Rubrics for EFL Oral Presentations

A Position Paper

By
Prof. Magdy M. Aly
Professor of Curriculum and EFL Instruction

Abstract

The instructional value of rubrics for promoting student learning and aiding teacher feedback to student performance has been extensively reached in the educational literature. There is nonetheless a dearth of studies on students' rubric use in second/foreign language contexts. And fewer studies have investigated the factor affecting rubrics' effectiveness for promoting student learning. The paper Reports a classroom-based inquiry unto students' perceptions of rubric use in self-assessment in English as a foreign language context and the factors moderating its effectiveness. Eighty students at Chinese university participated in the study. The data collected included their reflective journals and six case study informants' retrospective interviews. Results showed that the rubric was perceived as useful for fostering the students' self-regulation by guiding them through the stages of goal-setting, planning, self-monitoring and self-reflection. Both within-rubric and rubric-user factors were identified as affecting the rubric's effectiveness in student self-assessment. The findings are discussed with reference to the design features of rubrics implications are drawn for formative rubric use in student self-assessment

Keywords : Rubrics, Efl, Oral Presentations

ملخص البحث

لقد توصلت الأدبيات التعليمية بشكل هائل إلى القيمة التعليمية لنماذج التقييم لتشجيع الطلاب على التعلم ومساعدة المدرس في تقييم أداء الطلاب. ومع ذلك ، هناك ندرة في الدراسات التي تناولت استخدام نموذج تقييم الطلاب في سياقات اللغة الثانية / الأجنبية. وقد بحث عدد أقل من الدراسات عن العامل المؤثر في فعالية نماذج التقييم لتشجيع تعلم الطلاب. تنشرالورقة استقصاء قائم على استبيان رأي طلاب فصل دراسي في إستخدام نموذج التقييم في التقييم الذاتي للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وعوامل فعاليتها. شارك ثمانون طالبًا من جامعة صينية في الدراسة. تضمنت البيانات التي تم جمعها مقالاتهم النقدية وبيانات من خلال مقابلات لست حالات دراسية. أظهرت النتائج اعتبار نموذج التقييم مفيدًا لتعزيز التنظيم الذاتي للطلاب من خلال توجيههم خلال مراحل تحديد الأهداف والتخطيط والمراقبة الذاتية والتأمل الذاتي. تم تحديد كل من العوامل داخل نموذج التقييم وعامل تقييم الأداء على أنها تؤثر على فعالية نموذج التقييم في التقييم الذاتي للطلاب. تتم مناقشة النتائج مع الإشارة إلى ميزات التصميم الخاصة بما تحتويه قواعد التقييم التي يتم استخدامها من أجل استخدام نموذج تقييم يكون التقييم الذاتي للطلاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: معايير الاداء، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة اجنبية، العروض الشفهية

Introduction

A rubric is a coherent set of criteria for students' work that includes descriptions of levels of performance quality on the criteria. Sounds simple enough, right? Unfortunately, this definition of *rubric* is rarely demonstrated in practice. The Internet, for example, offers many rubrics that do not, in fact, describe performance. I think I know why that might be and will explain that in Chapter 2, but for now let's start with the positive. It should be clear from the definition that rubrics have two major aspects: *coherent sets of criteria* and *descriptions of levels of performance* for these criteria.

The genius of rubrics is that they are descriptive and not evaluative. Of course, rubrics can be used to evaluate, but the operating principle is you match the performance to the description rather than "judge" it. Thus, rubrics are as good or bad as the criteria selected and the descriptions of the levels of performance under each. Effective rubrics have appropriate criteria and well-written descriptions of performance.

Purposes of rubrics?

Like any other evaluation tool, rubrics are useful for certain purposes and not for others. *The main purpose of rubrics is to assess performances.* For some performances, you observe the

student in the process of doing something, like using an electric drill or discussing an issue. For other performances, you observe the product that is the result of the student's work, like a finished bookshelf or a written report. Table 1 lists some common kinds of school performances that can be assessed with rubrics. This list by no means covers every possible school performance. It is just meant to help you think of the types of performances you might assess with rubrics.

