

## Keeping Human Resources happy: improving hiring processes through the use of rubrics

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### Introduction

In any employee evaluation, be it screening a potential employee during a job interview, or reviewing the annual work of a seasoned veteran on your staff, it is absolutely necessary to have a clear set of performance expectations that is objective, impartial, and useful for whomever is on the search committee or review team.

One method that is useful in quantifying, qualifying, and being transparent in the expectations a manager has for job applicants is to use rubrics. A rubric is a tool that outlines specific expectations for varying levels of competency. They are commonly used in teaching situations, for appraising research papers or projects, and allocating grades. They also serve the purpose of comparing potential candidates against expectations, and can be used effectively in two situations related to evaluation of candidates who have applied for jobs: review of applications and evaluating interview performance.

In this article, readers will learn the basic construction of rubrics and how to apply rubrics in selecting employees equitably through application/cover letter review and interviews. In consideration of the purpose of using rubrics in these evaluation situations, it is important to ruminate on the role of the institution's Human Resources and/or Equity and Diversity offices. Often times, these departments have the (very important) task of ensuring that the hiring process is conducted without discrimination. In hiring situations, having a well-constructed rubric will make a search committee's job easier. Just like in assigning grades to classwork, using a rubric provides for efficient, consistent, and objective decision making in evaluating job applicants.

### Rubrics

A rubric is an ordered table containing expressions to aid in the delineation of expectations for performance related to specific criteria. They are most suited for assessment of multi-

dimensional concepts that are hard to quantify or rate on a scale because the definitions of achievement are subjective.

A typical rubric looks like this (adapted from University of Colorado at Denver):<sup>1</sup>

	<b>Recipe Followed Correctly</b>	<b>Apple Filling</b>	<b>Crust</b>	<b>Pie Baked Evenly</b>
<b>Below Expectations</b>	Recipe has not been followed correctly and the pie does not have the correct proportion of sugar, spices and crust	The apples for the filling were not cut and prepared correctly	Top and bottom crusts are not light and flaky	Pie is not baked evenly throughout and does not have an even-colored golden brown crust
<b>Meets Expectations</b>	The recipe has been mostly followed correctly with approximately the correct proportion of sugar, spices and crust	The apples for the filling were mostly cut and prepared correctly	Top and bottom crusts are mostly light and flaky	Pie is baked mostly evenly throughout and the crust has a mostly even-colored golden brown crust
<b>Above Expectations</b>	The recipe has been followed correctly and the pie has the correct proportion of sugar, spices and crust	The apples for the filling were all cut and prepared correctly	Top and bottom crusts are very light and flaky	Pie is baked evenly throughout with an even-colored golden brown crust

Obviously, this rubric is designed to evaluate the assignment of baking an apple pie. There are four grading criteria: following the recipe, the apple filling, the crust, and even baking. The rating scale is three-fold: below, meeting, or above expectations. For each criteria listed across the top row, the expectations are defined with relevant descriptors, and whomever is completing the apple pie assignment will be able to determine how their evaluation was conducted.

Sometimes, “scoring rubrics” are used. They also have criteria and ranking, but do not distinguish through descriptors what constitutes the score. For example:<sup>2</sup>

		0	1	2	3
visibility:	does not hide work with body any more than necessary				
writing:	writing is large and clearly written; level				
speech:	is audible and enunciated clearly; easy to follow				
attention:	talks to students, not board; frequently turns to face students				
interaction:	keeps students actively involved in process by asking questions				
modeling:	portrays logical thinking by using "think aloud" protocol				
student needs:	responds to student needs to know; asks for follow-up questions				

