

## WHAT IS SELF-ASSESSMENT?

Self-assessment is simply a matter of having students identify strengths and weaknesses in their own work and revise accordingly. Effective self-assessment involves students comparing their work to clear standards and generating feedback for themselves about where they need to make improvements. It is a tool that can promote learning if it is used while the learning is taking place. In order for self-assessment to be effective, students must be able to use their self-generated feedback to revise and improve their work before it is due for grading. After students self-assess and revise their work, they can turn it in for a grade.<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT IS NOT SELF-ASSESSMENT?

Self-assessment is not a process by which students determine their own grades. Although students tend to be quite honest when asked to formatively self-assess, the temptation to inflate a summative self-evaluation is often too great. Self-assessment is about promoting learning and achievement, not about grading. Self-assessment also is not something that happens after an assignment is complete and students are ready to turn it in for a final grade.<sup>2</sup>

## HOW CAN I USE SELF-ASSESSMENT WITH MY STUDENTS?

- > [Getting Started: Three key steps for effective self-assessment](#)
- > [Getting Started: Using rubrics and checklists to guide self-assessment](#)
- > [Example: Self-assessment of writing using colored pencils and a rubric](#)
- > [Example: Co-creating a rubric with students](#)
- > [Example: Using a checklist to guide self-assessment](#)
- > [Additional Resources](#)



guide

GETTING STARTED

# THREE KEY STEPS FOR EFFECTIVE SELF-ASSESSMENT<sup>3</sup>

Effective self-assessment involves at least three steps:

## 1. CLEAR PERFORMANCE TARGETS

In order for self-assessment to be effective, students must have clear targets to work toward. In other words, students must know what counts! Clear criteria for assignments that will be graded should be made available to students before work on the task begins. The assessment criteria can be created by the teacher or co-created with students. The criteria can be arranged in a simple checklist or in a rubric. Examples of rubrics are on [page 4](#) and [page 5](#) and checklist on [page 6](#).

## 2. CHECKING PROGRESS TOWARD THE TARGETS

This is where the actual self-assessment takes place. Once students know the performance targets (step 1), they create a draft of the assignment, compare the draft to the targets, and identify areas of strength and areas for improvement.

## 3. REVISION

Using the self-generated feedback from step 2, students revise their draft, trying to close the gaps between their work and the targets. This step is crucial. If students don't have the chance to revise and improve their work, and possibly their grades, they are unlikely to take the self-assessment process seriously.



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GETTING STARTED

# USING RUBRICS AND CHECKLISTS TO GUIDE SELF-ASSESSMENT<sup>4</sup>

## WHAT IS A RUBRIC?

A rubric is usually a 1-2 page document that has two features:

1. Clearly stated criteria or learning targets for a given assignment.
2. Descriptive levels or gradations of quality for each criterion, ranging from excellent to poor. See [page 4](#) for an example of a writing rubric.

## WHY USE A RUBRIC?

A rubric can be a very effective tool for guiding student self-assessment. Because it includes vivid descriptions of what excellent and poor work look like, a rubric can help students get a strong sense of the quality of their work and—perhaps more importantly—provide guidance about how to improve it.

## WHAT IS A CHECKLIST?

A checklist is similar to a rubric in that it lists the learning targets, or criteria (what counts), but it does not include the gradations of quality, which is characteristic of rubrics. See [page 6](#) for an example of a mathematics checklist.

## WHEN SHOULD I USE A CHECKLIST INSTEAD OF A RUBRIC?

Rubrics are excellent tools for guiding self-assessment but checklists can work equally well, or better, depending on the assignment. For larger, complex assignments, rubrics typically work best. For shorter, less complex assignments, checklists are often more appropriate.



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EXAMPLE

# SELF-ASSESSMENT OF WRITING USING COLORED PENCILS AND A RUBRIC<sup>5</sup>

Table 1 is an example of a writing rubric with six criteria and four levels of gradation.

1. Choosing a different colored pencil for each criterion, students underline key words on the rubric.
2. Next, students self-assess their drafts one criterion at a time. For example, for the first criterion, “Ideas and Content,” students underline key phrases on the rubric in red, such as “clearly states an opinion.”
3. Then, students turn to their drafts and search for evidence of clearly stating an opinion. If students find the evidence, they underline it in red. If not, they make a note to themselves that will later guide revision.

