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# Developing Criteria Rubrics in the Art Classroom

BY SANDRA MCCOLLISTER



**Classroom art teachers** are often required to use multiple methods of assessment to evaluate student work. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2001) expects qualified art teachers to “regularly monitor, analyze, and evaluate their teaching and student progress” (p. 61). It is the art teacher’s responsibility to “help students reflect on their own art learning and monitor their progress” (p. 63). Criteria rubrics can serve to guide and stimulate artistic and intellectual assessment. This article presents ideas for the development of rubrics in the art classroom.

A rubric, in this context, is a chart or matrix that describes varying levels of competency or success. The rubric may serve as a developmental guide or scoring device for many assessment approaches. The rubric may articulate qualities that are present in finished work or within a process. Rubrics may be designed for individual artwork, essay answers on tests, critiques, class presentations, district art assessments, portfolios, and any other assignments that result in student work of varying qualities. Rubrics can be particularly serviceable to inform students of ways to improve their learning and to inform teachers of ways to improve their teaching.

## How could we characterize a classroom rubric?

Generally, the classroom rubric provides a description of varying levels of productive completion of a particular lesson (see Figure 1, Mask Rubric). The classroom art teacher creates rubrics to support teaching and grading. The “in-progress” category notes prerequisite skills, what a student needs to know to get started. The “novice” category includes expectations for all students, the essential artistic requirements of the lesson. “Intermediate” indicates the presence of stronger visual and intellectual qualities in finished work. The “advanced” category characterizes the qualities of the most successful solutions in terms of creativity, intentions, and material use.

It is important to remember that as learners, we do things differently as we progress on any continuum of learning and develop greater competency. We don't simply do more of the same thing. We change our strategies, techniques, processes, output, and level of effectiveness. Good rubrics, when used to describe complex skill acquisition, will characterize different attributes of competency rather than simply showing an increase in the amount produced.

The rubric can be elastic and responsive and can be created with students and edited collaboratively with students, or it can be developed by the teacher individually. The rubric provides less experienced students with clear information about what to do to improve their work. A “reinterpretation” section may be added to give art teachers an accountability tool for the creative or advanced student that would require self-generated criteria of merit. Accommodation is possible for special needs students and gifted students.

## Is a rubric the same as listing steps in a lesson?

The rubric *does not* list the instructional steps within the lesson. Rather, the rubric responds to the question, “What qualities and characteristics may be present within the finished work at varying levels?” In the example of the mask rubric, the students' abilities to create three-dimensional shapes, learn to mix and apply desired colors, recognize cultural meaning and expressiveness, work with various materials, and develop texture have been identified repeatedly by the teacher and students as being important variables in finished work. These variables became the criteria labels in the left-hand column of the rubric.

The steps within the mask lesson itself include 1) an introduction with examples, slides, prints and video tape clips as motivators; 2) an explanation of the rubric; 3) instruction in basic papier mâché; 4) student research and preliminary drawings (full face and profile); 5) individual planning dialogues between student and teacher; 6) demonstrations of several more elaborate three-dimensional construction techniques; 7) paint mixing and color theory; and 8) ongoing studio work with problem solving. Formative and summative assessments are also present within dialogues, self-evaluation, display, and the group critique.

The mask rubric (Figure 1) states, “Not all characteristics are present in each outcome.” It is important for students to realize that there are many pathways to strong results. It is also possible to delete numerous phrases from this particular rubric, simplify the content, and use the model with younger students. The original was developed with young adults.

## What about rubrics for art assignments other than studio-based lessons?

You would change the criteria, of course, again asking “What qualities and characteristics are most desirable in finished work?” For example, in an assignment to write a critical essay of a local outdoor sculpture, the art teacher may include steps for student learning such as: 1) background research, 2) site visit, 3) selection and use of an appropriate critical model, 4) drafting the essay, 5) peer editing, and 6) final copy of edited and crafted writing. A rubric to guide the essay development and evaluation may include criteria such as careful observational skills, the effective selection and use of a critical model, cohesive writing, interpretive content and meaning clarity, richness of language use, or correct grammar use. We would then name and describe varying levels of competency for criteria within the rubric in order to advance and evaluate student progress.