Examples of
Scoring Rubrics for EFL Oral Presentations
Example #1

Category	Scoring Criteria	Total Points	Score
Organization **(15 points)**	The type of presentation is appropriate for the topic and audience.	5	
	Information is presented in a logical sequence.	5	
	Presentation appropriately cites requisite number of references.	5	
Content **(45 points)**	Introduction is attention−getting, lays out the problem well, and establishes a framework for the rest of the presentation.	5	
	Technical terms are well−defined in language appropriate for the target audience.	5	
	Presentation contains accurate information.	10	
	Material included is relevant to the overall message/purpose.	10	

	Appropriate amount of material is prepared, and points made reflect well their relative importance.	10	
	There is an obvious conclusion summarizing the presentation.	5	
Presentation (40 points)	Speaker maintains good eye contact with the audience and is appropriately animated (e.g., gestures, moving around, etc.).	5	
	Speaker uses a clear, audible voice.	5	
	Delivery is poised, controlled, and smooth.	5	
	Good language skills and pronunciation are used.	5	
	Visual aids are well prepared, informative, effective, and not distracting.	5	
	Length of presentation is within the assigned time limits.	5	
	Information was well communicated.	10	
Score	**Total Points**	**100**	

Scoring Rubric for Oral Presentations: Example #2

Content and Scientific Merit (60 points)

Introduction:

- o Defines background and importance of research.
- o States objective, and is able to identify relevant questions.

Body:

- o Presenter has a scientifically valid argument.
- o Addresses audience at an appropriate level (rigorous, but generally understandable to a scientifically-minded group).
- o Offers evidence of proof/disproof.
- o Describes methodology.
- o The talk is logical.

Conclusion:

- o Summarizes major points of talk.
- o Summarizes potential weaknesses (if any) in findings.
- o Provides you with a "take-home" message.

Speaking Style/Delivery (20 points)

- o Speaks clearly and at an understandable pace.
- o Maintains eye contact with audience.
- o Well rehearsed (either extemporaneous or scripted presentation).
- o Limited use of filler words ("umm," "like," etc.).

- o Speaker uses body language appropriately.

- o Speaker is within time limits.

- o Speaker is able to answer questions professionally.

- o Speaker is dressed appropriately.

Audio/Visual (20 points)

- o Graphs/figures are clear and understandable.

- o The text is readable and clear.

- o Audio/Visual components support the main points of the talk.

- o Appropriate referencing of data that is/was not generated by presenter

General Comments

Scoring Rubric for Oral Presentations: Example #3

PRESENCE   **5   4   3   2   1   0**

   −body language & eye contact

   −contact with the public

   −poise

   −physical organization

LANGUAGE SKILLS   **5   4   3   2   1 0**

   −correct usage

   −appropriate vocabulary and grammar

   −understandable (rhythm, intonation, accent)

   −spoken loud enough to hear easily

ORGANIZATION   **5   4   3   2   1 0**

   −clear objectives

   −logical structure

   −signposting

MASTERY OF THE SUBJECT   **5   4   3   2   1 0**

   −pertinence

   −depth of commentary

   −spoken, not read

   −able to answer questions

VISUAL AIDS   **5   4   3   2   1 0**

  −transparencies, slides

  −handouts

  −audio, video, etc.

