

Common scoring criteria are an essential component of a proficiency-based system of learning, serving as a key lever in promoting equitable outcomes for all students without requiring “one size fits all” instruction or assessment practices.

The four traits of effective scoring criteria are derived from a synthesis of the literature related to clear learning goals, standards-based grading, and effective feedback. While some authors might use different terms for specific concepts, these excerpts are referencing the same core ideas. Specific concepts, resources, and quotations cited below may be related to more than one trait because of the inherent inter-relationship of these ideas when applied in practice.

Common Scoring Criteria

Literature Supporting the Practice

1. “When teams of teachers use the same prioritized standards and proficiency scales...consistency from teacher to teacher and school to school increases. This consistency makes any differences in student achievement less dependent on which teacher a student is assigned and more reliably matched to the actual performance of that student on the criteria for a specific prioritized standard.”
—Hefelbower, T., Hoegh, J., and Warrick, P. (2014). *A school leader's guide to standards-based grading* [E-book]. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research Laboratory.
2. “Teachers in high-performing urban schools are explicit about what they want their students to learn. Typically, they write and post the specific learning objective that is the focus of instruction. But even more importantly, they talk about the learning objective with students. They help students know specifically, clearly, and explicitly what they should be attempting to learn.”
—Johnson, J., Perez, L., Uline, C. (2013). *Teaching practices from America's best urban schools*. (p. 9). New York: Routledge.
3. “Students can achieve a learning goal only if they understand that goal and can assess what they need to do to reach it...The criteria for evaluating any learning achievement must be made transparent to students to enable them to have a clear overview both of the aims of their work and of what it means to complete it successfully. Such criteria may well be abstract, but concrete examples should be used in modeling exercises to develop understanding.”
—Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B., Wiliam, D. (2004). Working inside the black box: Assessment for learning in the classroom. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(1), 14-15.

4. As Arter and McTighe note, clear performance criteria serve several important functions in standards-based systems:
 - “Performance criteria help define the standards by specifying what one would look for as evidence that the standards have been achieved. In fact, some folks think the criteria are the final definition of a standard--what is in the rubric is what teachers will teach and what students will learn.
 - When made public, the performance criteria and scoring guides provide clear and consistent targets for students, parents, teachers, and others.
 - When used consistently across classrooms, schools, and districts, the evaluation of student performance becomes more reliable.
 - Teaching criteria to students helps improve the very skills being assessed, thus integrating assessment and instruction.”

—Arter, J. and McTighe, J. (2001). *Scoring rubrics in the classroom: Using performance criteria for assessing and improving student performance*. (p. 12). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Trait #1

Scoring criteria articulate a clear ***progression*** of learning.

Literature Supporting the Trait

1. “When learner goals have been articulated in scale format...the teacher and students have clear direction about instructional targets as well as descriptions of levels of understanding and performance for those targets.”

—Marzano, R. (2007). *The art and science of teaching*. (p.23). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

2. “If standards are the ultimate destination of a particular area of instruction, learning progressions are the detailed driving directions that guide students from where they start to where they need to go.

Learning progressions map the routes students typically follow as they gain increasingly sophisticated levels of knowledge and skills during the passage from novice to expert levels of understanding.”

—Yettick, H. (2015, November 9). Learning progressions: Maps to personalized teaching. *Edweek*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/11/11/learning-progressions-maps-to-personalized-teaching.html>

3. “One of the major messages from Visible Learning for Teachers is the power of teachers learning from and talking to each other about planning – learning intentions, success criteria, what is valuable learning, progression, what it means to be ‘good’ at a subject...Only by having some common understanding of what it means to be ‘good’ at something can the resulting debates about forms of evidence, quality of teaching and student outcomes make sense. This can then lead to a more informed discussion about what progression means – which is at the core of effective teaching and learning. Sharing a common understanding of progression is the most critical success factor in any school...”

—Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. (p.60). New York: Routledge.

4. “In order to bring prioritized standards to life in the classroom, proficiency scales must be written for them. As explained previously, proficiency scales clearly describe what students need to know and be able to do at varying levels of performance for each prioritized standard. Like identifying prioritized standards, creating proficiency scales is best done in teams.”
—Hefelbower, T., Hoegh, J., & Warrick, P. (2014). *A school leader's guide to standards-based grading*. [E-book]. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research Laboratory.