TABLE 1. MIDDLE SCHOOL PERSUASIVE ESSAY RUBRIC				
	Highly competent	Competent	Approaching competent	Not yet
<b>1. Ideas and Content</b>	The paper <u>clearly states an opinion</u> and gives 3 clear, detailed <u>reasons in support</u> of it. <u>Opposing views</u> are addressed.	An opinion is given. One reason may be unclear or lack detail. Opposing views are mentioned.	An opinion is given. The reasons given tend to be weak or inaccurate. May get off topic.	The opinion and support for it is buried, confused and/or unclear.
<b>2. Organization</b>	The paper has an <u>interesting beginning</u> , developed middle and <u>satisfying conclusion</u> in an order that makes sense. Paragraphs are indented, have <u>topic and closing sentences</u> , and main ideas.	The paper has a beginning, middle and end in an order that makes sense. Paragraphs are indented; some have topic and closing sentences.	The paper has an attempt at a beginning &/or ending. Some ideas may seem out of order. Some problems with paragraphs.	There is no real beginning or ending. The ideas seem loosely strung together. No paragraph formatting.
<b>3. Voice &amp; tone</b>	The writing shows what the writer <u>thinks and feels</u> . It sounds like the writer cares about the topic.	The writing seems sincere but the writer’s voice fades in and out.	The paper could have been written by anyone. It shows very little about what the writer thought and felt.	The writing is bland and sounds like the writer doesn’t like the topic. No thoughts or feelings.
<b>4. Word choice</b>	The words used are descriptive but natural, <u>varied</u> and vivid.	The words used are correct, with a few attempts at vivid language.	The words used are ordinary. Some may sound forced or clichéd.	The same words are used over and over, some incorrectly.
<b>5. Sentence fluency</b>	Sentences are clear, complete, <u>begin in different ways</u> , and vary in length.	Mostly well-constructed sentences. Some variety in beginnings and length.	Many poorly constructed sentences. Little variety in beginnings or length.	Incomplete, run-on and awkward sentences make the paper hard to read.
<b>6. Conventions</b>	Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar are correct. Only minor edits are needed.	Spelling, punctuation and caps are usually correct. Some problems with grammar.	There are enough errors to make the writing hard to read and understand.	The writing is almost impossible to read because of errors.





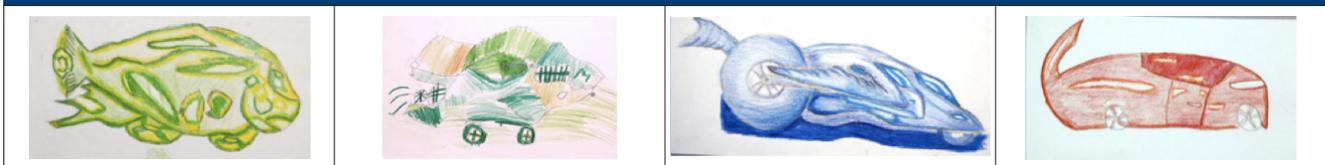
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EXAMPLE

# CO-CREATING A RUBRIC WITH STUDENTS

To increase student motivation, autonomy, and ownership of the learning process, some teachers co-create a rubric (or checklist) with their students. In the example below, two middle school visual art teachers, Emily Maddy and Jason Rondinelli, shared four examples of the use of gradation in the work of students from a different class, that they had determined ranged from excellent to poor (Table 2). Without knowing how the teachers ordered the drawings, students broke into small groups and described positives and negatives of a single drawing. They then came back together and compiled their descriptions. Collectively they determined which of the four merited an “excellent,” which “poor” and the ones in between (Table 3). The final product combined their comments into a co-developed rubric focused on gradation.<sup>6</sup>

