

## Starting Out with Rubrics

This document discusses the use of rubrics in a kindergarten/first grade classroom. It discusses the definition of a rubric, types of rubrics, the purpose of a rubric, how to develop a rubric, and various rating scales and descriptor icons. The California Kindergarten Association developed this paper in 2004.

"I really like Alexander's story!"

"He really uses a lot of color in his picture, and it looks so real!"

"Yeah, but I could never draw like that! I wonder how he does it?"

"Look at this picture. It is really good but I wish Mylynn had put more color in her picture."

Pieces of conversation were overheard by Mrs. Helen Faul, a first grade teacher (Ocean View School District), as students looked at the stories hanging on the closet doors as preparations were being made for "Back to School Night," in late August. Mrs. Faul realized at that point that the students were sharing expectations. They were aware of differing levels of achievement and were making observations, reflecting and analyzing. All of these skills are necessary components in analyzing the **quality of work**. Mrs. Faul seized this opportunity to guide the children towards reaching a goal. As they gathered on the carpet for a class meeting, Mrs. Faul repeated some of the comments that she had heard and concentrated on the statement: "Yeah, but I could never draw like Alexander." Mrs. Faul asked, "What makes you think that your work can't look like Alexander's? What are the qualities in Alexander's picture and story that makes you want to make your work look like his?" The children began the reflective process of examining Alexander's work and determining the **qualities** that made it special. Grant Wiggins (1993) suggests that a teacher ask, "What would an expert performance look like?" By starting with exemplary work, students can then define the other levels. Alexander's picture became the "**anchor**," the standard by which the other student's papers could be judged.

One might ask why would drawing be an important skill to focus on. "Scribbles and drawing are a child's first venture into writing, and they serve as an important foundation for later writing." (Lucy Calkins, 1986) The details that a child places in his/her picture will lead to details in a child's writing.

The class began at that point to develop as a "community of learners" and achieve a sense of control over their work. They had a goal: to create neat, colorful work that depicted a story. Mrs. Faul asked the class to tell what they knew about Alexander by looking at his picture and writing. The class related that Alexander's picture of a boy with a dog and sentence "I like my dog." told them that Alexander liked dogs. Then Mrs. Faul asked, "What else did the picture/story reveal to you?" The children replied, "His picture was colorful and had a dog and a boy as well as a house in the picture. He told about many things in his story."

Children had expressed an interest in drawing and writing like Alexander. Now the class was ready to put this goal into a rubric that would guide their development. The levels of performance were written on large pieces of construction paper. Mrs. Faul helped the students develop a scale that reflected the qualities they admired in Alexander's work.

Tony said, "Alexander not only drew his picture but he used many colors and colored a whole picture with details that covered the page."

Miranda said, "I like the letters and words because they are written on the line."

"You know where a word begins and ends," was Franchesca's comment.

In that way the children determined the "4" level of achievement.

The rest of the time was spent looking at other pieces of work and determining the **qualities** present at the other levels.

The children had taken control of their own learning and established their expectations. They had a goal: to produce a picture and story similar to Alexander's and met their level of expectation.

The class had prepared a rubric to be posted in the classroom.

4	3	2	1
The picture is drawn, colored completely, and tells a story.	The picture is drawn, colored completely, and tells a story.	The picture is drawn but not completely colored and does not tell a story.	The picture is incomplete and does not tell a story.
The picture has background.	The picture has little background.	The picture has no background.	The picture has no background.
A sentence is written.	A sentence is written.	Some words label the picture.	Some letters are written.
The sentence begins with an uppercase letter.	The sentence does not begin with an uppercase letter.	Most of the words have uppercase letters.	A few letters are written.
The sentence ends with a . , !, or ?.	The sentence does not end with a . , !, or ?.	No ending punctuation is used.	No ending punctuation is used.
The words are a finger space apart and the letters are written on the lines.	The words are a finger space apart and the letters are written on the lines.	No spacing is used and the letters are not written on the lines.	No spacing is used and the letters are not written on the lines.

