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| **[Rubrics: An Undervalued Teaching Tool](http://email.magnapubs.com/e1t/c/%2AV7h56d3v4l7nW9jl1B-2WvClz0/%2AN53K0bp2v39YVQwRWw8gjXxx0/5/f18dQhb0S1Xm7B0H3gW11fJc61SwYRtV29jPl1t8w96W6qGmqX6ktBRJW2HKnGC5_MKTNW6Wp_N12cB6C-W4sB-X97VgFBlW2kPMj05VL3RSW6xSm4g22nBKjW7K8JLx4vHqsqW1rdbns4dV9XWW8JqC455SWNzNW3HVCYK8L_P5YW8RNmRN6THpNXW50pZKr59g0zJVGWfty4NDPQqVf9KC47Cwx93N5BRlVlBMkNxW8cBq0y3GK6LlW1hgRWN27yQNqW1bDXrR5NsZqkVMgl2g6rj-q8W7gjrh799ZXh_W3PJR8w6b3kFKW7mC-8p8VwlqMN4QW5NhcZlR4W98wjJv1t4c22W2NYn2j3LsG9JW5gQBTK6xVCxZW4TjWnC6HyDFTW5F7Sz821SygRW3KfhVq6FlT-QW4xCVHP1cpzybW2gbxk153GDsmW3Y3brC6pJkkSN5GJs2rxRZYKW2b8f7y8-FMgyN9fyPZ1NxRzlW5zQSKv6ptsnqW6Qt_FX34WzDDW7qcPfW1cBr89W4CD9j86ypylbW5-zXFd6_5H6pW4jPP537VK_zNW1yN0M493ksFwW7ZY3zP4wF8MdW8WcMdv96DZglW1VBW1H8dVhPC103)** |

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| By Stephanie Almagno, PhDEnglish teachers know a few things about managing the paper load. But managing isn’t leading. We should do more than manage the load; we should lead our students through the writing process (invention, drafting, and revising) to help them become independent thinkers who can effectively present their ideas to an audience.Rubrics offer an effective way to guide thinking and learning in any writing-intensive course.HINT: Distribute the assignment sheet and rubric at the same time that you introduce a writing assignment. Students need this concrete information from the onset for self-improvement at all stages of the writing process. Your rubric should be clear enough that students understand your expectations even when you are not available for consultation.Here are five different ways to apply the same rubric in your classroom.1. **A Rubric for Thinking** (Invention Activity)* Immediately following the initial discussion of a writing assignment and its corresponding rubric, allow students to work independently for a few moments, generating their initial ideas for their papers.
* After brainstorming, direct students to reflect on the rubric to encourage additional responses to the topic at hand. The rubric should spark thinking.

Hint: Work with struggling students during this process. Demonstrate ways to use the rubric to flesh out their initial responses. This is your time to answer authentic questions one-on-one. 2. **A Rubric for Peer Feedback** (Drafting Activity)* Vomit drafts. Teachers don’t like to read them, so let the students read each other’s and score them against the rubric.
* Use rubrics for peer feedback at all stages of the writing process. If today is the day to review use of secondary sources and subsequent citations, pair students and set them to work.
* Students should respond to each other’s work using the verbiage in the assigned domains. Based on peer feedback, students should make adjustments and enhance their use of sources.
* Students can score their use of sources/citations against the rubric and discuss why these elements earn the grade they do. Remember, grades are earned, not given. Students should be able to align their essays and their components with established rubric categories and indicators.
* Use guided peer feedback throughout the writing process as homework or in class.

Hint: Rubrics should contain a discrete space for the name of the peer editor.**3. A Rubric for Teacher Feedback** (Revision Activity)* In this use of the rubric, you are offering a mulligan, a “do over”—students will appreciate this. Don’t worry about attributing points or grades to each domain on the rubric; instead, simply provide feedback. You are telling students, in so many words, “what works” and “what needs work.”
* Use symbols to convey quality of work. Stars and checkmarks indicate areas of strength. Or consistently use three emoticons: smile, meh, and frown. The emoticons speed up your response time, and while they provide authentic feedback, symbols don’t carry the same weight as a red-inked D. Reserve comments for clarification/remediation or indication of remarkable insight.

HINT: Student projects should include multiple drafts (look for development of ideas). Also collect peer feedback rubrics; “eyeball” these to ascertain the quality of student responses. Remember, teaching students to be good editors takes time and training.4. **A Rubric for Mini-Lessons** (Data Indicate a Teachable Moment)* Most teachers miss this use of rubrics. Prepare mini-lessons for authentic and immediate feedback to the entire class based on data gleaned from the rubric.
* After you respond to a set of papers, scan the rubric for the categories where the greatest number of students demonstrated proficiency and, conversely, showed need of remediation. Prepare mini-lessons to refresh or reteach the skills in the weakest category.
* Use students who excelled in this category to lead the discussion of the element being remediated.
* After a mini-lesson, students will have a better understanding of ways to improve the skill being discussed in the context of their own essays; this should lead to higher scores in that category and in subsequent revisions.

HINT: Return papers before the mini-lesson so students know that this lesson is for them.5. **A Rubric for Making Grades Visible** (Student Investment in Grading)* When students submit projects for grading, they should attach the rubric they used to score themselves. This combats the erroneous idea that grading criteria is vague or invisible.
* With this use, students assess their own strengths, weaknesses, and areas for revision.
* The teacher, in turn, responds to the projects on the same rubric. This is a check for inter-rater reliability. If the teacher and the student are close in their assessments, only moderate intervention is needed. But if the teacher and the student issue markedly different scores for a category, then remediation is needed—usually in the form of a quick in-class conference.

Hint: Always respond in a signature ink color. It should stand out against the students’ writing.How often have we heard that students believe grades to be arbitrary or capricious? Repeated use of a single rubric is good for both students and instructors. Switching roles between author and editor results in students’ increased familiarity with the process and the components of good writing. Over the course of the semester, students will synthesize the rubric’s components into effective communication. The instructor, too, will shift from “sage on the stage” to “guide on the side,” answering fewer questions (and answering the same question fewer times). In other words, students will gain greater independence as writers and thinkers. And this is good for all of us.Stephanie Almagno is associate dean of the School of Arts & Sciences at Piedmont College.  |

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