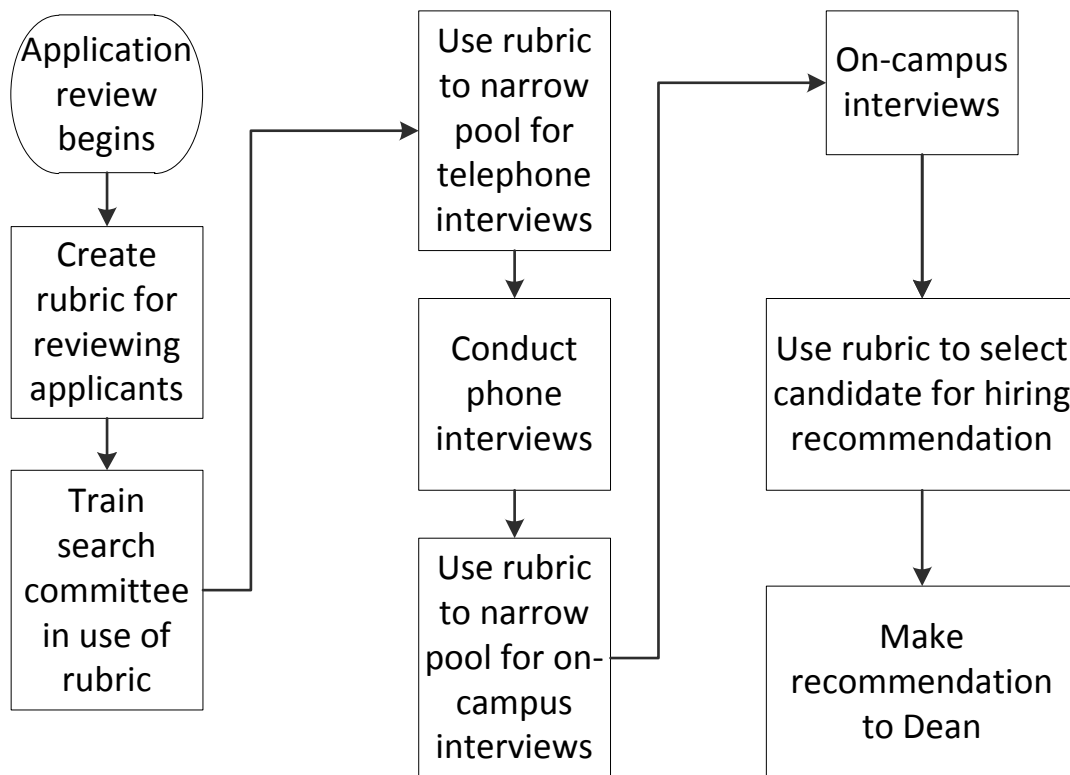
This rubric is an example used in grading a beginning teacher's use of a chalkboard/whiteboard. The criteria are listed in the left-hand column, and the rating scale is from 0-3. There are definitions for the criteria, and these seem to be a good start at creating the descriptors that would lead to an assignment of a score from 0-3, but they are not clear. This is too subjective and quite often if two people conducted the assessment, they would score it differently.

Constructing a rubric is simple in theory, but can get complicated in practice. Because one is trying to express qualitative information in essentially a quantitative manner, creating the descriptors that indicate each level of performance distinctly may take time. One should consider how others would interpret the descriptors, such as "top and bottom crusts are **very** light and flaky" as opposed to "top and bottom crusts are **mostly** light and flaky." They need to be distinguishable and as precise as possible. A scale of three options (below, meets, exceeds) is acceptable for most rubrics, although sometimes more are used.

### Rubrics in hiring

Rubrics can be used in a few places in the hiring process: applications and interviews. Why would you need to use one? The University of Texas says you need a tool that "lets you objectively compare an applicant's qualifications to a job vacancy's qualifications and functions, as well as compare applicants to one another based on established job-related criteria." Why does Human Resources care? "Because it provides equal employment opportunities to all applicants and upholds the integrity of the university by ensuring that selection decisions are made only on lawful, job-related and non-discriminatory criteria."<sup>3</sup>

A typical search committee's application review on a college campus that uses a rubric goes like this:



There are a few places here that Human Resources can weigh in on selections if they are monitoring the candidate review process. They would compare each candidate against the job posting, and may ask questions such as “Why didn’t this person get an interview” or “Why did you choose her over him?” The rubric helps you be able to demonstrate how committee members assessed each candidate’s qualifications during the application review and interviews.

### *Use of rubrics in applications*

There are “yes/no” qualifications that can be demonstrated in job applications and cover letters, such as whether or not the applicant submitted the prescribed quantity of reference letters, whether or not they completed the application in full, or whether or not they submitted a college transcript. However, there are far more qualitative measures that job postings have that necessitate clear description of what is acceptable. One manager’s idea of what “customer service experience” entails could be very different than another manager’s.

