

Rubrics for teacher education in community college

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Traditional assessment techniques may not afford all students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Rubrics may help students reach the objectives of an assignment. In this study, two rubrics were introduced to 55 community college students in two sections of an undergraduate education class. The first rubric was used to grade an assignment after completion of the project. The second rubric was distributed to the students before they completed an assignment. Student response to the experience is surveyed. Most students preferred to have the rubric in advance and reported that the rubric helped clarify the assignment. Three instructors used the rubric to re-grade anonymous term papers. Inter-rater reliability patterns seem to indicate that rubrics may increase objectivity in grading.

Introduction

The need for alternative assessments has been well documented (Wiggins, 1992; Brualdi, 1998; Browder, Spooner & Algozzine, 2003; and Byrnes, 2004). Soon after the 1983 landmark publication by the National Commission on Excellence, *A Nation at Risk*, it was recognized that “... most of our present testing programs are poor instruments for improvement or maintenance of standards” (Resnick & Resnick, 1985, p.17). Lewis (1997) found that changes in assessment lead to changes in curriculum. Standardized tests are severely criticized for their questionable reliability and validity (Popham, 1999; Worthen, White, Fan & Sudweeks, 1999; and Steeves, Hodgson & Peterson, 2002). There is an ongoing debate over the use of standardized measures for high stakes decisions (Kleinhart & Kennedy, 1999; Sacks, 2000, Nezavdal, 2003; and Baines & Stanley, 2004). Us-

ing performance tasks has been proposed as either an alternative or a supplemental assessment. It is imperative that we attempt to standardize criteria and scoring as much as possible (O'Neil, 1992). To this end, educators have begun using rubrics as an in-class, school, district, city, and even statewide tool. It is suggested that future teachers need hands-on experience with rubrics as part of their training. The current research asks several questions: Will teacher education students and faculty find rubrics useful, helpful, clear, and easy to use? Will teacher education students and faculty be interested in using rubrics in the future? Will instructors' grades be similar when using rubrics?

Background and literature review

The University of Minnesota Institute for Learning Disabilities introduced curriculum-based measurement (CBM) in the 1980s under the direction of Stanley L. Deno and Phyllis Mirkin. Increasing the reliability and validity of CBM procedures was the goal (Deno, 1987). "CBM has been portrayed as more than a measurement system, however, and as a commitment to a problem-solving model of resolving educational challenges" (Shinn, Nolet and Knutson, 1990). It is believed that performance tasks help educators gain information about the abilities and knowledge of learners of English as a second language (Warren & Goodwin, 1990). Alternative assessment tech-

niques were introduced to be used with the increasing culturally and linguistically diverse school population. A common claim is that standardized tests, by their nature, include cultural bias (Wilson & Martin, 2000; Solano-Flores & Trumbull, 2003). As multi-cultural representation in American school systems grows, educators need more reflective methods of assessment, as well as teaching strategies. These theories extend to the education of students with disabilities (Meltzer, 1992). Fuchs and Fuchs (1995) state that CBM can be used with a class-wide orientation for low, average, and high achieving students; but for students with learning disabilities, CBM needs to focus on individuals.

Currently, the trend in the nation to raise academic standards in schools, while including students with special needs in general education classes, is evidenced by recent legislation in the No Child Left Behind Act, 2001, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004. The dilemma for educators is that as they include more students in traditional assessment, the normative data becomes less meaningful and true progress of individuals may be missed. Abgenyega and Jiggetts (1999) believe that minority and bilingual children may have been referred for special education services in order to claim test exemption status, thereby manipulating national test scores to produce artificial positive skews in the Bell Curve. Inclusion may reduce this possibility. The

rubric may be a solution to raising standards while focusing on student learning outcomes.

Historically, *rubric* was a theological term used to describe an outline, which may be a plan of action. During the late 1980s, rubrics originated in the study of religion. Between 1990 and 1992, the rubric began to make its appearance on the educational scene as a tool for grading curriculum-based tasks. There are many advantages of using rubrics. The following list is a combination of thoughts from the author and the work of Goodrich (1997).

- The standard of excellence is made clear.
- The scoring criteria are objective.
- The gradations of quality are explicit.
- Students are aware of teacher expectations.
- Students receive feedback about strengths and weaknesses.
- Rubrics make scoring more efficient for teachers.
- There is flexibility to accommodate a wide variety of student populations.
- Actual learning experiences are reflected in the task and measured.
- The language is positive and thus gives students the message of trust.

