# Employ Student-Created Rubrics

## Have Students Create Their Own Rubrics

Many wonderful books and articles explain how to use rubrics, so I won't focus on those here. Rubrics can be time-savers, and schools like them because they create programmatic uniformity and efficiency. However, they also can feel impersonal and may not give students the information they need to improve.

I prefer to have students create their own rubrics. I do this in two ways, depending upon the class, the assignment, and the class time I am willing to use.

## Option 1: Class-Created Rubric

We begin as a class by listing essay elements students feel are most important. Then we combine some elements into categories (argument and thesis, for example, are one category), eliminate repetitive or unnecessary elements, and assign percentages to the items. This work requires some cooperation and compromise, and we put items to a binding class vote. In about fifteen minutes, we create a rubric over which the students feel agency.

I tell them that I have veto power (so, for example, if they all decide that the essay should be graded entirely on spelling, I will veto that) but that they can determine what elements of the essay should be privileged. In general, their rubrics do not differ tremendously from ones that I would create, but their creation of the rubric has two distinct advantages:

1. **They are more familiar with it.**
2. **They feel connected to the grading of their essays.**

## Option 2: Each Student Creates Their Own Rubric

A second option is to have each student create her own rubric, a blank version of which is submitted as the essay's cover page. I provide parameters: the rubric must include at least five elements; higher-order concerns like content must be weighed more than lower-order concerns like sentence structure; and argument must be among the elements. I sometimes ask that students include a few sentences explaining their rubric to show that they have thought about their choices.

| Advantages: | Disadvantages: |
|---|---|
| ● We don't use class time<br>● Students needn't agree with one another<br>● Students are invested in a rubric they created themselves | ● You may have to help struggling students create the rubric<br>● You have to readjust yourself to each rubric<br>● You may worry that students privilege their strengths and devalue weaknesses, which can lead to higher grades, but I haven't found this to manifest in reality. |

Mostly, the differences among student rubrics are minimal, but the payoff is well worth the small adjustments you must make as you comment on their work.

## Why It Works

Students generally take the opportunity to create rubrics seriously because they are so seldom given agency in grading, and they genuinely appreciate the opportunity. Being part of rubric creation, whether individually or as a group, lessens their sense that grading is arbitrary.

## Keep It Simple

A student-created rubric in my class might look more like this:
- Argument/thesis (25%)_____
- Support for argument (25%)_____
- Organization (20%)_____
- Introduction and conclusion (10%)_____
- Diction (10%)_____
- Grammar, spelling (10%)_____

If a class needs more direction, I might add adjectives:
- *"Clear, arguable, and supportable argument"*
- *"Specific and reputable support for argument"*
- *"Purposeful organization that uses topic sentences and transitions effectively"*

## Don't Forget The Feedback Loop

Finally, add a feedback loop to rubric creation by having each student fill out the rubric as well. Comparing their rubrics with yours can help students pinpoint where their self-assessment differs from that of an outside reader.