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## Slow-Cooked Rubric: Designing and Using a Rubric to Assess Undergraduate Final Papers

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## Slow-Cooked Rubric:

### *Designing and Using a Rubric to Assess Undergraduate Final Papers*

This assessment works well as a comprehensive way to assess student work in an introductory undergraduate class. While time-consuming, it is rewarding to have a clear picture of students' outputs and to collaborate with faculty.

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#### **NUTRITION INFORMATION**

We used a rubric to assess the final papers in an undergraduate English Composition class. We were interested in assessing students' abilities to access, evaluate, synthesize, and cite information. To judge this, we developed a rubric that rated these four areas as exemplary, developing, or beginning, and rated a selection of between twenty-six and forty-seven papers each semester for three different semesters. This has been a helpful exercise to judge the skill level of students, learn where to direct our instruction efforts, and build communication and collaboration with the English Department.

#### **DIETARY STANDARDS**

*ACRL Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* (2011) Principle 2, Indicator 2.3; Principle 3, Indicator 3.2, 3.3; Principle 5, Indicator 5.3

*ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2016) Authority is Constructed and Contextual; Information Has Value; and Searching as Strategic Exploration

#### **COOKING TIME**

Total cooking time is variable depending on

number of papers and raters. In our experience, each paper takes 15–30 minutes to rate.

#### **COOKING TECHNIQUE**

Rubrics

#### **INGREDIENTS**

- A rubric
- A small team of willing librarians to rate papers
- A large source of undergraduates receiving library instruction
- Student final papers
- A cooperative group of faculty to supply the papers

#### **PREPARATION**

Identify a course that regularly schedules information literacy instruction sessions. Meet with faculty to get buy-in for the assessment. Develop a rubric with faculty representatives (or adapt/use a preexisting rubric that meets your needs).

#### **THE ASSESSMENT**

##### ***Collect student final papers from faculty***

When working with multiple faculty, identify a liaison who will collect student papers from

faculty, either hard copy or electronic, and will send them to you.

##### ***Distribute papers to raters***

We used a shared cloud-based folder to access the papers.

##### ***Norm the rubric as a group***

Plan an initial meeting where you will rate at least three papers together.

At this point, raters will notice discrepancies in their scoring. Discuss the components of the rubric and edit it to cut down on ambiguous language or other design issues that are causing inconsistencies.

After any rubric edits, raters will have to re-score the previously scored papers.

##### ***Schedule multiple meetings with raters***

During these meetings, discuss papers rated individually and rate papers as a group.

Continue to evaluate the validity of your rubric until it fully meets your needs.

Determine how many additional papers to score between meetings. We found three

to five papers between discussions was manageable and helped us to increase our inter-rater reliability.

#### ***Test for inter-rater reliability***

SPSS software or free tools on the Internet will help in evaluating inter-rater reliability. One suggested site is <http://dfreelon.org/utills/recalfront/>.

You must determine how important inter-rater reliability is to your assessment project and decide on a testing method accordingly. Each method has various degrees of rigor. Testing for percent agreement is easiest but least rigorous. Testing using a method like Krippendorff's alpha is most rigorous but requires using more advanced statistical tools.

#### ***Analyze the complete set of scores against your instruction goals***

Set a baseline for acceptable scoring rates. For example, aim for 75 percent of the total papers to score higher than the lowest performance level.

If baseline goals are realistic but are not being reached, use your data to advocate for changes in your instruction program.

Once you have met your stated goals, look for ways to continue to improve scores and raise your baseline.

#### **ALLERGY WARNINGS**

For this assessment to work, you need to have faculty buy-in so they will send you their students' final papers. You also will need to devote a large amount of staff time to rating the papers.

#### **CHEF'S NOTES**

While time-consuming, this project is worthwhile. Reading actual student papers was an eye-opening experience for us, and we got a real sense of students' ability to apply information literacy concepts to a research project. In addition, we were able to use our results to advocate for updated teaching methods, encourage reluctant faculty to sign up for the instruction program, and foster stronger relationships with the English faculty.