



# USING RUBRICS TO TRANSFORM THE MARKING AND FEEDBACK EXPERIENCE

Professor Will Hughes

## OVERVIEW

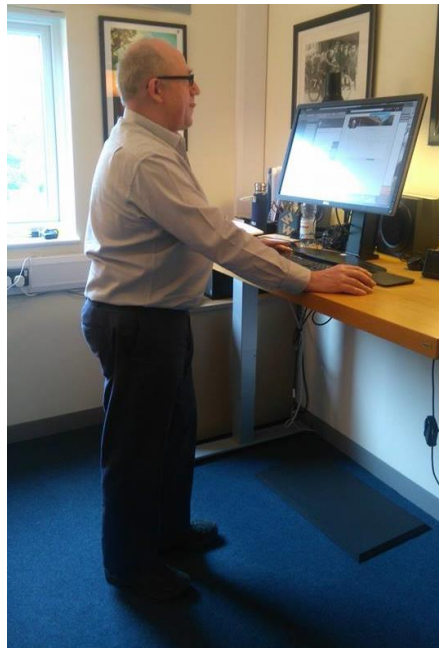
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Professor Will Hughes has extensively used rubric grids within Grademark across of all of his modules to significantly enhance student engagement with his feedback, student understanding of his marking criteria and student attainment in subsequent essays whilst making his own experience of marking more efficient.

## OBJECTIVES

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As convenor of a range of modules typically enrolling 120 students submitting around 3 pieces of work each year, I wanted to ensure that I had a really effective approach to marking and the provision of feedback. I wanted all of my students to engage fully in the feedback I provided, to thoroughly understand exactly what they had done well and where they could be making improvements after reading each piece that I provided. But I needed to achieve all of this in an effective and efficient way.



## CONTEXT

National Student Survey results suggest that a significant number of students do not feel that they have access to marking criteria prior to submission and do not understand how to improve their performance based on the comments provided. Often the provision of more and more free text feedback doesn't appear to feed into higher levels of student attainment and satisfaction. At the same time, increasing student numbers and broader workload demands have increased pressures on all lecturers across the sector. In response I decided to adopt the use of rubric grids as one way to start to address these key issues.

## IMPLEMENTATION

In 2015 I created a rubric grid in which I listed criteria along the left hand side and then unpicked what performance levels against each of those criteria might look like, describing different levels of performance in the lower 10 or 20 range all the way up to outstanding performance in the 90 or 100 range. It was extremely interesting to attempt a clear articulation of the differences between grades of failure and grades of excellence. Explaining, for example, the difference between 90 and 100% for a specific criterion is not something I had ever done before. A screenshot of a typical grid is shown below.

Criteria	Scales	Scales			
		Poor or missing 10.00	Inadequate 20.00	Insufficient 30.00	Borderline 40.00
<b>Context</b> 15% Background and economic/management context of the problem	You neglected to place this work in the context of the economics and management of construction procurement.	There is almost no mention of the context of this work. It was important to connect the ideas about construction procurement to the economics and management of the business of construction.	There is little in the way of background and context. It was important to connect the ideas about construction procurement to the economics and management of the business of construction.	There is some indication of the background and context for this work, but not enough. It was important to connect the ideas about construction procurement to the economics and management of the business of construction.	It's yo to cc ar th
<b>Literature</b> 15% Use of journal papers, conference papers and research reports	You have provided no evidence from the literature in support of an argument. It was important to read around the various aspects of the topic and weigh up conflicting views of procurement.	There are a few references to academic literature, but you have not read sufficient material to produce a report of this nature. It was important to read around the various aspects of the topic and weigh up conflicting views of	There are some references to academic literature, but you have not read enough material to produce a report of this nature. It was important to read around the various aspects of the topic and weigh up conflicting views of procurement.	While there are references to some papers, I was not persuaded that you knew how to mobilize evidence in support of a particular view. Indeed, you did not provide a view based on evidence. Rather you simply reported what some people	Tr ps dt hc of fa R2
<b>Reports</b> 15% Use of government and industry reports on procurement practice	You overlooked the requirement to mention government and industry reports on construction procurement. There is a lot of advice and guidance available to those who procure construction work. There was scope to mention a variety of	The use of reports on procurement was inadequate. There was scope to mention a variety of recent government reports and establish something about the context in which they were written. It is useful to develop a critical evaluation of	The use of reports on procurement leaves a lot of room for improvement. There was scope to mention a variety of recent government reports and establish something about the context in which they were written. It is useful	The use of some reports on procurement was good to see. There was scope to discuss why they came about and how the advice in different reports does not always match. It is necessary to develop a critical evaluation of	Ti wi cc re ex th
<b>Discussion</b> 30%	You have not dealt with the basic	Your discussion was poorly	Your discussion was generic, and	There are many different views	Ti

