

Top tips for understanding rubrics



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Using a rubric can help you do well on an assignment. Print the rubric and use it as a guide to keep you on track as you complete your work. These top tips will help you understand and use rubrics to their full potential.

What is a rubric?

A rubric is an assignment guideline that shows what your professor is looking for and how you can meet those expectations. In other words, a rubric explains what makes one assignment exceptional and another one unacceptable.

What does a rubric look like?

Rubrics vary from course to course and from professor to professor. Rubrics are typically presented in a chart format and contain the following elements:

Criteria: located in the first column, each rubric criterion provides a detailed description of a specific item that needs to be addressed in your assignment (e.g. research, content, organization).

Levels: located in the top row, marks associated with each criterion are presented in many ways, including points (e.g. 1, 2, 3, 4) and/or words (e.g. excellent, good, fair, poor). The following example is for a Research criterion and includes a detailed description for each level:

- **Excellent (4):** Research is thorough and provides factual and relevant content to the assignment.
- **Good (3):** Research is complete and mostly factual and relevant to the assignment.
- **Fair (2):** Research is mostly complete, but is not factual and is irrelevant to the assignment.
- **Poor (1):** Research is incomplete and does not add value to the assignment.

Know the key words

Levels can be represented using different descriptors. See the list below for some examples:

- **Excellent:** thorough, all necessary, exceeds expectations, always, clear, significant, accurate, strong, complete
- **Good:** often, meets expectations, considerable
- **Fair:** adequate, somewhat, satisfactory, some effectiveness, sometimes
- **Poor:** needs improvement, limited, incomplete, lacks, inappropriate, unclear, none, unsatisfactory, minimal, below expectations

How do I get an A+?

Rubrics take the guesswork out of how to complete an assignment. If you are aiming for an A+, you can see the exact criteria and guidelines you must follow. Take ownership of your learning and make responsible choices that will help you achieve an excellent mark.

What is it worth?

It is no secret that the life of a student is busy with multiple tests and assignments. How do you know which assignments to start first? Refer to each rubric and note the number of criteria that you have to fulfill. The more detailed the rubric, the greater the chance you will have to spend more time on that assignment in order to meet all of the expectations.

Identify your strengths

What are you good at? Look for criteria that you are most confident in doing well and complete those tasks first. For example, if you are good at finding a variety of credible sources, start by researching and keeping your research organized. Maximize your chance for success by building on your strengths.

Address your challenges

Assess the criteria that you are not as strong in and use the rubric to help develop those skills. For instance, if you typically lose marks for grammatical errors, allow time to get help to improve your editing skills. Use the rubric to help you become an even better student.

Self- and peer-review

Print several copies of the assignment rubric and use it to mark your own assignment and/or have a peer review it for you. This will not only help you measure and judge the quality of your work, it will allow you to monitor your own progress and make the adjustments if needed.