



Help Students Improve Their Writing by Using Rubrics and by Providing Annotated Example Student Papers

Typically, while we are creating the prompts, we should know what results we want to see in student writing. A comprehensive rubric should be given to students at the time they receive the writing prompt (or soon after). Having clear guidelines can help students to worry less about the paper and to concentrate on the content, since the format is already described.

Rubrics (the criteria you will use to evaluate student papers)

Giving students the rubrics when you give them the writing prompt (or soon after) may benefit students: “Knowing basic expectations in advance can help students respond well to an assignment and ease their writing anxiety . . . Because rubrics provide clear expectations and assessment criteria, students also [may] improve self-assessment and critical thinking skills when they are used” (Sands, 2017, p. 265).

Disciplines differ in the way they “appeal to background knowledge” and “establish truth.” Simply requiring students to “Write an APA paper,” or “Write a Turabian paper” fails to address conventions that novices may need to learn (Horkoff, 2023, p. 47).

The prompt, rubric, and instructor comments should all focus on the “*higher order* issues in writing like *argument, analysis, audience, purpose, and context*” (Branson, 2017, p. 19).

Effective writing assignments include details on the feedback students will receive and the criteria used to judge the finished piece (Gardner, 2008, p. 33).

Rubrics should correlate completely with the prompt and should be comprehensive. You can find online rubric generators to give you ideas such as <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php>

Do Your Students Need Guidance on Specific Requirements?

Evidence: Do you ask students to “back up claims with evidence”? If so, consider: how do you define what counts as evidence in your course? More refined definitions of evidence could be helpful for students (Horkoff, 2023, p. 50).

Citing Sources: The rules for citing sources “reflect the beliefs and values of the people who create, use, and maintain the system.” Undergraduates are usually most familiar with the Modern Language Association (MLA--the citation used by English teachers). This citation style encourages “fairly extensive source material from a text to support interpretation of its meaning” (Horkoff, 2023, p. 52). We need to move students from MLA style to the communication style of our disciplines.

Do Your Students Need Guidance on Specific Requirements?

Citing Sources: "Identifying expectations of what is typically cited (important people/ideas, previous studies/texts) and *how* those things are cited (how sources are incorporated, connections to meaning-making, how to indicate sources) . . . are often largely unfamiliar to undergraduates and beginning graduate students" (Horkoff, 2023, p. 54). Would it help your students to have a citation handout? An in-class review? References to page numbers in the appropriate citation style guide?

Other possible requirements that may need to be explained to students: What is "writing" in your field? And what is "good writing"?

Do students need to:

- sort through, understand, and appropriately use specialized vocabulary,
- recognize and use specialized forms of argument,
- understand how people here establish credibility,
- know what prior work (who and what) to cite,
- know how to cite it appropriately,
- take the right stance as a writer, and
- address readers in appropriate ways?

(Horkoff, 2023, p. 55)

What Can I Do to Help Students in Addition to Rubrics (without adding to my stress)?

Provide annotated samples of past student papers!!

Seeing examples of the work of other students with your annotated comments may help students become more objective and critical about their own work.

"Teachers need to help students understand how knowledge is arrived at in their own disciplines, what counts as evidence, and how to read critically and evaluate knowledge claims. . . . Most important of all, [students] need good models" (Svinivki & McKeachie, 2011, p. 173).

"Students often complain that they don't know what the teacher wants. Even though we may be quite explicit in describing the writing assignment, students will tend to forget details unless the assignment is in print." The solution is "to provide students with an assignment sheet that explains such details as the kind of writing required, its scope and length, the formatting requirements, and the due dates." Even when we provide these details, however, "students may still claim that they don't know what the teacher wants"; providing additional support materials may reduce or eliminate students' confusion (Gardner, 2008, p. 3). One way to avoid student complaints is to provide example papers to model what you want (and do not want) students to do.

You may be able to save time and avoid stress by using clear and comprehensive rubrics and by providing examples of student papers with your annotated comments.

References

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