There are steps involved in creating a rubric to use in screening applicants. First, use the job posting to list every single criteria or qualification from the job posting’s minimum qualifications,

then all that are listed as preferred/desired, and whatever others that the search committee might consider. This list will contain the yes/no qualifications (such as MLS degree) and the more qualitative ones. Now you need to define thresholds for what satisfies meeting minimum expectations, what is acceptable, and how an applicant would exceed expectations. A matrix representation with lines for each applicant is this:

	Qualification 1	Qualification 2	Qualification 3	Qualification 4	Qualification 5
	INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO APPLY RUBRIC				
	DEFINITIONS OF EXCEEDS, ACCEPTABLE, AND NOT ACCEPTABLE				
Applicant 1					
Applicant 2					
Applicant 3					
Applicant 4					

Next you must instruct the search committee in how to apply the rubric. Consistency is the key to reducing subjectivity, and you can enhance the rubric through group discussion. At the very least, everyone on an interview team should be knowledgeable on how each criteria is defined, and how to glean information from the candidate. Would you learn about the applicant's education from a cover letter? From the resume? From an interview? Some managers or search committee members may be very new to the hiring process and will need guidance in this way.

Unfortunately, with Human Resources departments, if there is a minimum qualification of "Reference experience," that is subjective and lenient. You may be required to interview ALL applicants with reference experience unless your job posting is more stringently constructed. A true rubric would delineate what is exceptional, passable, and not acceptable at all. Note, though, that not all qualifications will need all delineations. For example:

	<b>MLS/MSIS from ALA-accredited program</b>	<b>Supervisory Experience</b>	<b>Effective interpersonal and communication skills</b>	<b>Familiarity with library's current ILS system</b>
<b>Instructions on how to determine</b>	<i>yes or no? will be on application or resume</i>	<i>Should be stated in resume or cover letter: indicate yes or no; add notes about detail</i>	<i>Found in resume and cover letter. Watch grammar, spelling, punctuation. consistency of tense.</i>	<i>should be stated in resume or cover letter: indicate yes or no; add notes about detail</i>
<b>Guidance for ratings of Exceeds, Meets, or Below expectations</b>	<p><u>Meets</u>: has ALA-accredited degree, or will earn by September 2015</p> <p><u>Below</u>: does not have ALA-accredited degree</p>	<p><u>Exceeds</u>: has supervised group of 10+ staff</p> <p><u>Meets</u>: 1 year supervisory experience</p> <p><u>Below</u>: no supervisory experience stated</p>	<p><u>Exceeds</u>: no errors</p> <p><u>Meets</u>: fewer than 3 errors within all application materials</p> <p><u>Below</u>: three or more errors within all application materials</p>	<p><u>Exceeds</u>: back up system-administrator or 3+ years of experience</p> <p><u>Meets</u>: 1+ years of experience</p> <p><u>Below</u>: no experience stated</p>
<b>Applicant 1</b>				
<b>Applicant 2</b>				
<b>Applicant 3</b>				
<b>Applicant 4</b>				

### *Use of rubrics in interviewing*

When interviewing, hiring managers are often looking for more qualitative characteristics, such as 'critical thinking skills' or 'personality.' These can be harder to demarcate than the screening qualifications of 'degree' or 'experience with ...' used during application reviews. However, the characteristics of rubrics used in reviewing applications can also be applied during the interview process. Here is an example of a bad evaluation tool actually used in job interviews. This is from a school in California, and is used when interviewing staff, and they ask for interviewees to participate in a few on-site tests.

<b>Skills</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>
Basic Typing			
Recordkeeping			
Oral & Written Skills			
Public Contact			

The skills on the left are things that they are looking for in a job candidate. The ratings at the top are excellent, average, and poor. There are two things missing. The first is instruction on how an interviewer would know how to determine an interviewee's recordkeeping skills, or public contact experience. The other is the definition/explanation of how to determine what is excellent, average, or poor when it comes to basic typing or math skills. Now, when this same school conducts interviews for supervisors, they do have some additional information:

#### **Supervision**

Can effectively direct actions of others, assess workload needs, maintain constructive work environment, conflicts or problems.

#### **Communication/Interpersonal**

Expresses ideas clearly, concisely, and logically; is able to gain acceptance for own ideas; perceives and reacts sensitively to the needs and actions of others; can relate to diverse people including faculty, students and people of varied ethnic backgrounds.

#### **Flexibility**

Can vary behavior according to the situation, successfully with stress, reassess priorities and come up with new ideas when needed.

