Why Didn’t I Get an “A”
(A guide to fair and equitable grading of subjective assessments)
Types of Tests and Evaluations

OBJECTIVE (primarily recognition)
- Recognize correct answer
- T/F, multiple choice, matching

SUBJECTIVE (primarily recall)
- Students have to “supply” the answer
- Graded by a “human”
- Short answers, essay, performance, projects, portfolios
Challenges for Fair and Equitable Subjective Evaluation

• **TIME** to evaluate the student responses – objective tests are much quicker!

• Variability among evaluators if it is team assessment

• Personal bias

• Fatigue bias

• Scores tend to clump together ("looks like a "C" to me")
Grade the following answer with an A, B, C, D, F grade

QUESTION:
Explain electrical conduction and control of the heart beat.

RESPONSE:
The node in the atrea fires and causes the atrea to contract then it travels to the ventrecals and then they contract. Then it starts over again.

Write your grade down
RESPONSE:
The node in the atrea fires and causes the atrea to contract then it travels to the ventrecals and then they contract. Then it starts over again.

Information correct 10 pts
Clarity of thought 5 pts
Spelling 5 pts
Thoroughness 5 pts

← This is the start of a rubric
What is a rubric?

- It is an assessment tool often shaped like a matrix (a grid).
- A good rubric describes the level of achievement in specific areas of performance, understanding, or behavior.
- It provides for an easy way to assign points to an assignment based upon expected behaviors or outcomes.
- It helps make subjective grading become more objective.
Why use a rubric?

- Defines in greater detail the expectations for an excellent performance
- Complex assessments can be broken down in more manageable components
- Multiple evaluators or single evaluator with many assessments can produce consistent and equitable assessments across the population of responses
- It helps make subjective grading more objective
How do you create a rubric?

1. Make a list of the observable behaviors you expect successful students to be able to demonstrate at the end of the assignment

(sound like objectives???)

An objective describes the desired observable behavior
You knew in your own mind what it meant to have “successfully cooked eggs”

But what were the details you left out?

• Such that it is done in a sanitary manner
• Such that they are light, fluffy, and yellow
• Such that they TASTE good to the evaluator
How to create a rubric

1. Make a list of the observable behaviors you expect successful students to be able to demonstrate at the end of the assignment
2. Prioritize the list for importance
3. Assign your list to the criteria in the rubric grid
4. Create descriptors for each level of criteria performance (excellent to poor)
5. Assign points for each level
Anatomy of a Grading Rubric

Points assigned to each level

Criteria listed on this side (e.g., prepared in a sanitary manner, had correct color, were edible, etc.)

Descriptors for each level of performance go in here
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stated Objective or Performance</th>
<th>Beginning 1</th>
<th>Developing 2</th>
<th>Accomplished 3</th>
<th>Exemplary 4</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting a beginning level of performance.</td>
<td>Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting development and movement toward mastery of performance.</td>
<td>Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting mastery of performance.</td>
<td>Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting the highest level of performance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting development and movement toward mastery of performance.</td>
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<td>Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting mastery of performance.</td>
<td>Description of identifiable performance characteristics reflecting the highest level of performance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Let’s make a rubric for grading this question

QUESTION: Explain electrical conduction and control of the heart beat.

RESPONSE: The node in the atrea fires and causes the atrea to contract then it travels to the ventrecals and then they contract. Then it starts over again.
RESPONSE:
The node in the area fires and causes the area to contract then it travels to the ventricle and then they contract. Then it starts over again.

These were the criteria defined for evaluating this question:

- Information correct: 10 pts
- Clarity of thought: 5 pts
- Spelling: 5 pts
- Thoroughness: 5 pts
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information correct?</td>
<td>&gt;5 errors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All Correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of thought</td>
<td>confused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Easy follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>5 errors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoroughness</td>
<td>Miss 2 pts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All key pt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now for the descriptors fill in your observable “extreme” behaviors (worst and best)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 errors</th>
<th>2 errors</th>
<th>3 errors</th>
<th>4 errors</th>
<th>5 All Correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information correct?</td>
<td>&gt;5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>All Correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of thought</td>
<td>confused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Easy follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td></td>
<td>No errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoroughness</td>
<td>Miss 2 pts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Miss 1 pt</td>
<td></td>
<td>All key pt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fill in “gradients” as needed
Can now “weight” individual categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information (x2)</th>
<th>1 errors</th>
<th>2 errors</th>
<th>3 errors</th>
<th>4 errors</th>
<th>All correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of thought</td>
<td>&gt;5 errors</td>
<td>5 errors</td>
<td>3-4 errors</td>
<td>1-2 errors</td>
<td>Easy follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling (x2)</td>
<td>5 errors</td>
<td>3-4 errors</td>
<td>1-2 errors</td>
<td>No errors</td>
<td>All key pt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoroughness</td>
<td>Miss 2 pts</td>
<td>Miss 1 pt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>&gt;5 errors</td>
<td>5 errors</td>
<td>3-4 errors</td>
<td>1-2 errors</td>
<td>All correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of thought</td>
<td>confused</td>
<td>Blah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Easy follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>No errors</td>
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<td>x2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Miss 2 pts</td>
<td>Miss 1 pt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SCORE = 4+4+3+2+2+3 = 18
out of 30
How to create a rubric

1. Make a list of the observable behaviors you expect successful students to be able to demonstrate at the end of the assignment

