего, в числе принятых критериев: первый тип оценивает сочинение по каждому критерию, то есть отмечает каждый критерий в отдельности, а второй тип рассматривает все шесть критериев в целом.