I actually created a slightly different grid for each piece of assessment but it would be equally possible to create a slightly less assessment specific grid that could be used across a whole module or even a whole programme.

Crucially, I shared the criteria for assessment with my students in the assignment brief so they knew, well ahead of submission, what the marking criteria themselves looked like.

I created all of this content in a standard Excel spreadsheet first and then clicked on the 'rubric manager' button and then 'import' to transfer my grid into Grademark. I could have created it directly within

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Grademark, in an incredibly simple process, by clicking on the 'rubric' icon, 'rubric manager', 'rubric list' and then 'create new rubric'. I could then populate my grid with specific criteria and scales. By attaching the rubric grid to one assignment, Grademark automatically attaches the grid to all the assignments within the submission point.

This meant that each time I opened a piece of work in Grademark, I could click on the rubric icon to display the grid. I could then simply click the box against each criteria that applied to the particular assessment I was marking to show the student how they had performed in that particular skill.

In addition to using the rubric grid to classify student performance against individual marking criteria I would also provide in text comments and general comments in the free text feedback box to ensure really tailored and specific feedback content was also provided to all of my students. As I have become more experienced, I have tried to stop myself from adding in-text comments as it tends to result in detailed editing comments, which are not as helpful as feedback.

## IMPACT

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From the first time I used this approach, students have been enthusiastic. They have emailed me personally, as well as commenting in module evaluation forms, that they found the feedback more useful than anything they have received in their education to date. I no longer have students complaining that their mark is too low and asking whether I have made a mistake. Rather, those who would have complained begin by acknowledging that the mark is clear and well-justified and that they would like to discuss how to improve. This positive approach from students is refreshing.

## REFLECTIONS

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One of the things that made this activity successful was the prior development of a feedback library, which provided a wide-ranging list of comments to draw from and summarise. Another has been the move towards making comments positive rather than negative. It can be very difficult to focus on what students have done well in a poor submission. But it has proved to be the single most valuable thing. The performance of weak students improves significantly when they are given encouragement rather than discouragement. And strong students appreciate being given indications about how they could improve, as well, which, they tell, me is rare but welcome. I still have a way to go in making all of the comments positive and encouraging. If I were starting over, I would begin by spending time on thinking seriously about how to sound encouraging and positive when students submit very low-quality work. One thing to be careful about is that once the rubric has been attached to an assignment, it cannot be edited without being detached and losing all the grading. At first, I copied every mark into an Excel

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spreadsheet in case there were errors or omissions in my rubric that I hadn't noticed until using it.

## **FOLLOW UP**

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Every piece of work I set up in Turnitin gives me the opportunity to fine tune the approach. Each piece of work has its own criteria for assessment, so I tend to develop the rubrics in Excel, making them easier to adapt for the next piece of work. This also makes it easy to share with colleagues. If anyone would like further examples, I would be happy to share more recent ones as Excel files.

## **LINKS**

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Simple illustrated instructions to create similar qualitative rubric within Grademark, as well as standard or custom rubric and free response grading forms, can be found here:

[https://guides.turnitin.com/01\\_Manuals\\_and\\_Guides/Instructor\\_Guides/Turnitin\\_Classic\\_\(Deprecated\)/25\\_GradeMark/Rubrics\\_and\\_Grading\\_Forms](https://guides.turnitin.com/01_Manuals_and_Guides/Instructor_Guides/Turnitin_Classic_(Deprecated)/25_GradeMark/Rubrics_and_Grading_Forms)

A six minute Grademark video demonstrating the creation of a similar rubric and other key features is available here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAG44Fpm550>