

Developing Grading Criteria

Use grading criteria to help:

- clarify the assignments for students
- clarify the assignments for yourself
- you decide which writing features to emphasize in class
- students evaluate their own work
- students focus on particular features of their writing
- students gain experience in evaluating someone else's writing
- students gain practice in using the criteria on someone else's paper
- students develop a framework to use for other writing assignments

After reading through the written assignment:

1. Identify the goals.

- What do you expect students to learn by completing this assignment?
- What kinds of intellectual skills do you expect them to practice or acquire by completing this assignment?
- Are your goals for students, in terms of their learning, explicit?

SAMPLE:

Explicit Statement of Learning Goals:

This assignment has been *designed to help you gain experience with* the most typical writing required of graduates of this field, *proposal writing*.

My goals for you include:

- learn *the components* of a proposal
- learn to *write an effective problem statement*, one that limits the size of your proposal and suggests the criteria by which your proposal should be evaluated
- *identify and argue* convincingly for a particular solution
- design an *effective and realistic timeline* for the stages of the proposal
- be able to *anticipate the reader's concerns* and objections, and take those into account when writing your proposal
- be able to *read proposals written by others* and give specific *feedback* about their effectiveness
- *work effectively in teams* to gather information

Notice that some of these learning goals are specific to the proposal assignment, and others are things that the student is expected to learn in the process of completing the assignment.

2. What are the essential elements?

- Rather than focusing on what is desirable, identify what must be included.
- Is there a range of content (e.g. citations or examples) that you would find acceptable? If so, can you specify the range?
- Is there a rule of thumb that you'd like for them to apply?
- What features you are most concerned about?

Example Essential Elements

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|---|---|
| <p>General Items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organization• Logic• Use of transitions• Clear title• Appropriate punctuation• Supporting evidence, including examples• Supporting evidence, including citations | <p>Discipline-Specific Items:</p> <p>Features relevant to a chemistry lab write-up:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• summary of experiment being conducted• material and equipment used• method section• results• discussion |
| <p>Items Particular to an Assignment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explanation of cause/effect relationship• Historical analysis• Recognition of the needs of a particular audience (for example, business audience)• Incorporating a particular viewpoint or perspective into the argument• Effectively consider the constraints imposed by building on this particular site | <p>Features Relevant to a marketing proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• statement of problem• identification of target population or audience• thumbnail sketches and rough sketches• statement of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the sketches• overall assessment |

3. Where have students experienced problems with the assignment in the past?

If you've used this assignment in the past, where did students have problems with the assignment? Clarify to students how these problems may manifest themselves.

For example, remind students that they need to:

- start early
- include a title
- cite several sources from the past several years
- that certain parts are more challenging than others (and that is expected)

4. Order the list of key features from most to least important.

Once you have identified a list of key features, order them from most to least important.

Determine their ranking according to their:

- effects on meaning
- relationship to disciplinary preferences
- personal preferences

5. Apply the list as grading criteria for a sample set of students' work.

Note difficulties or problems applying these criteria. In particular, note if the grade you believe that the student has earned is not reflected in the score based on your criteria.

In some cases what you consider the overall "best" paper would not receive the highest score.

If this happens, try to identify additional criteria that you are using in your comprehensive evaluation that are not included in your criteria. Your overall assessment should be reflected in the individual rankings you give to specific features.

6. Revise the list to account for problems or difficulties.

You may need to revise the list several times so that it works the way that you want it to. A paper that receives a high score should also be one that you find well written.

7. Assign weights or values to the items.

8. Find exemplary models for the key features.

Identify and provide models that consistent with your students' skill levels. For example:

- find sections (or a paper) that can serve as models for key features
- include models of varying levels

9. Share your criteria with students.

Develop a criteria sheet so that students see what you value most and what will most positively effect their grade. Students can use criteria sheets shape their writing or help them understand their final score and assess their progress in mastering the course material.

Some instructors provide students with the criteria when they hand out an assignment, others when they assign the grade. Some instructors include an additional "other" category for flexibility.