OVERALL IMPRESSION   **5   4   3   2   1 0**

  −very interesting / very boring

  −pleasant / unpleasant to listen to

  −very good / poor communication

TOTAL SCORE _____ / 30

Scoring Rubric for Oral Presentations: Example #4

	Poor				Excellent
PRESENTATION SKILLS	1	2	3	4	5
Were the main ideas presented in an orderly and clear manner?	,	,	,	,	,
Did the presentation fill the time allotted?	,	,	,	,	,
Were the overheads/handouts appropriate and helpful to the audience?	,	,	,	,	,
Did the talk maintain the interest of the audience?	,	,	,	,	,
Was there a theme or take-home message to the presentation?	,	,	,	,	,
Was the presenter responsive to audience questions?	,	,	,	,	,

KNOWLEDGE BASE

Was proper background information on the topic given?	,	,	,	,	
Was the material selected for presentation appropriate to the topic?	,	,	,	,	
Was enough essential information given to allow the audience to effectively evaluate the topic?	,	,	,	,	
Was irrelevant or filler information excluded?	,	,	,	,	
Did the presenter have a clear understanding of the material presented?	,	,	,	,	

CRITICL THINKING

Were the main issues in this area clearly identified?	,	,	,	,	,
Were both theoretical positions and empirical evidence presented?	,	,	,	,	,
Were the strengths and weaknesses of these theories, and the methods used to gather this evidence adequately explained?	,	,	,	,	,
Did the presenter make recommendations for further work in this area?	,	,	,	,	,
Did the main conclusions of the presentation follow from the material presented?	...,	,	,	,	,
Were competing explanations or theories considered and dealt with properly?	...,	,	,	,	,

OVERALL IMPRESSION .... _____ / 15

COMMENTS

TOTAL SCORE _____ / 100

Analytic and holistic rubrics

Analytic rubrics describe work on each criterion separately. *Holistic rubrics* describe the work by applying all the

criteria at the same time and enabling an overall judgment about the quality of the work. The top panel of Figure 1.2 defines analytic and holistic rubrics and lists advantages and disadvantages for each.

For most classroom purposes, analytic rubrics are best. Focusing on the criteria one at a time is better for instruction and better for formative assessment because students can see what aspects of their work need what kind of attention. Focusing on the criteria one at a time is good for any summative assessment (grading) that will also be used to make decisions about the future—for example, decisions about how to follow up on a unit or decisions about how to teach something next year.

One classroom purpose for which holistic rubrics are better than analytic rubrics is the situation in which students will not see the results of a final summative assessment and you will not really use the information for anything except a grade. Some high school final examinations fall into this category. Grading with rubrics is faster when there is only one decision to make, rather than a separate decision for each criterion.

On balance, for most classroom purposes I recommend analytic rubrics. Therefore, most of the examples in this book will be analytic rubrics. Before we leave holistic rubrics, however, I want

to reemphasize the important point that *all the criteria* are used in holistic rubrics. You consider them together, but you don't boil down the evaluation to the old "excellent-good-fair-poor" kind of thinking along one general "judgment" dimension. True holistic rubrics are still rubrics; that is, they are based on criteria for good work and on observation of how the work meets those criteria.

General and task-specific rubrics

General rubrics use criteria and descriptions of performance that *generalize* across (hence the name *general rubrics*), or can be used with, different tasks. The tasks all have to be instances of the same learning outcome—for example, writing or mathematics problem solving. The criteria point to aspects of the learning outcome and not to features of any one specific task (for example, criteria list characteristics of good problem solving and not features of the solution to a specific problem). The descriptions of performance are general, so students learn general qualities and not isolated, task-specific features (for example, the description might say all relevant information was used to solve the problem, not that the numbers of knives, forks, spoons, and guests were used to solve the problem). *Task-specific rubrics* are pretty well described by their name: They are rubrics that are specific to the performance task with which they

are used. Task−specific rubrics contain the answers to a problem, or explain the reasoning students are supposed to use, or list facts and concepts students are supposed to mention. The bottom panel of Figure 1.2 defines general and task−specific rubrics and lists advantages and disadvantages for each.