Previous research has focused on the use of rubrics for a variety of content areas in various grades. Rubrics are not as common at the higher education level. Hanna and Smith (1998) successfully used rubrics for interns in counselor education. Moni, Beswick and Moni (2005) used dentistry students' feedback to develop an assessment rubric for constructing a concept map in physiology. Truemper

(2004) used a scoring rubric to facilitate evaluation of graduate level nursing students. Two studies present rubrics that were used for grading the technology projects of college students (Roberts, 2005; and Tufte, 2005). Andrade and Du (2005) used rubrics with 14 undergraduate teacher education students. The students reported feeling less anxious, producing higher quality work, and earning a better grade when using the rubric. However, the study also found that most students didn't read the entire rubric and used it as a tool to satisfy a particular instructor, rather than the standards of the discipline. Andrade (2005) gives recommendations on how to use rubrics with undergraduate and graduate students.

At community colleges, the faculty is responsible for raising standards while preparing students for senior college. Since community colleges attract a wide age, ethnic, and ability range of students, rubrics may be a useful tool to help meet the goals of faculty and students in community colleges. The present study introduced the use of rubrics to two classes and two instructors in the Early Childhood Education program at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York. The student response to using rubrics was explored using a Likert-type survey, while the instructor response was explored with a series of open-ended questions. In addition, interrater patterns between instructor grades are presented.

Methodology

Rubrics were introduced to fifty-five students in two sections of an undergraduate education class, at Kingsborough Community College of the City University of New York. The class, Social Sciences in Education, focuses on teaching social studies through integrated curricula in early childhood through middle schools. Two rubrics were created for the two major term assignments. During creation of the rubrics, thought was given to the wording of positive expectations and the degrees of excellence.

As the students presented a project in class, the first rubric was used for grading (see Appendix A). The students did not have access to the rubric in advance. Before the due date for the term paper, the second rubric was distributed (see Appendix B). The author graded all of the class assignments by circling parts of the rubrics, adding comments where necessary, and then assigning a letter grade to the entire project. The rubrics were returned to the students with their work.

The second rubric (Museum Assignment) was shared with two additional instructors who teach the same course. For the purposes of comparison, two anonymous museum papers were re-graded by each instructor using the rubric. The instructors were coded Rater Y and Z for the purpose of exploring inter-rater reliability.

Fifty-one students responded to a survey, using a Likert-type scale (see Appendix C). The survey at-

tempted to probe initial reactions to rubric use and to compare the experience of using the first and second rubrics. The two instructors were given a short questionnaire regarding their new experience using rubrics (see Appendix D). Additional comments, written or verbal, were invited from students and instructors.

Analysis

Survey responses presented in Table 1 show that most of the students—99%—reported that they had never encountered rubrics before. Only one student/mother believes that the list her daughter's third grade teacher sends home for reports is a form of a rubric because it lays out the criteria of a high quality report. Most students—90%—reported using the museum rubric and 88% found it helpful, 96% clear and 80% easy to use. Additionally, 100% of the respondents would like to use rubrics again. A comparison of the Backyard History Rubric, which students received only after completing the assignment, with the Museum Rubric, which was given to students before they prepared the assignment, shows that only 10% of the respondents found the Backyard History Rubric helpful whereas 85% of the respondents found the Museum Rubric helpful.

Student comments about the Museum Rubric seemed to fall into three categories: 80% positive, 10% confused, and 10% viewing the rubric as extra work. There was

definite preference for having the rubric in advance, to consult as they prepared their work. Sample comments from students are listed below.

1. Positive comments:
 - It was great!
 - Before the rubric, I didn't know where to start.
 - It made it easy.
 - It was like a recipe; you just follow it.
 - I just went one by one and did it.
2. Comments indicating confusion:
 - I wasn't sure how to use it.
 - It looked confusing.
3. Comment indicating that the rubric was viewed as extra work:
 - I know what to do, so I didn't really look at it.

