

## Transparent Assignment Rubric

This rubric was designed to help quantitatively and qualitatively assess the degree of transparency in major summative assignment descriptions. The development of the rubric was guided by the literature supporting the Syllabus Rubric<sup>1</sup> and Transparency in Teaching & Learning in Higher Education (TILT higher Ed)<sup>2</sup> projects and the scholarship on assignment design<sup>3</sup> and motivation.<sup>4</sup> It accounts for nuances in assignments while also maintaining widespread relevance to courses in a diverse range of disciplines, levels, and institutions.

The rubric focuses on four criteria characteristic of transparent teaching: (1) purpose, (2) task(s), (3) criteria/assessment, (4) accessibility. These criteria do not necessarily map onto any specific section of an assignment description; instead, users are directed to search for evidence of the quality of all criteria across the document.

We break down each criterion into multiple components, and provide a range of options for what evidence of proficiency in those components might look like. Each of the 18 components—designated as essential, important, or less-important—is scored on the strength of supporting evidence. Strong evidence indicates that many (but not necessarily all) of the characteristics of the component are present in the assignment description and match the descriptions closely. Moderate evidence indicates that a few of the characteristics of the component are present in the syllabus and/or only partly match the descriptions. Low evidence indicates that very few of the characteristics of the component are present in the assignment description and/or don't match the descriptions.

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<sup>1</sup> Palmer, M. S., Bach, D. J., & Streifer, A. C. (2014). Measuring the promise: A learning-focused syllabus rubric. *To improve the academy: A journal of educational development*, 33 (1), 14-36.

<sup>2</sup> Winkelmess, M. –A., Bernacki, M., Butler, J., Zochowski, M., Golanics, J., & Harriss Weavil, K. (2016). A teaching intervention that increases underserved college students' success. *Peer Review*, Winter/Spring.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Boye. "How Do I Create Meaningful and Effective Assignments?," Teaching, Learning, and Professional Development Center, Texas Tech University, [https://www.depts.ttu.edu/tlpdc/Resources/Teaching\\_resources/TLPDC\\_teaching\\_resources/CreatingEffectiveAssignments.php](https://www.depts.ttu.edu/tlpdc/Resources/Teaching_resources/TLPDC_teaching_resources/CreatingEffectiveAssignments.php) and Gottschalk and Hjortshoj, 2003. *Elements of Teaching Writing*.

<sup>4</sup> Schunk, D. H., Pintrich, P. R. and Meece, J. R. (2007). *Motivation in education: Theory, research, and applications* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

“Essential” components are shown in gold, “important” components in silver, and “less-important” components are in white.

Criterion	What the component looks like in the written document:	Ideas for where to look and examples of what to look for (not all need to be present):	Strength of evidence		
			Strong	Moderate	Low-None
<b>Purpose</b>	<b>The assignment description clearly states what knowledge students will gain and what practice they will get.</b>				
	1. Effective learning objectives for the assignment are articulated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning objectives may be embedded in an introductory statement of purpose, in a description of the assignment, or in their own easily identifiable section later.</li> <li>Objectives are written using specific, measurable action words (e.g., compare, evaluate).</li> <li>Learning objectives focus on what the students will need to do, not the assignment, course, or instructor.</li> <li>Ideally, the assignment learning objectives should align with the course learning objectives, but this is difficult to know without looking at the syllabus.</li> </ul>			
	2. The assignment is authentic, practically useful, and/or relevant to students’ lives beyond college.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The value of the assignment is usually found in the introductory statement or description of the assignment.</li> <li>Authentic assignments place students in real or realistic scenarios in which students perform work similar to that of experts or professionals in the discipline/field.</li> <li>Students might be asked explicitly to inhabit a role or context beyond a student in a course.</li> <li>The assignment makes a connection between activities or practical, transferrable skills that it involves and those that students will use now or after college.</li> </ul>			

	<p>3. The relevance of the assignment in the context of the course is clearly articulated.<sup>5</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A statement of relevance to course material (e.g. “As we have discussed in class...”) is usually found in the introductory statement or description of the assignment.</li> <li>• This may be difficult to assess as it often appears on the description of the assignment in the syllabus.</li> </ul>			
	<p>4. Learning objectives are appropriately pitched to the course level, class size, position of the assignment within the course, and the characteristics of the students taking the class.<sup>1</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This may be difficult to assess without extensive knowledge of the course, the discipline, the curriculum, and the institutional context.</li> </ul>			

Criterion	What the component looks like in the written document:	Ideas for where to look and examples of what to look for (not all need to be present):	Strength of evidence		
			Strong	Moderate	Low-None
<b>Task(s)</b>	<b>It is clear what the students will do and how they will do it.</b>				
	<p>5. The task is aligned with the purpose.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The task selected is well-suited to fulfill the purpose of the assignment.</li> </ul>			
	<p>6. The type or genre of the assignment is clear and defined.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The type (e.g., essay, digital media project, infographic) is usually discovered in the name or title of the assignment, but it is sometimes indicated under another, separate section.</li> <li>• The assignment describes or defines the genre for students, rather than assuming that students will know what, for example, a “research paper” means in that course.</li> </ul>			

<sup>5</sup> This criterion can be difficult to assess for anyone except the instructor. When used for research purposes, it may be necessary to exclude this criterion. In this case, the scoring system must be adjusted.

