ENVISION LEARNING PARTNERS Inspiring Results

Rubric Writing Rules of Thumb

1. **Rubrics are tools for measuring skills.**
   Use rubrics strategically. They are a solution to the particular problem of evaluating complex performances.
2. **A learner should see the same rubric multiple times; design accordingly.**
   Ideally, rubrics measure skills that are transferable; therefore, students should have multiple opportunities to measure themselves on the same rubric. Not only does this help learners understand the trajectory of their learning, it also helps them see that the skills are, indeed, transferable.
3. **Write the proficient level first.**
   Above all, a rubric is a way to communicate to a student what quality is. Start by describing what success looks like.
4. **Isolate discrete parts.**
   To the degree that you can, you want your rubric dimensions (typically rows) to represent distinct sub-skills of the larger performance. Obviously, the parts are related, but if a student's performance on one dimension moves in lockstep with another, then take time to reconsider your analysis. Ideally, a rubric helps students identify areas where they are succeeding, despite other areas were they still have much to learn.
5. **Rubrics should detail things you (or your colleagues) plan to teach and students will have opportunities to practice.**
   It is frustrating to learners, not to mention unfair, to be assessed on things they haven't had a chance to learn or practice.
6. **Wherever possible, avoid adjectives and adverbs. Prefer nouns and verbs.**
   Qualifiers tend to raise the very questions the rubric was meant to answer in the first place. What does "competent" or "insufficient" or "narrowly" mean? Where you see an adjective or adverb, try to replace or supplement it with a phrase that is more specific. For example, a "sophisticated" thesis is one that "defines the limits of its claims."
7. **Use the rubric to communicate pitfalls and things to avoid.**
   Rubrics are meant to communicate to students how to succeed. Because of your professional expertise, you know what mistakes students commonly make that keep them from their potential. Where appropriate, use the rubric to give explicit tips on what to do and what not to do.
8. **The student is the rubric's end user. Write to the student.**
   Make the language student friendly. Use first or second person when appropriate.