**TABLE 2.  
GRADATION EXAMPLES**



**TABLE 3.  
STUDENT DESCRIPTIONS OF GRADATION EXAMPLES**

			
Excellent	Good	Ok	Poor
<b>+</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>+</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; It has a cast shadow.</li> <li>&gt; It has gradation on the bottom.</li> <li>&gt; It has a light source.</li> <li>&gt; It goes from light to dark very clearly.</li> <li>&gt; Light colors blend in with dark</li> <li>&gt; The way the artist colored the car showed where the light source was coming from.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; It has shine marks.</li> <li>&gt; Artist shows good use of dark and light values</li> <li>&gt; The picture shows gradual shades in the car.</li> <li>&gt; He used light values that helped the car the way he used the shadows.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; There is gradation on the bottom of the door.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; The rims are shaded darkly.</li> <li>&gt; The car looks 3-D.</li> </ul>
<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; It has an outline.</li> <li>&gt; Cast shadow is too dark</li> <li>&gt; Doesn't go from light to dark</li> <li>&gt; Doesn't have enough gradation</li> <li>&gt; Outlined some body parts</li> <li>&gt; Cast shadow is really straight</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Needs more gradual value</li> <li>&gt; Give wheels lighter gradation or darker shade</li> <li>&gt; The direction of the light is not perfectly directed.</li> <li>&gt; The artists basically outlined the car.</li> <li>&gt; He had more dark value than light values.</li> <li>&gt; The wheels were too light.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; The car is outlined.</li> <li>&gt; There is no shadow.</li> <li>&gt; It's not shaded from light to dark.</li> <li>&gt; There are no details.</li> <li>&gt; The windows have no shine marks.</li> <li>&gt; The wheels do not look 3-D.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; The gradation starts wrong.</li> <li>&gt; The wheels are too little.</li> <li>&gt; Some spots are not well shaded.</li> <li>&gt; The shadow is not shaded correctly.</li> </ul>



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EXAMPLE

# USING A CHECKLIST TO GUIDE SELF-ASSESSMENT<sup>7</sup>

For shorter, less complex assignments, checklists are often more appropriate than rubrics.

Table 4 is a sample checklist for a mathematics class. Once the teacher was confident that the students could move through each step of the checklist, she had students focus on the scoring criteria associated with step 6 for their self-assessments.

**TABLE 4.  
MATHEMATICS CHECKLIST**

	✓		
1		<b>Understand the task</b>	I can clearly state what the problem is asking me to find.
2		<b>Explain what is known</b>	I can clearly explain the given information (what I know from the problem). I use words, numbers, and diagrams as appropriate.
3		<b>Plan an approach</b>	I can clearly describe my chosen strategy, which is efficient and sophisticated (e.g., “I will make a table,” “make an organized list,” “draw a diagram”).
4		<b>Solve the problem</b>	I use my plan to solve every part of the problem. If my strategy doesn’t work, I try a new one. I write out all the steps in my solution so the reader doesn’t have to guess at how or why I did what I did. I use words, numbers, and diagrams/charts/graphs, as appropriate. My work is clearly labeled.
5		<b>Explain the solution</b>	I clearly explain my solution and why I believe it is correct using precise and correct math terms and notations. I check to make sure my solution is reasonable. I check for possible flaws in my reasoning or my computations. If I can, I solve the problem in a different way and get the same answer.
6		<b>Check the solution</b>	I check my solution according to the scoring criteria. Scoring Criteria: <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate formula <input type="checkbox"/> Diagram with clear labels <input type="checkbox"/> All work shown and connected to final answer <input type="checkbox"/> Correct calculations <input type="checkbox"/> Final answer clearly identified <input type="checkbox"/> Answer labeled with units, if appropriate If my solution is incorrect, I find my mistake, determine a new plan, solve the problem, and justify my new answer.



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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- > Video of student peer assessment, including examples, teacher perspectives, and student reactions will be available summer 2013 at [studentsatthecenter.org](http://studentsatthecenter.org)
- > For more on student-centered assessment, see [Assessing Learning: The Students at the Center Series](#) (Heidi Andrade, Kristen Huff, & Georgia Brooke, 2012).<sup>8</sup>

### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Heidi Andrade & Anna Valtcheva. 2009. "Promoting Learning and Achievement Through Self-assessment." *Theory Into Practice*. Vol. 48, 12-19.
- <sup>2</sup> See Andrade & Valtcheva (2009).
- <sup>3</sup> See Andrade & Valtcheva (2009).
- <sup>4</sup> See Heidi Andrade & Zachary B. Warner. 2012. "Beyond 'I give myself an A.'" *Educator's Voice*. Vol. 42, 42-51.
- <sup>5</sup> See Andrade & Warner (2012).
- <sup>6</sup> See Heidi Andrade, Joanna Hefferen, & Maria Palma. Forthcoming. "Formative Assessment in the Visual Arts." *Art Education Journal*.
- <sup>7</sup> See Andrade & Warner (2012).
- <sup>8</sup> See Heidi Andrade, Kristen Huff, & Georgia Brooke. 2012. *Assessing Learning: The Students at the Center Series*. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future. Available at: <http://studentsatthecenter.org/topics/assessing-learning>

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