The rubric provides a framework for examining finished work. (Bonnie Campbell Hill, Cynthia Ruptic, and Lisa Norwick , 1998)

**Rubrics** are one form of assessing a student's progress by gathering evidence to document **ongoing learning, growth, and quality of work.** A rubric is simply one piece of a well-rounded assessment program. (Ruptic, Hill, and Norwick, 1998) Rubrics are most effective when they are child developed (as the introductory anecdote relates) and posted with grade level standards, criteria charts, and the task that the child is being asked to do. The information provides a basis for an educator to make informed decisions regarding a child's needs and

progress and enables the educator to design meaningful curriculum. It also allows the child to self-assess.

Edward Chittenden (1991) suggests four purposes for assessment:

- Keeping track of a student's progress
- Checking up on a student's progress
- Finding out where a student is and summing up the progress.

Students should be an integral part of the assessment and help educators define expectations and goals. Using rubrics can provide an effective way to meet Chittenden's goals. Rubrics can provide an effective way for students to evaluate their own learning and thus, become part of the assessment process.

The assessment process may include:

- Student portfolios
- Parent and student surveys
- Running records, journals
- Skill tests
- Teacher developed tests
- Teacher observations and anecdotal records
- Videos and tape recordings
- Standardized tests

The documentation process may include:

- Checklists
- Profile Cards
- Report Cards

Multiple assessment formats based on District and State standards, continuums, and other such guiding documents allow students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding, and skill development. A rubric-based evaluation scheme notes improvement based on where a student started and how he/she progresses. Rubrics provide the teacher, parents, and the student with the information needed for a student to improve. Rubrics must be clearly defined so they are relevant to a specific learning goal and can be developed in any content area.

Figure 1 is an example of a math rubric and appears on page 4. This math rubric was developed by teachers in the Fresno area and used to assess different strands in the California Math Content Standards. For example, the strand could be number sense specifically standard 1.2 count, recognize, represent, name and order numbers (to 30) using objects or it could be measurement and geometry specifically standard 1.1 compare the length, weight and capacity of objects. The teacher reviewed the expectations in conceptual knowledge, problem solving knowledge and communication for each score level. Students were aware of the expectations and their progress was measured according to the rubric.

Figure 1

## Kindergarten Math Rubric

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Standards/Concepts Addressed \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Score Level</b>  How many points did you earn?	<b>Conceptual Knowledge</b>  Do you know it?	<b>Problem Solving Knowledge</b>  What is your plan?	<b>Communication</b>  Did you explain it?
<b>4</b>	I got the right answer. OR I found more than one correct answer.  I used math words correctly.	I used a way (strategy) that made sense to solve the problem. I used pictures and words to solve the problem. OR I used number sentences to show how I solved the problem.	I told what I did to solve the problem and why I did it.
<b>3</b>	I got the right answer.  I worked it out with no mistakes, or maybe I made small mistakes.  I used math words correctly.	I showed all/most of how I solved the problem by using objects/drawing pictures.  I was unable to show a number sentence.	I told what I did to solve the problem.
<b>2</b>	I understood a little, but I made a lot or big mistakes.  I did not use math words.	I showed some of how I solved the problem by using objects/drawing pictures.	I told some of what I did to solve the problem.
<b>1</b>	I tried to do the problem but I didn't understand it.  I did not use math words.	I used objects/drew pictures that didn't help me to solve the problem.	I told an answer that is not clear.
<b>0</b>	I didn't do the problem.  I didn't use math words.	I didn't show how I solved the problem.	I didn't tell anything about what I did to solve the problem.

It is important to note that every classroom activity (standard) does not require a rubric. That is why teachers use multiple types of assessments.