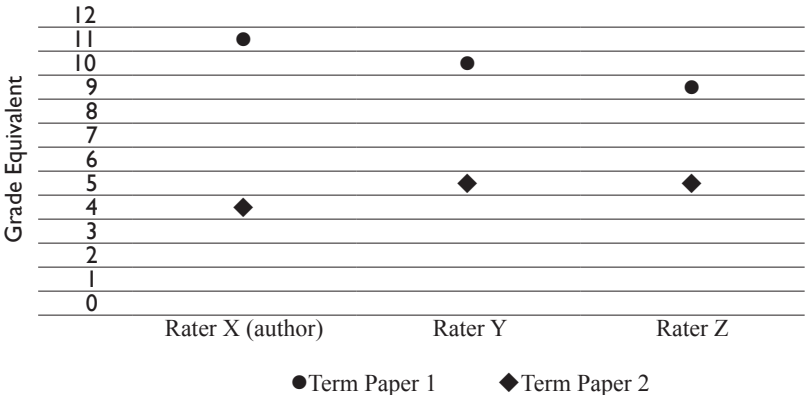
The following comments relate to the Backyard History Rubric, which students did not have in advance:

- It was not fair because we didn't know that you were using that.
- I didn't know what to expect.
- When I saw it, I said, "What is it?"

Table 1: Results of student experiences survey (N=51)

Question	Percent of responses Very or Extremely (4-5)
1) Did you use the Museum rubric?	90
2) Was the Museum rubric helpful?	88
3) Did the rubric make the assignment clear?	96
4) Was the rubric easy to use?	80
5) Was the Backyard History rubric helpful?	10
6) Did you ever see a rubric before?	99% answered "No"
7) Would you like to use rubrics again?	100% answered "Yes"

Table 2: Numeric equivalent to letter grades assigned by instructors



Inter-rater reliability could not be calculated with the sample size of three. However, the equivalent numerical values of assigned grades are presented in a scatter plot in Table 2. A visual analysis of the patterns seem to suggest that using the rubric may have increased objectivity in grading.

Apparently, the term papers were graded very similarly when the instructors used the rubric. For term paper 1, Rater X gave an A, when Rater Y gave an A- and Rater Z gave a B+. Raters Y and Z both commented that without the rubric, they think that the first paper would have been an A, and the rubric held the work to a higher standard. For term paper 2, Rater X gave a C-, when both Raters Y and Z gave C's. Here all three instructors commented that the rubric highlighted weaknesses in the paper. All of the grades for each paper were within the range of half a grade. The pattern portrayed in the table displays the difference between the two papers and the similarity in grading. This appears significant because there was very little variation in grading between raters.

The two additional instructors' comments were insightful. They both reported that they expected the rubric to be hard to use and extra work. However, by the second paper the rubric became familiar and actually quite easy. They also agreed that the assignment was accurately reflected in the rubric with clear, fair, and relevant instructional objectives. One of

the instructors declared that she felt that using a rubric would make her a "much harder grader." She was certain that before assigning a grade below "B," she would offer the student the opportunity to re-do the paper with the necessary corrections. The rubric could be helpful in isolating the absent elements. Additionally, it was noted that the Museum assignment rubric was missing some vital components such as credit given to quality of ideas, creativity, thoughtfulness and effort. Furthermore, both instructors realized that the weight of each section toward the total grade should be included. For example, for the Museum assignment the Curriculum Web, Activity Plan and Graphic Organizer would each be worth 20%. The Introduction and Class Trip would each be worth 10%.

Discussion

The survey respondents overwhelmingly reported a positive experience using rubrics. The results indicate that rubrics were a useful grading tool, which appeared to assist students in producing high quality work. Since rubrics help to approach standardization of performance tasks, when the criteria are clear, students are better equipped to attain the goal. For example, there are quantified requirements posted on several parts of the Backyard History Assignment Rubric (Appendix A) and the Museum Assignment Rubric (Appendix B). In the Backyard History Rubric, three pages of *The New York Times*

are required for a grade of A and a minimum of three generations on the Family Tree is required for a grade of A. When the gradations of quality are specific, grading is more likely to be objective and reliable. Students can have a clear indication of any weaknesses in their work. The rubric empowers students to revise and improve their assignment.

Students strongly preferred having the rubric prior to completing their work. Occasionally, students are involved in the design of the rubric. Skillings & Ferrell (2000) found that when second and third grade students collaborate on deciding what is the “very best,” “okay,” and “not so good” levels, they reach for high standards in a low-anxiety environment. Being involved in meta-cognitive activities (thinking about thinking) becomes a learning experience in its own right. Although during the current study the students did not participate in the creation of either rubric, it would be an interesting task for the future. At the community college level, students could be engaged in brainstorming sessions and/or producing sample drafts of aspects of the assignments.