Why use general rubrics? General rubrics have several advantages over task−specific rubrics. General rubrics

- Can be shared with students at the beginning of an assignment, to help them plan and monitor their own work.
- Can be used with many different tasks, focusing the students on the knowledge and skills they are developing over time.
- Describe student performance in terms that allow for many different paths to success.
- Focus the teacher on developing students' learning of skills instead of task completion.
- Do not need to be rewritten for every assignment.

Let's look more closely at the first two advantages.

Can be shared with students at the beginning of an assignment. General rubrics do not "give away answers" to questions. They do not contain any information that the students are supposed to be developing themselves. Instead, they contain descriptions like

"Explanation of reasoning is clear and supported with appropriate details." Descriptions like this focus students on what their learning target is supposed to be (for example, explaining reasoning clearly, with appropriate supporting details). They clarify for students how to approach the assignment (for example, in solving the problem posed, I should make sure to explicitly focus on why I made the choices I did and be able to explain that). Therefore, over time general rubrics help students build up a concept of what it means to perform a skill well (for example, effective problem solving requires clear reasoning that I can explain and support).

Can be used with many different tasks. Because general rubrics focus students on the knowledge and skills, they are learning rather than the particular task they are completing, they offer the best method I know for preventing the problem of "empty rubrics" that will be described in Chapter 2. Good general rubrics will, by definition, not be task directions in disguise, or counts of surface features, or evaluative rating scales.

Because general rubrics focus students on the knowledge and skills they are supposed to be acquiring, they can and should be used with any task that belongs to the whole domain of learning for those learning outcomes. Of course, you never have an

opportunity to give students all of the potential tasks in a domain—you can't ask them to write every possible essay about characterization, solve every possible problem involving slope, design experiments involving every possible chemical solvent, or describe every political takeover that was the result of a power vacuum.

These sets of tasks all indicate important knowledge and skills, however, and they develop over time and with practice. Essay writing, problem solving, experimental design, and the analysis of political systems are each important skills in their respective disciplines. If the rubrics are the same each time a student does the same kind of work, the student will learn general qualities of good essay writing, problem solving, and so on. If the rubrics are different each time the student does the same kind of work, the student will not have an opportunity to see past the specific essay or problem. The general approach encourages students to think about building up general knowledge and skills rather than thinking about school learning in terms of getting individual assignments done.

Why use task-specific rubrics? Task-specific rubrics function as "scoring directions" for the person who is grading the work. Because they detail the elements to look for in a student's answer

to a particular task, scoring students' responses with task−specific rubrics is lower−inference work than scoring students' responses with general rubrics. For this reason, it is faster to train raters to reach acceptable levels of scoring reliability using task−specific rubrics for large−scale assessment. Similarly, it is easier for teachers to apply task−specific rubrics consistently with a minimum of practice. General rubrics take longer to learn to apply well.

However, the reliability advantage is temporary (one can learn to apply general rubrics well), and it comes with a big downside. Obviously, task−specific rubrics are useful only for scoring. If students can't see the rubrics ahead of time, you can't share them with students, and therefore task−specific rubrics are not useful for formative assessment. That in itself is one good reason not to use them except for special purposes. Task−specific rubrics do not take advantage of the most powerful aspects of rubrics—their usefulness in helping students to conceptualize their learning targets and to monitor their own progress.

Importance of Rubrics

Rubrics are important because they clarify for students the qualities their work should have. This point is often expressed in terms of students understanding the learning target and criteria

for success. For this reason, rubrics help teachers teach, they help coordinate instruction and assessment, and they help students learn.

Rubrics help teachers teach

To write or select rubrics, teachers need to focus on the criteria by which learning will be assessed. This focus on what you intend students to *learn* rather than what you intend to *teach* actually helps improve instruction. The common approach of "teaching things," as in "I taught the American Revolution" or "I taught factoring quadratic equations," is clear on content but not so clear on outcomes. Without clarity on outcomes, it's hard to know how much of various aspects of the content to teach. Rubrics help with clarity of both content and outcomes.