## What is a rubric?

A rubric can be compared to a road map or ruler. It gives direction and the increments needed to make improvement. **Letting students know the goals ahead of time (backwards design) is a radical change from traditional assessment.** In the past students were given a grade on a paper that was marked with red ink and returned with possible comments for improvement. A rubric

- Describes the features and achievement levels for a given task
- Focuses on a particular standard, criteria, task, or behavior
- Describes the levels of performance and learning
- Provides a framework for examining a finished product, behavior, or task
- Provides guidelines for peer evaluation, self-evaluation and goal setting
- Involves students in identifying the characteristics of **quality work**.

## What is the difference between a checklist and a rubric?

### Checklist

- identifies the components to complete a task
- do not address the quality of each of the components
- focus on completing or mastering the components





### Rubric

- address the depth and breadth of students' work
- help individual students analyze the **quality** of their work
- focus on **quality** of the work and set specific goals for improvement

## Types of Rubrics

Rubrics can be general or task specific. **Holistic rubrics** have a single score for a finished product, task or behavior. The piece of work, task or behavior is evaluated as a whole and one score is assigned. In a holistic score, the score is based on an overall impression of the student's work or desired behavior. The following example of a holistic rubric was developed by Armando Wm. Argandona at Ford Blvd. Elementary in Los Angeles Unified School District to enable his kindergarteners and the teachers to evaluate a child's ability to work independently. His class discussed the criteria to determine what makes an independent worker.

Mr. Argandona used ice cream icons to make the rubric more student friendly. He created a large chart that was posted in his classroom with the rubric and criteria. Daily, for approximately one month prior to beginning universal access/working independently, Mr. Argandona reviewed the rubric and the criteria with the children. Each day, upon completion of universal access/working independently, Mr. Argandona had the class debrief by having the students evaluate and reflect on their effort towards becoming independent workers. For example: He would ask, "Did you work quietly? Did you share?" Etc.

Working Independently Rubric		
Double 	4	I am working independently.
Single 	3	I am almost working independently.
Cone 	2	I am not working independently yet.
Napkin 	1	I am not trying.

Working Independently Criteria
<p>I work quietly.</p> <p>I share materials/equipment.</p> <p>I follow our classroom rules.</p> <p>I stay focused on my independent work activity/center.</p> <p>I solve problems myself or by asking my classmates for help.</p> <p>I remember not to interrupt the teacher while he is working with other students.</p>

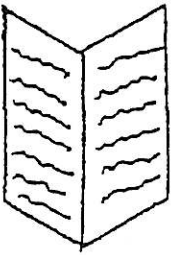




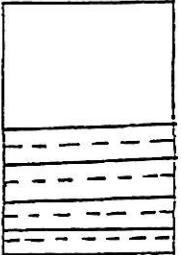
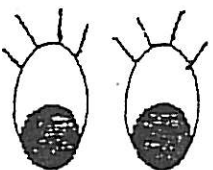
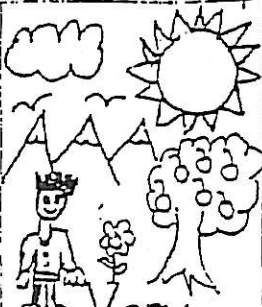
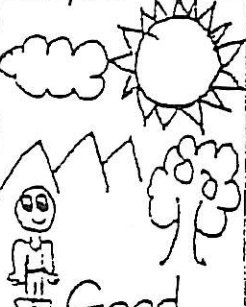
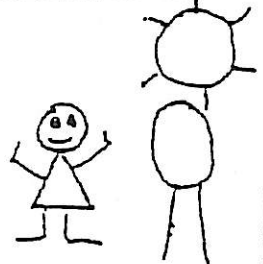

**Analytical rubrics** rate specific aspects (organization, content, mechanics, and creativity (presentation) according to 3, 4, 5, 6, or 8 levels of descriptors. “Having children draw in response to reading is one sure way to help them visualize or imagine and comprehend. Incorporating drawing (creativity/presentation) can be one way to guide the children to think about their reading (writing).” *Classrooms That Work* – Allington and Cunningham 1994