**Problem Solving**

Can troubleshoot organizational problems; identify correctly and respond appropriately to key people and issues; define problems and identify central issues; sort out and weigh consequences of alternatives.

They have operationally defined the concepts of ‘Supervision’ and ‘Flexibility,’ but haven’t given enough explanatory detail that would allow an interviewer to explicitly eliminate interviewees from their pool.

This is a better set of expectations:

<b><u>Written Communication</u></b>	<b><u>Critical Thinking Ability</u></b>	<b><u>Leadership Potential</u></b>
<p><b>Exceeds:</b> clear, coherent, imaginative, concise, intelligent, free of errors</p> <p><b>Acceptable:</b> weak structure, predictable results, basic</p> <p><b>Not acceptable:</b> poorly written, spelling and grammar errors, sloppy, plagiarism</p>	<p><b>Exceeds:</b> consistently fair minded, ethical, justifies assumptions and reasons, discusses alternate points of view</p> <p><b>Acceptable:</b> makes connections in limited way, includes evidence of interpretation or prediction</p> <p><b>Not acceptable:</b> lacks careful thought, weak or unsupported arguments, shows close-mindedness</p>	<p><b>Exceeds:</b> has point of view, confidence, engages reader, shows maturity, recognizes benefits of teams, demonstrates trustworthiness</p> <p><b>Acceptable:</b> has personal voice, mentions goals, but lack of depth regarding leadership, seems fair</p> <p><b>Not acceptable:</b> no understanding of leadership or demonstration of potential</p>



And more:

<u>Appreciation of Diversity</u>	<u>Forward Thinking/Vision Ability</u>	<u>Commitment to Profession</u>
<p><b>Exceeds:</b> clear connection to adding to and affirming diversity</p> <p><b>Acceptable:</b> acknowledges diversity, interaction with others</p> <p><b>Not acceptable:</b> no clear opinion or vision of diversity</p>	<p><b>Exceeds:</b> originality, shows innovative thinking, grasp of future</p> <p><b>Acceptable:</b> is realistic in goals and ideas, maybe simplistic</p> <p><b>Not acceptable:</b> no concept of future or thoughts beyond here and now</p>	<p><b>Exceeds:</b> ambition, recognition of current events/issues, evidence of professional development/contributions</p> <p><b>Acceptable:</b> able to place themselves in organization</p> <p><b>Not acceptable:</b> demonstrates little to no commitment to profession</p>

### *Using matrix with point-systems*

Some search committees may apply a “point-system” to their ratings in order to effectively rank candidates. This, in fact, may be a requirement in some workplaces. To apply points to a rubric, one could equate as such:

Not acceptable	=	0 points
Acceptable	=	1 point
Exceeds	=	2 points

After reviewing all applications, and again after interviewing all qualified applicants, points for each candidate may be tallied to assign rank for hiring decisions. Though this does quantify the process, there is a neglect here of the overall impression that one gets in a face-to-face interaction.

### **Conclusion**

A rubric is a very useful tool. Human Resources departments, Equity and Diversity offices, supervisors, job candidates, and employees alike benefit from their use. With planning and up-front work in the construction of a sound rubric, the review of job applicants becomes simpler equitable, and transparent. Although rubric construction can be complex due to the need for

stringent distinction of evaluation criteria, there is an added benefit of time-savings during these human resources situations.

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<sup>1</sup> University of Colorado, Center for Faculty Development, "Rubrics: as easy as apple pie!," accessed August 1, 2014, [http://www.ucdenver.edu/faculty\\_staff/faculty/center-for-faculty-development/Documents/Tutorials/Rubrics/1\\_what\\_is/easy\\_as\\_pie.htm](http://www.ucdenver.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/center-for-faculty-development/Documents/Tutorials/Rubrics/1_what_is/easy_as_pie.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Illinois State University, Department of Physics, "Creation of scoring rubric," accessed August 1, 2014, [http://www.phy.ilstu.edu/pte/311content/testconstruction/write\\_rubric.html](http://www.phy.ilstu.edu/pte/311content/testconstruction/write_rubric.html)

<sup>3</sup> The University of Texas at Austin, Human Resources, "Form a selection panel or develop a selection matrix," accessed August 1, 2014, <http://www.utexas.edu/hr/manager/hiring/form.html>