In response to the questionnaire and during face-to-face meetings, the instructors provided valuable formal and informal feedback. They agreed that designing rubrics requires content from multiple sources to insure that all aspects of the assignment are clear and included in the rubric. Whether or not to include weighted values

for parts of the rubric needs to be considered. When using number grades, the weight of each aspect is important to clarify how grades were determined. In the two rubrics discussed above, students were receiving a letter grade. The value of each element of the assignment could have been used.

Recommendations for quality rubrics

Although rubrics have become popular in recent years, certain aspects distinguish quality rubrics. It is recommended that the creator of the rubric first determine the major goals of the assignment and then carefully add detailed objectives that would demonstrate student achievement of the goals. For example, a major goal of students visiting a museum is for future teachers to be able to develop theme-based instruction. In the Curriculum Web part of the Museum Assignment Rubric (Appendix B), the theme was expected to be well-defined and age appropriate. Then the number of required curriculum areas and developmentally appropriate activities need to be stated. The students had freedom in choosing the target age group and curriculum areas. For the rubric to be used as an authentic assessment tool, it is imperative that the required skills have been taught and practiced in class. Before going to a museum, the class designed hypothetical thematic instruction in small groups. It is important to be flexible in planning so that the standards on the rubric can be ad-

justed to fit the assignment.

When creating a quality measurement tool, educators must carefully word the standards of excellence. The expectations must be clear and specific. The gradations of excellence should be precise while presented in positive statements. Even though the lower levels of criteria will represent missing or incomplete work, it is imperative that the rubric does not present the lower levels as an option. For example, in the Introduction part of the Museum Assignment Rubric (Appendix B), rather than state that the student did not go to a museum or did not write an adequate introduction and thus received a grade of D, the wording remains positive with some examples of incorrect trips. The grade of D still assumes that the student attempted to go somewhere or find out about a place. The omission of a grade of F on the rubric obviously means that if the student did not prove she had attended a museum, she would not pass the assignment. The higher gradations reflect greater amounts of information and thought. To receive a grade of A on the introduction, the students were required to write a detailed account of their experience. Fewer details result in a lower grade.

Conclusion

This study included several assumptions and limitations. It was assumed that all respondents were honest. The survey and questionnaire were not tested for validity or reliability. The students in the sample were chosen by virtue of being enrolled in the course and studying to be future teachers. The instructors in the sample were chosen simply because they were teaching the same course during the same semester. Furthermore, the survey and questionnaire would not be considered inclusive of all possible areas of study. Future research may include correlating survey responses with grades on the assignments. One may examine the internal consistency of the project grades with other measures of class performance such as attendance, class participation and examinations. Exploration of reliability between raters who do not teach the class and with larger grading samples would yield additional replication of the use of rubrics as an objective grading tool. Future research may modify the study by attempting to use a control group of students who do not receive the rubric. Creating the control would be difficult since students tend to share information and are encouraged to collaborate during their studies. Investigation of teacher attitudes toward using rubrics and possible attitude change could be informative. Overall, the study supports the hypothesis that rubrics can be useful and versatile tools.

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Appendix A. The history assignment that was distributed to the class.

BACKYARD HISTORY PROJECT

This assignment is based on the required book, *My Backyard History*, by David Weitzmann. Little Brown Publishers.

Part 1

In the library, find *The New York Times* from the day you were born. (If it was on strike, choose a date that is close to your birth date.)

Read, copy and bring to class the first page and any accompanying pages that interest you. Look at pages 60-71 in your book for ideas.

Who was the president? Who was the Governor of New York State? Who was the Mayor of New York City?

What international, national and local events were in the news that day?

Who were some of the famous personalities of that time?

Research that time period by interviewing relatives to see what they recall from that time period, not just surrounding your birth.

Reflect on the material you have gathered and be prepared to give a summary comparing then to now.

Part 2

Research your place in your family's history.

Choose one of the family projects described in the *My Backyard History Book*, pages 24, 27, 30-40, or a combination. These involve interviewing older family members and getting information from a variety of sources.