Really good rubrics help teachers avoid confusing the task or activity with the learning goal, and therefore confusing completion of the task with learning. Rubrics help keep teachers focused on criteria, not tasks. I have already discussed this point in the section about selecting criteria. Focusing rubrics on *learning* and not on *tasks* is the most important concept in this book. I will return to it over and over. It seems to be a difficult concept—or probably a more accurate statement is that focusing on tasks is so easy and so seductive that it becomes the path many busy

teachers take. Penny–wise and pound–foolish, such an approach saves time in the short run by sacrificing learning in the long run.

Rubrics help coordinate instruction and assessment

Most rubrics should be designed for repeated use, over time, on several tasks. Students are given a rubric at the beginning of a unit of instruction or an episode of work. They tackle the work, receive feedback, practice, revise or do another task, continue to practice, and ultimately receive a grade—all using the same rubric as their description of the criteria and the quality levels that will demonstrate learning. This path to learning is much more cohesive than a string of assignments with related but different criteria.

Rubrics help students learn

The criteria and performance–level descriptions in rubrics help students understand what the desired performance is and what it looks like. Effective rubrics show students how they will know to what extent their performance passes muster on each criterion of importance, and if used formatively can also show students what their next steps should be to enhance the quality of their performance. This claim is backed by research at all grade levels and in different disciplines.

Several studies of student−generated criteria demonstrate that students can participate in defining and describing the qualities their work should have. Nancy Harris and Laura Kuehn (Higgins, Harris, & Kuehn, 1994) did research in their own team−taught classroom to see what sorts of criteria primary school students could generate for a "good project." They found that their students, in grades 1 and 2, were able to define criteria for group projects. At the beginning of the year, most of the criteria were about process (for example, the group members getting along with each other). In December, students were able to view examples of projects, and with continued brainstorming and discussion they began to see the importance of substantive criteria (for example, the information contained in the project). By the end of the year, about half the criteria students chose were about process and half were about product. This study shows us that students need to learn how to focus on learning—and, more important, that they can begin to do this as early as 1st grade.

Andrade, Du, and Wang (2008) investigated the effects of having 3rd and 4th graders read a model written assignment, generate their own list of criteria, and use rubrics to self−assess the quality of the written stories and essays they then produced. A comparison group brainstormed criteria and self−assessed their

drafts but did not use the rubric. Controlling for previous writing ability, the group that used the rubrics for self-assessment wrote better overall, and specifically in the areas of ideas, organization, voice, and word choice. There were no differences between the groups in the areas of sentences and conventions, presumably areas of much previous drill for all young writers. Andrade, Du, and Mycek (2010) replicated these findings with students in 5th, 6th, and 7th grade, except that the rubric group's writing was evaluated as having higher quality on all six criteria.

Ross, Hoagaboam-Gray, and Rolheiser (2002) taught 5th and 6th grade students self-evaluation skills in mathematics, also using a method based on criteria. Their self-evaluation instruction involved four strategies: involving students in defining criteria, teaching them how to apply the criteria, giving them feedback on these self-evaluations against criteria, and helping them develop action plans based on the self-evaluations. Controlling for previous problem-solving ability, students who self-assessed using criteria outscored a comparison group at solving mathematics problems.

Ross and Starling (2008) used the same four-component self-assessment training, based on criteria, with secondary students in a 9th grade geography class. Students were learning to solve

geography problems using global information systems (GIS) software, so the learning goals were about both accurate use of the software and applying it to real-world geography problems, including being able to explain their problem-solving strategies. Controlling for pretest computer self-efficacy (known to be important in technology learning), the treatment group outscored a comparison group on three different measures: production of a map using the software, a report explaining their problem-solving strategies, and an exam measuring knowledge of the mapping program. The largest difference was for the problem-solving explanations.