	7. The sequence of the assignment seems logical and well-paced and the major steps within that sequence are described.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steps may be delineated using numbers, bullet points, checklists, or transitional words (e.g., first, second, next, then, etc.).</li> <li>• How to do each step is clear.</li> <li>• The presence of multiple due dates may indicate the assignment has been broken into a logical sequence with different steps.</li> <li>• The sequence seems well-paced, with not too many tasks occurring or due all at once.</li> <li>• It is noted which parts of the process students will learn more about later.</li> </ul>			
	8. Formatting requirements or restrictions, the weight or worth of the assignment, and/or any important due dates or deadlines are specified.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These details usually appear in their own separately labeled sections.</li> <li>• Instructors may use special formatting (e.g., bold, underline, italics) to emphasize important details on assignments.</li> <li>• While the weight or worth of the assignment is often articulated in the syllabus, it's good practice to reiterate it on the assignment description.</li> </ul>			
	9. Useful hints on how to avoid common pitfalls are provided.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This may appear as a list or a table.</li> <li>• This may be difficult to assess as these may appear in supplementary material, as part of an in-class discussion, or on the syllabus.</li> </ul>			

Criterion	What the component looks like in the written document:	Ideas for where to look and examples of what to look for (not all need to be present):	Strength of evidence		
			Strong	Moderate	Low-None
<b>Criteria/Assessment</b>	<b>The criteria describe what excellence looks like and allow students to effectively self-evaluate.</b>				
	10. The criteria by which the assignment will be assessed are indicated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These criteria may appear in the form of a checklist, rubric, or textual descriptions.</li> </ul>			

<p>11. The criteria delineate different levels of performance, including the specific characteristics that represent high-quality work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple levels of performance are clearly marked and described.</li> <li>• The language within the different levels is clearly defined, easily understood, and framed in a positive way.</li> </ul>			
<p>12. The assessment criteria are aligned with the assignment’s purpose and task(s).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The criteria should be clearly derived from and supportive of the purposes and the task(s). For example, if part of the purpose of the assignment is for students to demonstrate their ability to closely read a text, then the skills associated with close reading need to be represented in the assignment’s assessment standards.</li> </ul>			
<p>13. The assignment refers students to multiple annotated examples of work that fulfill the criteria.<sup>1</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking students to discover examples may be explicitly included as part of the assignment.</li> <li>• There may be examples included on or attached to the assignment.</li> <li>• The examples should be annotated, in writing or verbally, in or out of class.</li> <li>• The availability and/or quality of the examples may be difficult to assess as these can appear as supplementary materials or part of in-class discussions.</li> </ul>			
<p>14. There are opportunities to practice and to receive formative feedback, according to the criteria, before final submission.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities for feedback may be indicated by separate steps and important dates.</li> <li>• Formative feedback can be provided by the instructor, as well as through peer feedback or critical self-reflection.</li> </ul>			

Criterion	What the component looks like in the written document:	Ideas for where to look and examples of what to look for (not all need to be present):	Strength of evidence		
			Strong	Moderate	Low-None
<b>Accessibility</b>	<b>The document is written with learners in mind, helping to organize, engage, and challenge them.</b>				
	15. The tone of the assignment is positive, respectful, inviting, and directly addresses the student as a competent, engaged learner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The positive, respectful, inviting tone is conveyed throughout the document.</li> <li>Personal pronouns (e.g., you, we, us) are used, rather than “the students” or “they.”</li> </ul>			
	16. The assignment is well-organized and easy to navigate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The assignment is readable and the organization is clear and seemingly logical.</li> <li>The presentation of the assignment elicits no major questions or confusions.</li> <li>Layout, formatting, and organization emphasize the most important aspects of the assignment, rather than focusing students’ attention on logistical details (e.g., page length, margins, etc.).</li> </ul>			
	17. The assignment is engaging.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The assignment is likely to pique students’ interest because it seems interesting, different, intriguing, provocative, fun, and/or creative.</li> </ul>			
	18. The assignment communicates high expectations and projects confidence that students can meet those high expectations through hard work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The purpose, task, and criteria all indicate a high level of academic rigor (e.g., a purpose that promotes higher-order thinking, a task that mimics the types of work expert professionals perform, etc.).</li> <li>The assignment communicates the belief that each student can succeed.</li> </ul>			
Subtotal			x 2 =	x 1 =	x 0 = 0
				<b>Total</b>	<b>/ 78</b>