



The role of criteria in producing trustworthy assessment decisions

The tasks in Activity 2 illustrate characteristics of rubrics such as the Criteria sheets for the TEAL Oral and Written assessment tasks:

1. A 'single' criterion may include multiple components

A column representing a 'single' language dimension often involves more than one component. In using the 'single' criterion you were provided with, you probably found you had several language components to consider. For example, when considering the *Writing skills in English* criterion you had to focus on letter formation, spelling and punctuation. It is often the case that a student's performance of a task is not equally proficient in every component, so decisions need to be made about which component will carry greatest weight, such as when a student's letter formation is excellent but there are many spelling problems. When this happens, it is important to be explicit about the way you resolve the differences. One approach is to give priority to the component that most impedes comprehension of the text; another approach is to give priority to the component that has been the focus of teaching.

2. Weighting multiple criteria

There is no universal or 'correct' weighting of different assessment criteria. A rubric is likely to reflect the priorities of its author. For example, in the case of the TEAL criteria sheets, *Communication* is placed in the left column of the rubric to reflect a communicative approach to second language education, where the ability to communicate in a language is considered the central concern. But in different assessment contexts, and at different times, teachers may choose to give most emphasis to any of the columns, depending on the purpose of the assessment task. For instance, following teaching of a unit aimed at improving EAL students' abilities to use topic-appropriate language and vocabulary, a teacher may choose to focus on *Linguistic structures and features and vocabulary*, to determine how well a student has learned essential content. For diagnostic purposes, columns where a student is not performing so well provide guidance in the determination of teaching priorities.

In this way, a multidimensional rubric provides teachers with a comprehensive and flexible assessment tool that can be focused and refocused to suit different assessment purposes at different times. What is important is that the teacher is explicit in deciding how to apply the rubric, and communicate what they are doing to other parties such as colleagues and students.

Using rubrics in collaborative contexts/assessment

It is important that teachers have explicit and shared understandings about assessment criteria when working collaboratively. When two or more teachers are assessing different classes or students for the same purpose, such as when two teachers teach the same subject to different classes at the same year level, it is important to ensure there is explicit and shared understandings about how each teacher is applying the rubric to an assessment task, and weighting different criteria. When two or more teachers are collaborating with a shared set of goals and priorities, such as an EAL or language specialist and a mainstream subject teacher are working with the same students, it is important that they have a mutually-agreed weighting of criteria. However, when different teachers have different roles or goals, it may well be appropriate for each teacher to work with different weightings of the same criteria to match their roles. In these circumstances, it is important that teachers provide students with feedback in a manner that is not confusing and helps the student to progress in the area of focus of each teacher.

Using rubrics for longitudinal assessment

Different criteria can be given different weightings when looking at how a student is developing over a period of time. For example, the first time a student is assessed on production of a procedural text, *communication* may well be given emphasis, but as the student does further work, the focus of assessment may move towards accuracy of language elements. Alternatively, as *language accuracy* increases, focus may move towards how well the student manages the *cultural conventions* of the task. Such shifts between different criteria, help identify teaching priorities.

Well-considered and explicit understanding of the use of multidimensional assessment rubrics is an important feature of trustworthy assessment of EAL learners.