Trait #2

Scoring criteria describe the **quality of student work** at each level of performance.

Literature Supporting the Trait

1. “Clearly defined performance criteria communicate the important dimensions, or elements of quality, in a product or performance. The clarity provided by well-defined criteria assists us in reducing subjective judgments when evaluating student work. When a common set of performance criteria and scoring guides are used throughout a department or grade-level team, school or district, this benefit is extended, increasing the consistency of judgments across teachers.”
—Arter, J. & McTighe, J. (2001). *Scoring rubrics in the classroom: Using performance criteria for assessing and improving student performance*. (p.10). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
2. “Black and William (1998) and other motivational research (Assessment Reform Group, 2002; Butler, 1998; Dweck, 2001; Sadler, 1998) clearly show that the type of feedback given to students affects their motivation to learn:
 - It's the quality of the feedback rather than its existence or absence that determines its power. Specifically what makes the difference is the use of descriptive, criterion-based feedback as opposed to numerical scoring or letter grades.”
—Stiggins, R. (2006). *Classroom assessment for student learning: Doing it right, using it well*. (p.40). Assessment Training Institute.
3. “The main point about criteria is that they should be about learning outcomes, not aspects of the task itself. The main point about descriptions of levels of performance is that they should be descriptions, not evaluative statements.”
—Brookhart, S. (2013). *How to create and use rubrics for formative assessment and grading*. (p.14). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Trait #3

Scoring criteria **describe affirmatively** what students can do at each level of performance.

Literature Supporting the Trait

1. “Feedback should be positive. Being ‘positive’ doesn’t mean being artificially happy or saying work is good when it isn’t. Being positive means describing how the strengths in a student’s work match the criteria for good work and how those strengths show what the student is learning. Being positive means pointing out where improvement is needed and suggesting things the student could do about it.”
—Brookhart, S. (2008). *How to give effective feedback to your students*. (p.26). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
2. “Specifically, feedback is more effective when it provides information on correct rather than incorrect responses and when it builds on changes from previous trials.”
—Hattie, J. & Timperley, H. (2007). *The power of feedback*. *Review of Educational Research*. 77(81), 85.
3. “In short, drive theory tells us that classroom assessment that is encouraging must have two characteristics. First, teachers must provide students with a way to interpret even low scores in a manner that does not imply failure. If not, failure-avoidant students will continually be discouraged when they do not receive high scores. Second, teachers must provide students with evidence that effort on their part results in higher scores.”
—Marzano, R. (2006). *Classroom assessment and grading that work*. (p.6). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Trait #4

Scoring criteria are **task neutral**; they can be applied to a variety of learning experiences and products.

Literature Supporting the Trait

1. “Not focusing beyond tasks to intended learning outcomes is an error on two levels. First, students really will think that what you ask them to do exemplifies what you want them to learn....Second, task-based, as opposed to learning-based, criteria do not yield the kind of information you and your students need to support future learning.”
—Brookhart, S. (2013). *How to create and use rubrics for formative assessment and grading*. (p.17). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
2. “What teachers really want to do is promote students’ mastery of a skill that can be successfully applied to an unlimited number of tasks—not just one. And a rubric that’s riveted on only one limited task will be of no help—to students or teachers—in clarifying the important elements of the skill itself.”
—Popham, J. (2006). *The role of rubrics in testing and teaching*. (p.21-22). New York: Routledge.

3. “General rubrics have several advantages over task-specific rubrics. General rubrics:
- Can be shared with students at the beginning of an assignment, to help them plan and monitor their own work.
 - Can be used with many different tasks, focusing the students on the knowledge and skills they are developing over time.
 - Describe student performance in terms that allow for many different paths to success.
 - Focus the teacher on developing students’ learning of skills instead of task completion.
 - Do not need to be rewritten for every assignment.”

—Brookhart, S. (2013). *How to create and use rubrics for formative assessment and grading*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Readings

Arter, J. (2012). *Developing and recognizing quality rubrics study guide*. Portland, OR: Pearson Assessment Training Institute.

This text defines various types of rubrics and outlines important qualities of effective rubrics. In addition, considerations for rubric development, assessment task development and alignment and grading and feedback are discussed.