Hafner and Hafner (2003) investigated college biology students' use of rubrics for peer assessment and teacher assessment of a collaborative oral presentation. There were five criteria: organization and research, persuasiveness and logic of argument, collaboration, delivery and grammar, and creativity and originality. Originally the rubric was developed and then modified with discussion and involvement of students. For the study, the same rubric was used for a required course assignment three years in a row. The instructors were interested in finding out whether the information students gained from peer evaluation was accurate, whether its matched teacher input, and whether this accuracy was

consistent across different years and classes. The short answer was yes. Students were able to accurately give feedback to their peers, their information matched that of their instructor, and this was the case for each class.

Summing up

This article has defined rubrics in terms of their two main components: criteria and descriptions of levels of performance. The main point about criteria is that they should be about learning outcomes, not aspects of the task itself. The main point about descriptions of levels of performance is that they should be descriptions, not evaluative statements. The "evaluation" aspect of assessment is accomplished by matching student work with the description, not by making immediate judgments. Finally, the article has presented some evidence that using this kind of rubric helps teachers teach and students learn, and it has invited you to pursue your own evidence, in your specific classroom and school context.

Bibliography

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. (1999). ACTFL performance guidelines for K–12 learners. Yonkers, NY: ACTFL.

Applebee, A.N. (2000). Alternative models of writing development.

Airasian, P.W. (1991). Classroom Assessment. New York: McGraw–Hill Lim, H–Y, &Griffith, W.I. (2011). Practice doesn't make perfect Blaz, Deborah. (2001).

A collection of performance tasks and rubrics: Foreign languages. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

 Brown, J. D. (Ed.) (2012). Developing, using and Analyzing Rubrics in Language Assessment with Case Studies in Asian and Pacific Languages. Honolulu, HI: National Foreign Languages Resource Center.

Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA),
http://www.carla.umn.edu/assessment/vac/Evaluation/res_1.html Fiderer, A. (1999).40 rubrics & checklists to assess reading and writing. New York: Scholastic Goodrich Andrade, H. (1997). Understanding rubrics. Originally published in Educational

Leadership http://www.ascd.org/publications/educationalleadership/dec96/vol54/num04/Understanding-Rubrics.aspx KasmanValenza, J. (2000). Students and teachers alike can benefit from rubrics: Selections from an interview with Dr. AndStix. http://www.interactiveclassroom.com/pdf/2000_Students_and_Teachers_Alike_Can_Benefit_from_Rubri cs_Philly.pdf Lloyd-Jones, R. (1977). Primary trait scoring. In C.R. Cooper & L. Odell (Eds.), Evaluating writing: Describing, measuring, judging (pp. 33-66). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English. Luft, Julie. Design Your Own Rubric. http://plato.acadiau.ca/courses/educ/GMacKinnon/EDUC4143/graphics/rubrics.pdf McNamara, T. (1996). Measuring second language performance. London: Longman.

Moskal, B.M. (2000). Scoring rubrics: What, when and how? Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 7(3) Popham, W.J. (1995). Classroom Assessment: What Teachers Need to Know. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon. SRI International: Center for Technology in Learning. (1997-2002). PALS Guide http://pals.sri.com/guide/index.html Stevens, D.& Levi, A. An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning.2005

Stiggins, R.J. (1994). Student-Centered Classroom Assessment. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company. Taggart, G.L., S.J. Phifer, J.A. Nixon, and M. Wood. (1998). Rubrics: A handbook for construction and use. Lancaster, PA: Technomic Publishing Company TeacherVision.com. (2000-2002). The advantages of rubrics: Part one in a five-part serieshttp://www.teachervision.fen.com/teaching-methods-and-management/rubrics/4522.html Tedick, D.J. (2002). Proficiency-oriented language instruction and assessment: Standards, philosophies, and considerations for assessment. In Minnesota Articulation Project, D. J. Tedick (Ed.), Proficiency-oriented language instruction and assessment: A curriculum handbook for teachers (Rev Ed.). CARLA Working Paper Series. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acqusition.