



Tips for Teachers

Collaborative Analytic-Scoring Rubrics for Writing Assignments

Naoya Shibata, Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, Nisshin, Aichi, Japan

I have been teaching at private high schools for five years and at a university for one year. Due to globalisation and technological advancement, people today understand the importance of English language and communicative competence. Regarding the importance of communication, listening, speaking and reading skills are often considered as essential components; on the other hand, writing skills tend to be undervalued. For example, my students at my high school were fully engaged in content-based interactive activities, but not in writing activities, as they believed that only listening and speaking activities were a part of communication. However, written communication has become an essential tool in various situations, such as in business, and education. Therefore, to help my students realise the importance of writing, I started to implement writing assignments using rubrics into my class.

Recently, to assess learners' language proficiency, many schools and institutions have introduced evaluation criteria often called "Can-Do Lists" or rubrics. They are groups of evaluation criteria for assessing learners' abilities. Since evaluation in language production measures is largely based on holistic scoring, one grade or score tends to include multiple integrated requirements, and therefore it is potentially less reliable. Wiggins (1998) states that this kind of evaluation can make it possible for the same assessor to offer different scores to the same test-taker at various times for changing reasons or criteria. Holistic scoring also offers enough feedback to learners to diagnose their strong and weak points and develop their language abilities. In educational contexts, the use of evaluation criteria should be helpful for both assessors and test-takers to give and receive useful feedback and to encourage learners to develop their target language abilities. Accordingly, to help students improve their skills, teachers need to know valuable ways

of making valid and reliable rubrics. Therefore, in order to maximise the validity and reliability of rubrics for my essay assignments, I decided to make analytical-scoring evaluation criteria with my students collaboratively.

Procedure

These steps introduced below may be helpful for other language instructors who wish to utilise analytic-scoring rubrics for essays in their classes, but sometimes struggle to maximise the validity and the reliability of the evaluation criteria. Depending on the course size and the learners' proficiency, it may require several days to complete the procedure. This approach is student-centred and encourages negotiation between the teacher and the students. The descriptions of each requirement can also be written in either English or the students' first language.

Step One

To help students reflect upon their writing experiences and daily lives and generate as many ideas as possible, the teacher provides them with two or three opportunities to brainstorm the essential requirements of good writing products, for example, quality of content, coherence, communicability, and paragraph construction, with their partner. They also share their ideas with different classmates to think about the reasons why each category is essential. After that, the teacher asks the students for some ideas and write them down on the blackboard.

Step Two

The marks need not be allocated equally in each category, but "should reflect the importance of the category" (Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 271). For example, because I usually implement content-based instruction into my English classes, my students and I prioritise content rather than accuracy. After sharing their ideas with each other, students decide what to include in the evaluation criteria and the degree of significance. Although the total number of categories may depend on the learners' proficiency and the time allocation, three or four components will be appropriate to make the criteria attainable for the students.

Step Three

The teacher divides the students into groups of four. They share their ideas with their group members to determine the criterion for each grade as well as characteristics of quality in their work and write them down on the provided handout. After that, the teacher collects their papers and makes the first draft of the rubric.

Step Four

The teacher provides students with the first version of the rubric and a sample essay to check the “inter-rater reliability” or usefulness of the rubric with them. He or she asks them which description is difficult to understand before letting them evaluate it. Later, they refer to the given criteria and assess it. After that, the teacher collects their evaluation and analyses the differences between the highest and the lowest scores in each category in order to fine tune the description and minimise the differences as much as possible. After two or three versions, the teacher and students arrive at a final version of the rubric which they can all use clearly and consistently.

Conclusion

Collaborative analytical-scoring rubrics can play a significant role in maximising the validity (particularly face validity) and the reliability of the evaluation process. The teacher and the students negotiate and understand the nature and goals of the assessment in advance, and everyone understands what language sub-skills to value and develop through the process of evaluating. Learning to read and evaluate others’ writing also helps learners both write and read with a critical perspective. It should also be pointed out that this approach to evaluation works equally well with speaking.

References

- Lee, J. F., & VanPatten, B. (2003). *Making communicative language teaching happen* (2nd ed.). New York: Mc Graw Hill.
- Wiggins, G. (1998). *Educative assessment: Designing assessments to inform and improve student performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

About the Author

Naoya Shibata is a part-time lecturer at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, where he acquired a master's degree in TESOL. He also works part-time at Aichi University and Eitoku High School. His research interests include second language writing, content-based instruction, and language testing using analytic-scoring rubrics.