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 interrelationship 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.”
   

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.”
   

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.”
   

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.”

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Four Traits of Effective Scoring Criteria: Supporting Literature

**TRAIT 1: Scoring criteria articulate a clear progression of learning.**

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.”

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.”

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…”

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.”

**TRAIT 2: Scoring criteria describe the quality of student work at each performance level.**

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.”

2. “Black and Wiliam (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.”
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.”
Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

**TRAIT 3: Scoring criteria describe (in affirmative terms) what students can do at each level of performance.**

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.”

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.”

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.”

**TRAIT 4: Scoring criteria are task neutral; they can be applied to a variety of learning experiences and products.**

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.”
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.”

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.”