## How do descriptions on a rubric relate to cognitive processing?

Frequently art teachers, artists, and advanced art students take their personal expertise for granted. We forget what it was like to be a beginner, and we may pursue visual exploration and reach visual success in very automatic or fluid ways, not even having a conscious awareness of the synthetic nature of our process. Cognitive psychologists have long been interested in the notion of “expert” thinking, and Snow and Lohman (1989) have described the cognitive orientations that are present within expert or “proceduralized” knowledge. The authors have described the *conceptual foundation* that undergirds the practices to be learned, the why and the how of the

learning. The knowing student becomes able to monitor and facilitate *correctness of output*, recognizing and avoiding errors. Proceduralized knowledge becomes *automatized*, requiring less and less thought and attention and maintaining quality in the face of concurrent tasks or demands. The knowledge shows a *degree of composition*, a wholeness. Steps become less necessary or apparent, and student performance smoothes and occurs more readily. A student with proceduralized knowledge recognizes the possibilities and limitations of the transference of that knowledge and makes appropriate *generalizations*. Finally, students develop *metacognition*: they think about their thinking.

The use of a rubric that is rich in description allows the teacher to disclose a great body of information to a large number of students, answer many questions, and demystify the learning at hand. Taken-for-granted proceduralized knowledge is more clearly revealed, and the percentage of students who can do well increases.

### What practical role does the rubric play to improve student performance?

The rubric, whether generated with a class or previously constructed with an earlier class, can assist the teacher in learner intervention. Intervention can occur when a student is faltering or uncertain and experiencing difficulty making transitions from less-sophisticated to more sophisticated work (Henning-Stout, 1994). The rubric also clarifies the teacher's expectation of a shared knowledge base for a particular lesson (McCollister, 1993). The shared knowledge base may be developed in prerequisite courses or may have been developed by the art teacher in the early part of a course. For example,

after having been taught the elements and principles of design or ideas about the role of folk art in local culture, the class shares this knowledge and can appreciate transfer of knowledge within new learning experiences. Clearly, the "in-progress" category specifies pre-requisite skills and knowledge. Additionally, this levels the playing field and allows the less-experienced student to identify a point of entry into the process and an opportunity to say, "I don't get it," or, "I'll need to learn how to do this." Also, many learners need to read in order to understand instruction.

The teacher can use the rubric as a tool in intervention to inform a conversation with the student concerning work-in-progress. This informed dialogue can assist the learner with 1) increased personal responsibility, 2) independence, 3) accurate self-assessment, 4) application of concepts, and 5) selective attention to what is important. These are personal qualities that Deitz (1994) identified as integral to the process of developing from a less experienced to a more advanced student. The teacher can pose the question, "What do you think would be the next step for you?" and guide the discussion.

Many students must look critically and with discernment at other students' solutions, before they can understand their own range of possibilities with materials or meaning, and *before* they can understand their own goals and capabilities. This is not to imply copying, but rather the insight and leaps of faith that bolster confidence. Rich and diverse encouragement (which may include humor, compliments, interest, caring, praise, and peptalks) combine with the specificity of this critical discernment, motivating the highest level of student achievement. Additionally, many students must

be physically involved with materials prior to "getting it" and personal idea development. This kinesthetic engagement is absolutely necessary for many art students, and the teacher may bring the student's attention back to the criteria rubrics and lesson expectations as the student work progresses.

### My art classroom is very busy. How can I find time to develop rubrics with student input?

Start with one of your favorite lessons or a lesson you know could be better, lessons that trigger enthusiasm for you and for your students. Work with the students by *posing a general question*. After a lesson introduction, simply ask, "What qualities and characteristics should be present in the finished work?" or "What qualities would the work have if it were the best work you have ever done?"

Keep a list on the board; have the dialogue in more than one class. Soon you will have a list of criteria and also some descriptive statements about how the criteria could be met. Select three to six criteria and place them in the left-hand column on a matrix and then begin to add descriptive statements under appropriate headings "in-progress," "novice," "intermediate," and "advanced." The matrix may be posted on butcher paper, and additions can be made in an ongoing manner. To open a class or to close a class, as students are in process with their artwork, one may ask, "What do you see that is working?", "How does that visual characteristic (or material use or problem solving strategy) fit with our rubric?"

Brainstorm with visuals. The visuals may be examples of previous students' work, work-in-progress, slides, illustrations from texts, teacher-prepared examples, or preliminary drawings