The analytical rubric of scoring is used when students need specific feedback about their strengths and weaknesses. It can include content, organization, mechanics and grammar, presentation/creativity. Linda Kobrock (Elk Grove School district) developed an analytical rubric to help her class analyze their writing, it can be scored for specific criteria. For example a story could receive a “4” for content, a “3” for organization, a “2” for mechanics, and a “3” for presentation. Therefore, the student would know which aspects of the story needed improvement. **Note Linda Kobrock’s Writing Rubric on page 7.**



Figure 2

# Writing Rubric

		★ 4 ★ ★	3	2	1
Content		Wow! Great story Very interesting Imaginative 	Mostly interesting. Most of the story has descriptive words. 	Somewhat interesting. I used some descriptive words. 	I don't get it... 
Organization		Very Neat •All the letters are nice and neat •Great spacing between words	Mostly Neat •Most of the letters are neat •Most of the paper has spacing	Somewhat Neat •Some letters are messy •Some spacing	Sloppy •Letters are messy •No spacing
		The book	The cat	I am big	I like the dog
Mechanics	? ! A, B, C, D, E, F, G	Great! •All capitals and punctuations are correct •Sight words are spelled correctly	Most of the paper has capitals and punctuations •Most sight words are spelled correctly	Some capitals and punctuations •some sight words are spelled correctly.	No Capitals and no punctuations. •Sight words are misspelled
		I like you!	He iz nice.	i like sam he	he iz beg
		You are pretty.	do you like him	is mi friend	-----
Presentation		 Very detailed	 Good details	 Needs more details	 Very little details

## What is the purpose of a rubric?

Rubrics clarify expectations of the criteria that are to be evaluated. In *Elementary Makes the Grade (2000)* California Department of Education Recommendation 4 is; “communicate performance expectations and results.” *Students and parents should know what is expected for proficient work and how students can improve their work to make it proficient. Students also need opportunities for self-assessment, such as using rubrics. These opportunities cause students to be more reflective about their own work.*

Developed by the teacher or created jointly with the students, rubrics are very beneficial when they are used to:

- Support student learning
- Help clarify the purpose of a task or activity
- Clarify goals or standards
- Provide a focus for instruction
- Provide guidelines for self-evaluation and goal setting
- Involve students in identifying exemplary work or actions.

**Task + Standard = Rubric**

## Student Friendly Language

We are aware that many teachers are required to use either National, State, or District rubrics to assess. Many of these rubrics are not “translated” so that students can understand what is required. They are meant for the practitioner. However, in a backwards design model, students need to have access to the standard and the rubric/criteria in order to understand the expectations. CKA strongly suggests that you “translate” the rubric language into “kid talk” so the children will understand the expectations. Following are some examples of parts of a rubric or standard that have been reworded to reflect, “kid talk” and be comprehensible to a young learner.

1. **“Teacher talk”** states in the kindergarten standard 1.4:  
*Write upper and lowercase letters of the alphabet independently, attending to the form and proper spacing of the letters.*  
The teachers at Tierra Vista in Ocean View School District “translated” this standard to **“kid talk”** for the rubric:
  - Write upper and lowercase letters of the alphabet by yourself.
  - Place your letters on the lines.
  - Use a finger space between each letter.
2. **In “Teacher talk”** the standard for narrative writing states:”  
*Tells a story that can be a single event or a few events that are somewhat linked and which the writer pulls together.*



The teachers at Ford Boulevard in Los Angeles Unified School District “translated” this standard to “**kid talk**” for the rubric:

- My story stays on topic.

