

Using Color-coded Rubrics



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What is it?

The color-coded rubric is more than just another analytic rubric. It is a new approach to grading that offers students valuable feedback on their writing.

It begins by using a generic analytic rubric. Any analytic rubric can be used. However, it is important that the rubric be analytic rather than holistic.

The color-coded rubric has two components: Essential Components and Levels of Performance.

The Essential Components section (horizontal) divides an expository writing assignment into various essential components such as the thesis, support, transitions, and conclusion. It then articulates the Level of Performance (vertical) for each component, describing what is expected of students at each level of performance for each essential component. These descriptions give students a more precise understanding of what performance looks like at each level and how their work can be distinguished from work at other levels.

The Levels of Performance are also a means for scoring students' papers. Teachers can rate students' performance in each essential component using a four-point scale with 4 being the highest and 1 being the lowest. Each point on the scale is accompanied by a description. For example, in the thesis component, there will be a description of a 4 (outstanding) thesis statement, a 3 (effective) thesis statement, a 2 (needs improvement) thesis statement, and a 1 (not yet) thesis statement. Each description points students to key features of the thesis statement.

The color-coded rubric is different in that each Essential Component is assigned a different color. Any marks a teacher makes on a student's paper concerning that Essential Component is made using that color.

The color-coded rubric can be used throughout all parts of the writing process. It can be given to students at the beginning of the writing process and discussed before students even begin to compose. It can be used as a guide as students draft their compositions. And it can be used as a practice rubric in the peer evaluation process. Thus the students have a clear idea of the standards by which they will be graded before they submit their compositions for evaluation.

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How does it work?

The teacher begins by selecting an analytic rubric and assigning a different color to each of the components. For instance, the teacher may assign the color green to the support section and yellow to the transitions section. Then, as the teacher grades the students' papers, anytime the students make a point that lacks support, the teacher would underline that point with a green marker. If the student fails to effectively transition from one point to the next, the teacher underlines that section with a yellow marker. Then, the teacher circles the appropriate description on the rubric with that same color marker. Thus, the rubric is color-coded to the teacher's remarks on the students' papers.

What are the benefits?

For Teachers

- Teachers do not have to write the same comments on paper after paper after paper.
- Once teachers learn to use the rubric, grading becomes a lot faster because the teacher spends most of the time underlining rather than writing comments.
- Grading becomes a lot more objective rather than subjective.
- The rubric focuses teachers on specific components of the writing process.
- The teacher has a better understanding of a student's writing strengths and weaknesses.

For Students

- Students can immediately tell which marks are connected to which parts of the rubric.
- Students can immediately see on which components of the writing process they need improvement.
- Students focus more on their writing than they do on their grades.
- Students have a clear understanding of the various components of an effective essay.
- Students know exactly how they are being evaluated.