

RUBRIC DESIGN & USE



CONTEXT

Rubrics are evaluation protocols, and they are one of the most widely adopted tools to facilitate more holistic, equitable, efficient review. Faculty in a variety of fields use rubrics for evaluating the quality of student work. The process of developing one with one's colleagues is useful in both creating common understandings of what should / should not be considered in admissions, and as a step toward a more equitable review process.

OBJECTIVES

By participating in this session you will:

1. understand how evaluation rubrics can facilitate holistic review
2. think through core criteria of a rubric for your program
3. articulate what different levels of quality look like on key criteria
4. practice putting a rubric to use through sample personal statements

START WITH EQUITY-MINDEDNESS

Aiming for equity-mindedness: As people and professionals, we are all at different places in our knowledge and experiences with issues around equity. Yet we collectively aspire to equity-mindedness, a “mode of thinking exhibited by practitioners who call attention to patterns of inequity in student outcomes. Figure 2 highlights components of equity-mindedness.

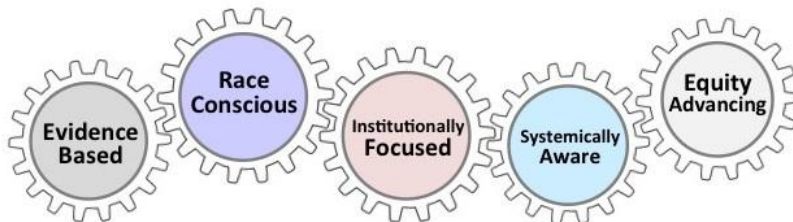
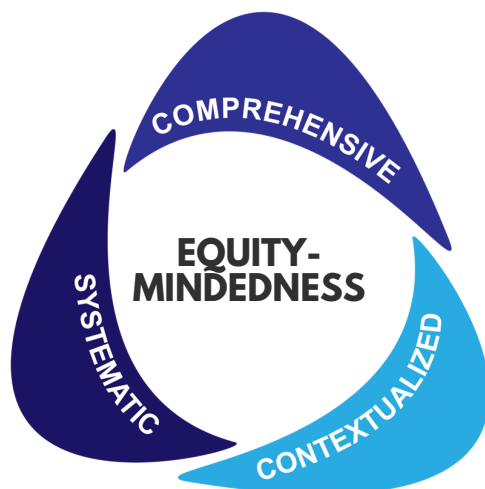


Figure 2. Components of Equity-Mindedness. Reproduced with permission from the USC Center for Urban Education

KEY FEATURES OF HOLISTIC REVIEW



Holistic review is "the consideration of a broad range of candidate qualities including 'noncognitive' or personal attributes" (CGS, 2016, p. iii).

COMPREHENSIVE

- Numerous and diverse criteria, drawn from different parts of the application
- Consider the whole person and the sum of their potential
- Remember that diverse perspectives improve scholarly work
- Consider that socio-emotional competencies are necessary for outstanding professional performance

CONTEXTUALIZED

- Metrics in context
 - Note intrinsic error, as all statistics have
 - Note societal patterns in who has access to opportunities that lead to high scores
- Achievements in context
 - Distributions of opportunities relative to societal patterns
 - Achievements don't always signal aptitude or ability
- Admissions in context
 - How students aid your program's identity, mission, and broader goals

SYSTEMATIC

- Base review on shared, predefined criteria with structured protocols, for efficiency & consistency.
- Create space for flexibility, nuance.
- Build in safeguards & checks to promote equity and limit biases.
- Carefully select & train gatekeepers
- Coordinate evaluation with recruitment and yield efforts

NOTES

INCORPORATING NON-COGNITIVE COMPETENCIES

- Social and emotional skills that we use to navigate life.
 - Initiative
 - Persistence
 - Conscientiousness
- Measurable
- Results from decades of psychology research (developmental, social, and industrial-organizational)
 - Predict academic/job performance
 - Little, if any, group differences by gender and race
 - Orthogonal to cognitive measures (e.g., GPA, SAT/GRE)

Correlating professional performance with admissions criteria and non-cognitive competencies

	Didactic	Clinical
Cognitive	Yes	No
Non-Cognitive	Maybe	Yes

"Cognitive ability and knowledge are threshold aspects of professional work, necessary *but not sufficient* for outstanding professional performance."

Victoroff and Boyatzis, J. Dent. Ed 77, 416 (2013)

SELF-MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES correlate with clinical grade

Relationship Management

Teamwork and Collaboration
 Communication
 Building Bonds
 Conflict Management
 Influence
 Change Catalyst
 Inspirational Leadership
 Developing Others

Social Awareness

Cultural Awareness
 Organizational Awareness
 Empathy
 Service Orientation

Self Management

Optimism
 Trustworthiness
 Achievement Orientation
 Conscientiousness
 Adaptability
 Emotional Self-Control
 Initiative

Self Awareness

Self-Confidence
 Accurate Self-Assessment
 Emotional Awareness

RUBRICS

Comprehensive, Contextualized, & Systematic

WHY RUBRICS ?

Rubrics offer benefits that redress common drawbacks in many programs' admissions' process.