### How do you develop a rubric?

1. Select the primary focus of a task, concept, behavior to be taught or assessed based on grade level standards.
2. Translate the “teacher talk” (curriculum or content standard) into “kid talk” to make the rubric user friendly and understandable for the young child.
3. Maintain consistency with the levels of performance. A rating of
  - 4 represents advanced performance.
  - 3 represents proficiency performance.
  - 2 represents partially proficient performance.
  - 1 represents nonperformance or not proficient performance.
4. Develop the rubric by using parallel language. Be consistent with word phrasing that delineates the levels of proficiency.  
A good example of parallel language occurs in the organization section of the Kindergarten Narrative Writing Rubric used by Ford Boulevard School in Los Angeles Unified.

**Note how each bullet in each level corresponds to the next level.**

	4	3	2	1
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directionality is evident (left/right, top/bottom)</li> <li>• Writing piece is neat</li> <li>• Spacing between all words</li> <li>• All letters are formed correctly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directionality is evident (left/right, top/bottom)</li> <li>• Writing piece is neat</li> <li>• Spacing between most words</li> <li>• Most letters are formed correctly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directionality is evident (left/right)</li> <li>• Writing piece is messy</li> <li>• Some words are spaced</li> <li>• Some letters are formed correctly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directionality is not evident</li> <li>• Writing piece is messy</li> <li>• No spacing between words</li> <li>• Letters are formed poorly</li> </ul>

5. Teach all the components that children must master in order to meet or exceed the standard.
6. Allow the students to use the pertinent rubric when performing a task independently.
7. Collect the student work and compare to the rubric.
8. Score papers according to the rubric and analyze the class set of work.
9. Determine your “**anchor papers**” or **sample**. An “**anchor paper**” serves as a standard by which other performances may be judged.
10. Allow the students to look at the anchor papers telling why the 1 is a 1, 2 is a 2, 3 is a 3, and 4 is a 4 . An overhead projector and transparency or model copies of each anchor paper may be used for comparison.
11. Post the “**anchor papers**” that demonstrate each performance level with the rubric and have each student score his own paper.

After completing the process, some students may be unsuccessful with the task or activity. Then the teacher must provide additional support to the students to enable them to become successful at a later time. **The teacher should re-strategize providing different approaches, techniques, and materials always striving to capitalize on a student's personal learning style.**

## Generic Versus Class Developed Rubrics

*Why work so hard to develop a rubric for or with your class when generic rubrics are available?* Even though computers make it easy to obtain a generic rubric by clicking on a website, student generated rubrics create better learning opportunities. Student generated rubrics give students control and help them develop responsibility.

The effectiveness of a rubric is dependent upon:

- the finished product,
- the student's understanding of the task, and
- the teacher's direct teaching and student's learning.

Rubrics you create for your classroom will be specific to your district and grade level standards and goals. They can be effective in assessing your class progress towards meeting those standards.

## How do I develop rating scales and descriptor icons?

Whether you use a 3, 4, 5, or 6 point scale is not critical, what is critical is:









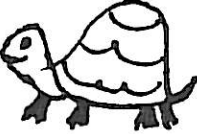







- Assessing the quality of the work
- Determining the focus or standard the student must meet
- Assuring that the scale and icons are understandable to the children in the class.

With younger children a simpler 3 or 4 point scale is more easily understood. It should be noted that a 4 point scale forces the teacher or child to further analyze their work rather than commit to the mid score.

**Descriptor levels** can be indicated by numerals, words, pictorial icons, seasonal themes. **Here are some levels using words.**

- Wow!, You've Got It! Almost, Try again
- Fluent, Emergent, Early, Pre
- All, Most, Some, Little
- Well done! This needs to be better! Not yet!

Here are some examples of different levels of accomplishment using pictorial icons:

4	3	2	1
			
			
			
			

The California Kindergarten Association is aware that many teachers have been using rubrics with their classes successfully. We encourage you to share your expertise by mailing any teacher/student developed rubrics that have been successful for you to the CKA office. Please include a narrative description that includes the context for the rubric. Selected rubrics may be posted on the website [www.ckanet.org](http://www.ckanet.org). Be sure to continually check the website for additional sample rubrics.

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