Look at pages 16 - 21 and 50 - 59 for ideas on how to conduct this research. These involve creating a family tree where you trace the genealogy of your family.

Part 3

Trace your family's journey to New York City.

Interview family members about how the decision was made to come to New York and from where. Include any interesting events that happened along the way. Include a map or maps with lines showing your family's journey. See pages 28-29.

This entire history project will be presented in class.

Backyard History Assignment Rubric

	A	B	C	D
NEW YORK TIMES	Brought in at least 3 pages, including the front page. Answered all the questions. Compared then and now for at least 3 topics. Shared information from more than one source. Used visual aides.	Brought in less than 3 pages, including the front page. Answered all the questions. Compared then and now for at least 3 topics.	Brought in the front page. Answered some of the questions OR compared then and now for at least 3 topics.	Brought in one page of the newspaper. Answered some of the questions OR mentioned changes over time.
FAMILY HISTORY	Drew a creative, legible, organized family tree with at least 3 generations, a legend, 3 pieces of information on each individual and story. OR interviewed an older family member and shared general and personal information.	Drew a legible, organized family tree with at least 3 generations and symbols. OR interviewed an older family member and shared information of the past.	Drew a family tree with less than 3 generations and few lateral relatives. Used symbols inconsistently. OR interviewed an older person and shared one story.	Listed or drew a dis-organized family tree with very few relatives and information. OR spoke to someone about their life.
FAMILY JOURNEY	Researched the circumstances of the branches of family's migration to N.Y.C., based on the five social sciences. Shared information about the decision making process and family stories. Prepared and located points of departure on a map.	Researched the reason for and year of the family's migration to New York City. Shared one piece of information about the family. Located points of departure on a map, in class.	Researched the place of origin of the family. Located the point of departure on a map.	Named the place of origin of one side of the family. Needed assistance to locate the point of departure on a map.
PRESENTATION	Was present and prepared on the given due date. Presented in an organized, creative, professional manner. Took and responded to questions and/or comments. Tried to connect with the audience.	Made advance preparations for change of due date. Presented completely, in an organized manner. Responded to the audience.	Presented later than the assigned due date. Presented all parts of the project.	Presented in a hurried fashion, late and disorganized. Presentation did not reflect advance preparation.
OTHER APECTS	Did something extra. Perhaps, brought in artifacts from the family or recipes or songs, etc. Perhaps made a 3-D family tree or charts of then/now comparisons.	Tried very hard to overcome some special circumstance.		
	Additional comments:			

Appendix A: The students did not have the rubric used to grade the Backyard History assignment in advance.

Appendix B. The museum assignment distributed to the classes.

Museum assignment

Visit one of the following museums:

The Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY,
718-638-5000

The Museum of the City of New York, 1220 5th Ave, NY, NY,
212-534-1672

OR

Any Borough Children's Museum, an ethnic Museum,
or any official museum.

- 1) *Introduction*: Explain which museum you went to and a brief description of your experience.
- 2) Choose an age group, and pretend that you are the teacher taking your class on a field trip to this museum.

In Essay Form, describe how you would prepare your class for this trip. Also describe what procedures, questions, discussions, etc. you would do during the trip.

- 3) Choose one of the exhibits to use as a central theme of study. Create a *CURRICULUM WEB* of this theme with at least 5 Curriculum areas and 2 possible activities you could do for each. Of the 5 Curriculum areas, 2 must be a Social Studies Element. Do not use the term Social Studies. You must choose 2 from the G-SHAPE definitions (6 Social Sciences).
- 4) Write an *ACTIVITY PLAN* for 1 of your Social Studies ideas. Go to the library and find 2 Children's Books related to this activity, appropriate to this age group. (You may use the lists in your text.) Include using at least one of the books in your Activity. This should not be an art activity.
- 5) Create a *GRAPHIC ORGANIZER* to be used with the book and/or during the activity. There must be a minimum of 3 questions.
- 6) Include the *BIBLIOGRAPHY* of the 2 books, with ISBN numbers, or Call Numbers, author, date of publication and publisher.

Appendix B: The rubric used to grade the Museum assignment was given to the students two weeks before the due date for the project.

