

## STRATEGY GUIDE

# Using Rubrics

A rubric is more than a tool to assess final products. It is a tool that should be leveraged throughout the project to support multiple kinds of learning opportunities for your students.

## Why is it useful?

Here are some of the powerful learning opportunities that are created when rubrics are used throughout the project:

### Making expectations transparent.

Students are most likely to succeed when we are transparent about expectations and assessment criteria from the beginning. We compound our students' chances of success when they either see and reflect on rubrics during the first few days of a project or we co-create the rubrics with our students after we discuss the end products. The goal is to build rubrics for each product that have clear distinct indicators that are derived from appropriate standards in student-friendly language.

### Cultivating growth mindset.

Rubrics are also not just for the end of projects when students turn in perfectly polished products. Your rubrics should serve as primary reference points from the beginning of product creation, through various rounds of critique, and into the final presentation. When used throughout the project to guide formative feedback, we help model and scaffold a growth mindset process for students. We show them that the first draft is a good start, but since the goal is growth, we work with students to keep crafting, reflecting, and drafting until presentation day.

## Giving and receiving feedback.

Strong, effective feedback is imperative to quality products and presentations. To help students create those quality products without holding their hands, encourage them by routinely giving effective feedback using your high quality rubrics. Then we add the use of protocols alongside those rubrics to teach them how to give each other effective feedback and how to appropriately receive and use peer feedback. Finally, we celebrate at the end with rubrics as both we and our students use the product and success skills rubrics one final time to reflect on how far they have come in their learning.

## Emphasizing success skills in addition to content.

Be sure to have rubrics for individual products and the success skill you'll be emphasizing with students. While the hope is that students will be engaged in several success skills throughout a project, to keep students from becoming overwhelmed consider emphasizing one success skill for each PBL unit. For example, students may be engaging in several success skills (e.g., self-management, critical thinking, and collaboration) during a single PBL unit, but you decide to focus on collaboration for this project. Hence you will want a collaboration rubric that students use to reflect and self- and peer-assess throughout the project in addition to any product rubrics.

## What do I do?

The following are recommended ways to use rubrics throughout a project:

STEPS	INSIGHTS/SUGGESTIONS
<p><b>Student Choice:</b> Ensure that students have ample time to sift through and analyze rubrics for each product they will create in the project. Do this before they ever start creating products.</p>	<p>Students are more likely to buy into the project expectations when they contribute to rubric creation. You can co-construct the rubric with your students by dissecting an exemplar of the product for both content and style, and then identifying the indicators and that all agree belong on the rubric.</p> <p>Reviewing an exemplar is also an effective way to help students unpack the criteria in teacher-created rubrics.</p> <p><i>Early Elementary Tip:</i> Students will need simplified rubrics that you go over either individually (beginning of the year) or in small groups (later in the year). You might consider making the rubric a learning station on some days so that students have regular opportunities to explore and understand it.</p>

<p><b>Build Knowledge:</b> Create a routine in which students use the rubric to reflect on what they know and what they need to know in order to move forward.</p>	<p>You may find it useful to set aside a specific day of the week to check status/progress with the rubric. Writing rubric checks into the Project Calendar that's posted for students (physically in the room or digitally) may be a helpful reminder for you and your students to take the time to assess and reflect.</p> <p><i>Early Elementary Tip:</i> Consider having students circle rubric indicators at different points during the project using different colored markers to show growth over time (e.g., green at the beginning, blue in the middle, red at the end).</p>
<p><b>Develop and Critique:</b> Create a routine where students are pulling out their rubrics to self- and peer-assess progress regularly.</p>	<p>The most effective revisions happen after taking time for reflection on the critique received. Make sure to build in these days up front when planning out how long your project will take.</p> <p>Create formal opportunities for students to utilize the rubrics by implementing critique protocols such as the <a href="#">Charrette Protocol</a>, <a href="#">Rose, Bud, Thorn Protocol</a>, or the <a href="#">Tuning Protocol</a>.</p> <p>Don't forget your success skill rubric! Students should self- and peer-assess growth in the chosen success skill as well as growth in content knowledge.</p>
<p><b>Presentation:</b> Ensure students have time to reflect not only on their product/performance but also their learning in the project.</p>	<p>Rubrics are an essential tool for reflection during and at the end of the project. Reserve a good chunk of the day after project presentations for students to go over audience, teacher, and peer feedback to accurately assess themselves one final time before you do the final assessment.</p> <p><i>Early Elementary Tip:</i> Your class may need two days so you can meet with each student about their thoughts and self-assessments.</p>

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## Troubleshooting Tips

**Students don't understand the rubric.** When students don't understand the rubric, chances are that the rubric can be greatly improved. Language in a rubric should be understandable and student friendly. Be open to revising the rubric with students so that it is accessible to them. It is also important for you to model the use of the rubric to increase student understanding of it and how to use it. This helps calibrate assessment across the class so that self- and peer-assessments are accurate.

**Student don't use the rubric until the end of the project.** Build in routines for regular checking on progress in relation to the rubric.

**Rubrics focus on quantity rather than quality.** Less effective rubrics tend to focus on existence of components rather than depth (e.g., "Students must provide three reasons for the Civil War." rather than "Student supports their arguments with evidence and reasoning in an easy to follow, logical manner."). In this case, return to the standards that the product is assessing for mastery and rewrite the rubric to focus on depth of knowledge.