Arter, J. & McTighe, J. (2001). *Scoring rubrics in the classroom: Using performance criteria for assessing and improving student performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

This book explains the concepts of performance criteria versus rubrics and how they can support quality instruction and improved student performance. Additional topics include different types of rubrics, how to develop effective rubrics, how to use performance criteria and rubrics for grading and instruction.

Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B., William, D. (2004). *Working inside the black box: Assessment for learning in the classroom*. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86(1), 9-12.

This article follows up on “Inside the Black Box” (1998) which found that improving formative assessment raises student achievement. Here, the authors highlight specific strategies that improve formative assessment such as questioning, peer and self-assessment, feedback through grading and the formative use of summative assessments.

Brookhart, S. M. (2008). *How to give effective feedback to your students*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

This book explains the research on feedback including different types of feedback and how to give feedback in varied ways. Additional topics include helping students use feedback, content specific strategies for feedback and addressing learner differences when providing feedback.

Brookhart, S. M. (2013). *How to create and use rubrics for formative assessment and grading*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

This text begins by defining what rubrics are and sharing some common misconceptions before detailing and providing examples of different types of rubrics. The author describes different uses for rubrics including to help students understand learning goals, as a foundation for feedback, to inform self-assessment and for grading.

Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. New York: Routledge.

This text outlines the results of Hattie's meta-analysis of high impact teaching strategies, including those on the impact of feedback and the factors that influence its efficacy for students.

Hattie, J. & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(81), 81-112.

This article explains some of the key research about feedback, including what about the type of feedback and how it is given makes the feedback more or less effective. The authors then propose a model of feedback to promote a greater positive effect.

Hefelbower, T., Hoegh, J., & Warrick, P. (2014). *A school leader's guide to standards-based grading*. [E-book].
Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research Laboratory.

This text presents definitions, research support for, and descriptions of standards based assessment and grading practices including prioritizing standards and articulating learning progressions, aligning assessments to the standards, grading and reporting and communication with families.

Johnson, J., Perez, L., & Uline, C. (2013). *Teaching Practices from America's Best Urban Schools*. New York: Routledge.

This research-based text describes and explains instructional practices common to award-winning urban schools. Using specific stories to illustrate the practices, the authors also provide guidance on implementing and applying the practices for teachers and school leaders.

Marzano, R.J. (2006). *Classroom Assessment and Grading that Work*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

The author presents a case for prioritizing standards as well as articulating and using a clear, shared scale for assessing student learning of those standards as a way to produce valid and reliable assessment information.

Pollio, M. & Hochbein, C. (2015, November). The association between standards-based grading and standardized test scores as an element of a high school reform model. *Teachers College Record*, 117(11).

This paper examines the connection between different grading methods and performance on standardized tests. The study examines approximately 2400 11th grade students taking Algebra 2 across 11 high schools in a large metropolitan area and finds that standards based grades are more predictive of student performance on the state assessment, including for students considered "at risk."

Popham, J. (2006). *The role of rubrics in testing and teaching*. New York: Routledge.

In this brief booklet, the author defines types and uses of rubrics, when and how they can be useful in instruction and assessment, and benefits and pitfalls of application. The author provides several examples of what he describes and a short glossary of terms.

Stiggins, R. (2006). *Classroom assessment for student learning: Doing it right, using it well*. Portland, OR: Educational Testing Service Assessment Training Institute.

The authors reframe discussion of assessment as about the difference between assessment of learning and assessment for learning. They outline how to use assessment for learning to promote student engagement and achievement, including activities and exercises to support implementation.

William, D. (2016). The secret of effective feedback. *Educational Leadership*, 73(7), 10-15.

In this article, the author summarizes key traits and conditions that make feedback effective in improving student learning including that students must be able to use the feedback in future work, that is must build on what students already know and can do, and that teacher student relationships provide an important context for how

feedback is received. Additionally, the author talks about the importance of using feedback practices that teach students how to self-assess.

Yettick, H. (Nov. 9, 2015). Learning progressions: Maps to personalized teaching.” *Edweek*.

Retrieved from: <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/11/11/learning-progressions-maps-to-personalized-teaching.html>

This article both defines key features and provides background information about learning progressions and illustrates what the practice looks like in use, describing implications for teachers and students.