		Museum Assignment Rubric			
		A	B	C	D
INTRO CLASS WEB CURRICULUM ACTIVITY PLAN	Correctly identifies the full name & location of the museum. Accurately describes more than 3 exhibits. Includes information about the chosen theme, the day, and any companions. Opinions and reactions are expressed	Correctly identifies the full name of the museum. Accurately describes up to 3 exhibits. Includes information about the chosen theme. There is one opinion statement.	Identifies the name of the museum. Describes 1 exhibit. Names the theme that is chosen in the museum.	It is unclear which museum was attended or it was not a museum, such as a gallery or un-approved attraction. There is no description of the theme and exhibits.	
	Written in interesting, essay format. Age/grade is stated. Theme is introduced before the trip. Safety and social rules are clear. Logistics and organization is addressed. There is educational focus planned for during the trip.	Written in essay format. Age or grade is implied. The trip appears to be part of a theme. Safety and organization is mentioned. Children are instructed to focus on the theme.	Written as a paragraph or list. The age/grade is unclear. The theme is not introduced. Planning for during the trip is minimal.	Poorly written list of what may be seen or done on the trip.	
	The theme is well defined and age appropriate. There are 5 curriculum areas, 2 are Social Sciences. Each area has 2 creative developmentally appropriate activity ideas.	The theme is general. There are 5 curriculum areas, 2 are Social Sciences. Each area has 1 developmentally appropriate activity idea.	The theme is unclear. There are 5 curriculum areas, 2 are Social Sciences. There is less than 1 activity idea for each area.	The theme is unclear. There are less than 5 curriculum areas and/or less than 2 that are Social Sciences. There is less than 1 activity idea for each area.	
	One of the Social Science activities is DAP planned. All components of the plan are complete. The goal is written in behavioral terms. There is a minimum of 1 open-ended and 1 factual question. The questions & vocabulary relate to the goal.	One of the Social Science activities is planned. All of the components of the plan are complete. The goal is not observable or product-oriented. There is 1 open-ended and 1 factual question. The questions and vocabulary relate to the goal.	A non-social science activity is planned. Parts of the plan are incomplete. The goal is a product or not observable. There is less than 1 open-ended and 1 factual question. The questions and/or vocabulary are not related to the goal.	A non-social science activity is planned. The plan is incomplete. The goal is not written in behavioral terms. Questions and/or vocabulary are missing and do not relate to the goal.	

Appendix B: continued

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER	The graphic organizer is age appropriate. It relates to one of the children's books. There are at least 3 questions, with space for students' responses.	The graphic organizer is age appropriate. It relates to one of the children's books. There are less than 3 questions and not enough space for children's responses.	The graphic organizer is not age appropriate. It does not relate to the activity or book or trip. There are no questions.
BIBLIOGRAPHY	At least two (2) children's books are cited. The title, author, publication date, and ISBN are included. At least 1 book is a high quality literature book.	At least two (2) children's books are cited. The title, author and ISBN number are included.	One children's book is cited.
PRESENTATION	Paper is well-written. Spelling, grammar, syntax and punctuation are all correct. Essay has a clear introduction, body and conclusion. All aspects of the project are neat and legible.	Minor errors in spelling, grammar, syntax or punctuation. Essay has a beginning and a body.	Frequent errors in spelling, grammar, syntax and punctuation. Paper is illegible and sloppy.
TIMELINESS	Turned in on time.	Turned in within the week of the due date.	Turned in more than two weeks late.

Appendix C: Survey distributed to the students after their papers were returned.

Student Experience Survey

This survey is to be completed anonymously. Thank you for your honesty

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR BEST ANSWER.

1) Did you use the Museum Assignment Rubric?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much	Totally

2) Was the Museum Rubric helpful?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

3) Did the Museum Rubric make the assignment clear?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very	Extremely

4) Was the Museum Rubric easy to use?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very	Extremely

5) Was the Backyard History Rubric helpful?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very	Extremely

6) Did you ever see or use a Rubric before? Yes No

7) Would you like to use Rubrics again? Yes No

8) Are there any further Comments you would like add? Please write them below.

Appendix D: The questions that were asked of the instructors after using the rubric for grading.

Please respond to these questions:

- 1) Does the rubric reflect the assignment in all areas?
- 2) Are the instructional objectives clear from the rubric?
- 3) Is the standard of excellence objective, fair, and relevant to the goals of the task?
- 4) Would you use this? Why or why not? How might you use a rubric?
- 5) Please add any further comments.

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