

FEMINIST ASSIGNMENT RUBRIC GUIDELINES

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Universities increasingly mandate grading rubrics to ensure that instructors implement a fair grading structure. Typically in the form of a grid, they create rigid and seemingly objective categories of assessment that present a one-way mode of communication between educator and student. These features deny students agency in their own learning processes.

Working together, we outlined a number of feminist critiques and suggestions to change both the format and language of the rubric assessment document, which educators can use to foster a less hierarchical and more empowering learning environment.

FAAC embraces multiple definitions of feminism, many of which acknowledge that the feminist principles of care, collaboration, and mutual respect transcend a narrow emphasis on gender. Our recommendations are broadly applicable, yet are intended to ensure that marginalized groups - women among them - have equal access to learning opportunities. Likewise, our suggestions are informed by our backgrounds in art and architectural history, as we explore how the design elements of the rubric form itself can impede or enhance student success.

- **Evaluate the work, not the student.** Pay attention to language used when writing rubrics so as to not implicate the student as a person, but the work.

Example: For a presentation rubric, shift language from “Student does not have grasp of information” to “Presentation needed to deliver more in-depth information.”

- **Criticize constructively.** Information in the rubric should not just penalize what is missing from the assignment, but instead explain to the student how to improve.

Example: For an essay rubric, shift language from “Student does not have a grasp of information” to “An architectural essay should include more examples and quotations to support the main argument.”

- **Make expectations transparent.** The rubric should be distributed as part of the prompt for the assignment to ensure that all students understand the assumptions that may be embedded in conventional assignment language.
- **Question received formats.** The rubric’s common grid format is limiting, as it cannot take into account of each student’s specific work. Often, student work falls between the categories, or displays qualities not articulated in the rubric. Additionally, the rectilinear grid is a visual device that has been used historically to impose metaphorical order on marginalized groups. Is there a way to create a rubric that allows one to go beyond its own self-imposed limits?

Example: One possible solution is to use word-webs that emphasize certain words and diminish others according to the qualities of the student work, rather than a grid format.

- **Evaluate process as well as product.** Add a grading criterion that rewards crafting and effort, not just content. This is in order to acknowledge effort as a form of labor, not just final outcomes.
- **Emphasize comments over numbers.** Prioritize the comments on the grading form more than the numerical grade. It is in the comments that educators can communicate to the student how to improve, not in the numerical grade.
- **Welcome student voices.** Add space in the rubric for the student to give feedback and reflect on the assignment process, as well as the grading process. This is an opportunity to transform the rubric into a two-way dialogue, rather than a unilateral, one-way, system of communication. Students can even have a voice in the creation of the rubric itself to better align the assignment outcomes with their own academic and professional goals.