**Figure 1: Mask Rubric**

**Please note: Not all characteristics are present in each outcome.**

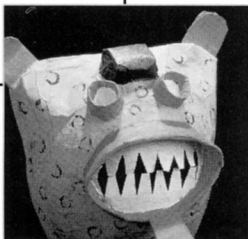
**LESSON TITLE:** Papier Mâché Masks

**OUTCOME:** Three dimensional papier mâché construction, painted, multi-media accessories

**OBJECTIVE:** Creation of mask or headdress from selected culture

**CRITERIA:** Specific behaviors, products, characteristics, and qualities we look for in evaluating finished work

Criteria	In Progress	Novice	Intermediate	Advanced
Three dimensional construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Idea</li> <li>Thinking 3-D</li> <li>Molding and shaping</li> <li>Applying papier mâché</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attachments</li> <li>Balloon base</li> <li>Papier mâché</li> <li>Mastering materials</li> <li>Consider view from the side and front</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Control over shape</li> <li>Smoothness</li> <li>Texture</li> <li>Increased complexity</li> <li>Shape is actual</li> <li>Shape the nose, eyes, chin, jaw, and mouth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Real" as intended</li> <li>Proportions</li> <li>Physical strength</li> <li>Able to fulfill intentions</li> </ul>
Use of color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop skills in mixing</li> <li>Knowledge of color wheel</li> <li>Choosing paint</li> <li>Using brushes</li> <li>Placement</li> <li>Clean up</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Controlling values, hues</li> <li>Changing values</li> <li>Shading (light to dark)</li> <li>Mixing color</li> <li>Effective brush use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Color harmony, schemes</li> <li>Range and variety</li> <li>Imaging, choice, mastering</li> <li>Texturized with paint</li> <li>Unifying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visual texture</li> <li>Actual color/texture</li> <li>Enhanced color schemes with various materials</li> </ul>
Cultural meaning, expression	Cultural icon: knowledge of purpose in culture Myth, story: classic, ancient, recent Sensibility: grace, mood, respect, freedom		Evokes aesthetic response Expression can transform during making	
Use of materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thinking or planning</li> <li>Think of different ways to use folders, newspaper, paint, etc.</li> <li>Securing parts</li> <li>Knowledge of the different types of available materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selecting appropriate materials</li> <li>Combining materials</li> <li>Making contours and creating extremities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Variety of materials attached</li> <li>Attachments well-blended into whole</li> <li>Gives meaning</li> <li>Emphasize and exaggerate eyes, ears, etc.</li> <li>Creating aesthetic question</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating a unified look with all materials</li> <li>Choosing appropriate paints and materials</li> </ul>
Texture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing skills with paint, crumpled paper, and paper towels</li> <li>Joining thoughts with knowledge of what makes a particular texture</li> <li>Visualizing surface</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manipulate material to make smooth or rough</li> <li>Show lines and wrinkles when needed; show smooth areas when needed</li> <li>Create textures with paint or other materials</li> <li>Achieving texture desired through different mediums</li> <li>Texture corresponds with subject of the piece</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use of paint improves wrinkles and smooth parts start forming</li> <li>Use of fibers</li> <li>Some textures adapted to the mood of the piece</li> <li>Texture adds "realness"</li> <li>Develop different sections</li> <li>Surface is touchable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mask looks authentic</li> <li>Flow and unity</li> <li>Accomplish a detailed effect</li> <li>Creative use of materials</li> <li>Placement of pattern, may have added spots, whiskers, different shades of fur.</li> </ul>





## STEPS to DEVELOPING RUBRICS

1. Use any blank sheet of paper or the worksheet to begin developing a rubric or description of criteria. Across the top, write:

Criteria	In-Progress	Novice	Intermediate	Advanced
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2. Think about your lesson or assignment. What will the **outcome** of your lesson be? What is your **objective**?

What *learning* would you like to take place? What *qualities and characteristics* would this learning have? How would you *describe* the learning? Begin taking notes in response to the questions.

3. Name two to four **criteria** and place the words in a column on the left hand side. Consider how students manifest this criteria in their work.

4. Begin by writing the **Novice** or foundational level. Describe your expectations.

What would you like everyone within the class to *learn* and *show* within the outcome of this assignment relative to the criteria? All of these characteristics go in the **Novice** column.

5. For the **In-Progress** column, imagine skills which people may need in order to perform at the **Novice** level.

What *skills* will you need to *remediate*? What will make it impossible for some learners to follow your instructions? This information helps students name and identify what they need to learn and see their next steps while in-progress of developing capabilities.

6. Consider the **Intermediate** designation. How do people work as they develop competency?

We do not necessarily do more of the same thing. Students do assignments *differently*, in a different manner, using different approaches, and having different realizations. What are these manners, approaches, realizations within this lesson? Characterize work that improves beyond the novice level within the **Intermediate** designation.

7. The **Advanced** arena can be exciting.

How does one characterize the work of advanced learners, people who demonstrate competency, students who may be *reinterpreting the assignment effectively*? There will be striking qualities, obvious, meaningful, varied, and, hopefully, surprising. Notice these qualities and describe them in the **Advanced** column.

### POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- Students will be "in-progress" in many areas of learning and "intermediate" in others, with "advanced" competencies in others. That's fine and can be recognized openly.
- All characteristics are *not* present in all successful solutions.
- Rubrics are not a secret. Share them with your students.
- Add to them, delete from them, incorporate student suggestions, and facilitate reinterpretations when appropriate.
- It is possible to start with *novice* and add descriptions to *in-progress*, *intermediate*, and *advanced* while a lesson is in process.



created to facilitate the planning and conceptualization process by the students. Look at it, see what works, what doesn't work, and why. Have vocabulary listings posted in the room to stimulate and reinforce articulation. This brainstorming with visuals often takes place individually or in a critique. But, by the time you get to a critique, it is too late and too discouraging for most students to re-engage in their work. See what is working as early in the lesson as possible.

Other techniques for gathering descriptions of criteria include individual response sheets, written self- and group-generated criteria, student notes from self-evaluation check sheets, or your comments compiled from notes you have written about qualities of finished work at the time of grading. Another rich source that reveals student decision making and personal criteria is the recording and publication of student commentary or the "autobiography" of learning (Wolf & Pistone, 1991).

Students can become stakeholders in the process. However, the final evaluation and grading decisions rest with you, the teacher. At times, and with certain classes, it is important to clearly state that you want them to do their best, that their input is very valuable, and that the grading is your responsibility. The teacher remains the leader.

## What about grading with the rubric?

With a homogenous and fairly hard-working group of students, novice, intermediate and advanced could become C, B, and A. However, grading in K-12 art classroom is seldom that straightforward, nor are the qualities of human learning so regular and predictable. Some students will fail. Some students face complex challenges

beyond the sphere of the teacher's influence. Some students have individualized learning plans and auxiliary support systems. But, still, the grading remains the responsibility of the classroom teacher. Scoring means marking, assigning the grade, either number or letter, as well as giving descriptive praise and constructive criticism. The rubric may be used as a reference and guide for student understanding.

At times, the teacher may want to use a differential approach toward grading, noting that students show incremental growth from "left to right" on a continuum within a particular horizontal section of the rubric. If so, openly recognize at the beginning of a grading period that students come to the art class with varied experiences, and assist students in identifying their points of entry on a particular rubric. Say openly that each person will be learning and developing and growing beyond existing capabilities. This stance leads to a more individualized, criteria-referenced orientation toward grading and may require portfolio benchmarks. One can also put "positive work habits" as a criterion of the lesson, describe them at the various levels, and lend structure, direction, and reward to desired classroom behaviors.

## What are the limitations of using rubrics in the art classroom?

As with most strategies and methods of assessment, the greatest strengths can be the greatest weaknesses. Rubrics reveal certain successful qualities and characteristics of finished work, the scaffolding of a certain kind of effective result, if you will. The limitation of rubric use can be *sameness* or less variation and less risk taking in the students' solutions to the problems that lessons pose. Also, at times, students *want to know too much* about what's expected

of them and need to be guided and required to develop self-confidence and make their own decisions, experience trial and error, and explore personal authenticity and purpose. Extensive use of criteria rubrics can hamper personal responsibility, creativity, and independence. Art teachers and students benefit from the use of varied assessment strategies. We must ultimately evaluate our own work and shape our direction and purpose accordingly.

## I need more information about rubric design. Where should I look?

Regarding research on rubrics, Arter and McTighe (2001) lead the way in their text, *Scoring Rubrics in the Classroom*, with plentiful examples and guidelines for practical rubric development. Their extensive background in performance assessment and staff development inform the work and provide us with a "metarubric," a guide to the critical review of rubrics considering the criteria of content/coverage, clarity/detail, usability, and technical quality.

## In Summary

Developing scoring rubrics within the art classroom can be a rich and rewarding experience for teachers and students alike. Student articulation is enhanced when brainstorming the contents of rubrics. The students look for, recognize, and describe the qualities within the finished work. The students' ability to use language that represents varying cognitive and manipulative processes and results is practiced and refined, and, as expectations are clarified and strengthened, student work improves.

As art teachers, one of the most striking outcomes of rubric development and use with students can be the

improvement of our teaching methodologies. Reflective teachers realize that recognizing our students' inventiveness and successes teaches us how to improve instruction. We learn from our students. We may need to re-teach a fundamental concept or add a second or third demonstration or intervene with a mid-point peer review. As we seek to describe clearly the many avenues to competence and achievement, we also discover our weaknesses and the changes that are needed in our instruction.

While creating and modifying criteria rubrics in the art classroom, you will be modeling your own willingness to learn and the creative process of teaching. You will show respect for and require your students' ability to be discerning and articulate. And, most probably, you will enhance the qualities of their productivity and your own. The use of the criteria rubric is one of several possible assessment strategies for the art classroom today.

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