- *EFFICIENCY* is enhanced by expediting review, reducing faculty load.
- *STRUCTURE* for a process in which many applicants are compared on multiple dimensions.
- *SPECIFICITY* about what reviewers should be looking for may reduce implicit bias, creating a more equitable process.
- *TRANSPARENCY* about evaluation criteria is good for decision makers, their colleagues, and applicants.
- *RELIABILITY* of evaluations across raters can be assessed.
- *ACCOUNTABILITY* to head off charges of unfairness.

Category	High	Medium	Low	Notes
Academic Preparation	A- or better in all core STEM courses AND B or better in non-STEM courses; received at least one academic honor	B or better in all core STEM courses; Concerning grades have a reasonable explanation	Lower than a B in 2 or more core STEM courses; Grades of C or lower do not have a reasonable explanation	
Scholarly potential	Clear commitment to and enthusiasm for research AND experience at least equal to a senior thesis	Clear commitment to and enthusiasm for research, BUT experience less than a senior thesis	Signals that a PhD is more of a next step than a clear passion.	
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Contributions	Has been an active advocate for diversity, equity, and/or inclusion	Some evidence of engagement with diversity, equity, and/or inclusion	Limited evidence of engagement with diversity, equity, and/or inclusion	
Alignment with Program	Research interests align with multiple faculty AND stated career goals align with program training	Research interests align with one faculty member AND stated career goals align with program training	Limited alignment with faculty research interests OR limited evidence of alignment between career goals and program training	
Realistic Self-Appraisal	Clearly delineates strengths and weaknesses AND clear evidence of effort on self development	Basic statements about strengths and weaknesses AND does seek positive and negative feedback	Over or understates abilities; indications that self-assessment or learning from experiences are limited	
Preference for long-term goals	Clearly communicates long-range goals beyond the PhD AND has a record of engaging in long-term endeavors	Clearly communicates long-range goals beyond the PhD OR Has a record of engaging in long-term endeavors	Goals are short range (e.g., specific coursework); limited history of engagement in long-term projects	

SAMPLE RUBRIC



Attribute	Score		
	High	Medium	Low
Positive Self-Concept	Expresses confidence they can complete challenging goals, makes positive statements about abilities	Shows confidence and independence but may be unsure about adequacy or skills	Is unsure they can complete the program, exhibits low self-esteem
Realistic Self-Appraisal	Can clearly and realistically delineate strengths and weaknesses, works on self development	Has trouble identifying strengths and weakness but appreciates/seek both positive and negative feedback	Over or understates abilities, does little to no self-assessment, does not appear to have learned from experiences
Preference for Long vs. Short Term Goals	Clearly communicates long-range goals beyond the PhD	Primary goal is PhD completion	Is vague about long-term goals, or goals are short term such as coursework
Support Person Availability	Can define a professional support network including mentors	Expresses support from one individual, or family or community	Expresses little or no support from family or institution for goals
Leadership/Community Involvement	Demonstrates involvement and leadership ability in either academics, family, community, religious group, or athletics	Demonstrates involvement in groups in academia or extramural but has not shown leadership	Not involved in institutional or community group, no demonstrated leadership
Knowledge in a Field/Non-Traditional Learning	Has engaged in, and learned from, experiences outside the classroom, i.e. performed independent research, extramural activities, self-taught skills	Shows some evidence of non-traditional learning experience	Has not engaged in or indicated learning from experiences outside the classroom
Perseverance	Can describe a time they failed or encountered an obstacle and successfully coped.	Can identify a time they hit an obstacle but has trouble defining how they overcame the challenge.	Has little experience with failure/obstacles. Cannot provide an example or describe response

Modified from Sedlacek

Source: *Fisk-Vanderbilt Master's to PhD Bridge Program* <https://www.fisk-vanderbilt-bridge.org/toolkit>

WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF THIS RUBRIC?

WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH THIS RUBRIC?

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- If you choose to require GRE scores, fold GRE scores and grades into a single judgment of academic preparation, to prevent anchoring bias and/or attributing small differences in scores/grades into large differences in overall quality.
- Create space for comments to justify assessments; Leave open the possibility of naming unique strengths that merit special consideration.

SOME TIPS FOR USING RUBRICS

- A rubric is only as beneficial as users' fidelity to it.
- Calibrate and increase inter-rater reliability by having all members independently rate two applications, then meet to discuss how they came to their scores.
- Ensure each application is reviewed by 2+ people. If there is significant divergence in the ratings, bring in a third reader.
- Prepare in advance a plan to subject very unique cases to a different sort of evaluation.

HOLISTIC REVIEW IN CONTEXT

- Holistic review is just one part of improving selection and rubrics are just one tool to facilitate it
- Useful for identifying talent from many underrepresented groups
- "To fully realise its potential as a policy intervention though, it is most helpfully part of integrated support for students" (Mountford-Zimdars, 2016)

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ITEM	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
Academic Preparation			
Scholarly Potential			
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Contributions			
Alignment with Program			
Non-Cognitive Competencies: Realistic Self-Appraisal			