2. Prioritize the list for importance

3. Assign your list to the criteria in the rubric grid

4. Create descriptors for each level of criteria performance (excellent to poor)

5. Assign points for each level
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nursing Diagnosis</strong></td>
<td>The nursing diagnosis is stated in correct medical format.</td>
<td>The nursing diagnosis is stated in correct medical format.</td>
<td>The goal is not directly related to the problem. The goal is not patient-centered, realistic, measurable and/or achievable within a specific time frame.</td>
<td>The goal is not directly related to the problem. The goal is not patient-centered, realistic, measurable and/or achievable within a specific time frame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals/Objectives</strong></td>
<td>The goal is directly related to the problem. It is patient-centered, realistic, measurable and achievable within a specific time frame.</td>
<td>The goal is directly related to the problem. It is patient-centered, realistic, measurable, but not achievable within a specific time frame.</td>
<td>The goal is directly related to the problem. It is not patient-centered, realistic, measurable and/or achievable within a specific time frame.</td>
<td>The goal is directly related to the problem. It is not patient-centered, realistic, measurable and/or achievable within a specific time frame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nursing Interventions</strong></td>
<td>There are 5 or more specific, individualized interventions listed that are related to the problem.</td>
<td>There are 5 or more interventions listed, but one or two are not specific or individualized.</td>
<td>There are 5 or more interventions listed, but three or more are not specific, individualized or related to the problem.</td>
<td>There are not 5 interventions listed that are specific, individualized and related to the problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scientific Rationale</strong></td>
<td>Specific scientific principles are stated for each listed intervention.</td>
<td>The evaluation relates to whether the goal was met. If not met, a reason and revision are stated.</td>
<td>The evaluation relates to whether the goal was met. If not met, a reason and revision are not stated.</td>
<td>Specific scientific principles are not stated for each listed intervention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation</strong></td>
<td>The evaluation relates to whether the goal was met. If not met, a reason and revision are stated.</td>
<td>The evaluation relates to whether the goal was met. If not met, a reason and revision are not stated.</td>
<td>The evaluation does not relate to the goal. If not met, a reason and revision are not stated.</td>
<td>The evaluation does not relate to the goal. If not met, a reason and revision are not stated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On time</strong></td>
<td>The assignment is submitted on time.</td>
<td>The assignment is 3-4 days late.</td>
<td>The assignment is 5-6 days late.</td>
<td>The assignment is 7 or more days late.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complete, legible</strong></td>
<td>The assignment is complete and legible.</td>
<td>The assignment has minor gaps but is legible.</td>
<td>The assignment has major gaps but is legible.</td>
<td>The assignment has major gaps and/or is illegible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you would like to keep your rubric for more than one week, please select the permanent option from this pull-down menu.

Creating and Editing Your Rubric

Here are some quick steps to help you create your rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Please Choose -
  - If you don't like the text in the box above, you can use the text box below to rename a category or type in a new category name.
  - You may add or modify content in the rubric test boxes to the right.

- Please Choose -
  - If you don't like the text in the box above, you can use the text box below to rename a category or type in a new category name.
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Advantages of a Rubric for essay or projects

1. Saves TIME grading it!! (just assign points and add them up!)

2. Keeps the grader honest! (less prone to subjective bias)

3. Does spread out the scores more

4. Give the rubric to your students AHEAD of time to clearly communicate your expectations! (creation of “objectives” clarifies in your own mind what is important)
Now that you have used a rubric and assigned points for the assignment, how do you assign a grade?
Whatever grading system you set up, it needs to be set in your syllabus

Decide how you want to assess the outcomes of the whole class:

Grade a student based upon the performance of the whole class?

Grade a student against a set standard?
Assume student points fall along a “bell shaped” curve.
Assume students fall along a “bell shaped” curve.
Assume students fall along a “bell shaped” curve.
Assume students fall along a “bell shaped” curve.
Assume students fall along a “bell shaped” curve.

The diagram shows a bell curve with the number of students distributed across different grades (F, D, C, B, A) based on their assignment scores. The percentages for each grade are as follows:

- F: 7%
- D: 24%
- C: 38%
- B: 24%
- A: 7%

The curve peaks at the C grade, indicating that the majority of students fall within this range.
Assume students fall along a “bell shaped” curve.
Assume students fall along a “bell shaped” curve.
Criterion referenced
Norm referenced

Criterion: performance compared to benchmarks
Norm: performance compared to other students
Hybrid: Set up criterion (90% A, 80% B)
Set top grade = “100%”
Set all rest of grades relative to top grade (norm reference)
Example of a Hybrid

Identify the distribution of grades (e.g., 90% = A, 80% = B, etc.)

Identify top score and set to 100%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top score 50 (out of 80 possible)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90% A</td>
<td>45 – 50 = A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80% B</td>
<td>40 – 44 = B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70% C</td>
<td>35 – 39 = C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60% D</td>
<td>30 – 34 = D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Uses for Hybrid grading scheme

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>70% C</td>
<td>35 – 39 = C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60% D</td>
<td>30 – 34 = D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Use it for projects when you don’t have a clear idea of what the “perfect” project or outcome looks like
- Use it for oral exams where you are not clear how the students are going to be distributed
- Use for essays that can have wide ranges of legitimate answers
Avoiding Trouble with Assigning Grades

Remind students about how grades are assessed and expectations for performance

Avoid setting up grade competition

• discourages cooperation, team work

Grades close to cut off

• treat everyone equally

• extra credit points provide “buffer”

• remind students about cut off policy
Return grades in a timely manner

- The closer feedback, the more the benefit by remembering the context of feedback

Avoiding Grade Appeals

- Keep to your syllabus – it is your contract with the students for how they are to be evaluated
- Don’t make exceptions
- Notify students of how to track grades (e.g., Blackboard) – remind them to check
- Be available to discuss grades in person (but not argue points)
Rubrics can make subjective evaluations more quantifiable

Rubrics can help you communicate your expectations

Use the criterion or norm referenced grading scale for assigning grades if the likely range of scores is known

Use the hybrid for subjective eval if not sure of the actual distribution of scores