

RUBRICS:

An Overview on the Reading & Use of Rubrics for the SCA

Baron Fridrikr Tomasson



(Rubric page for the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul)

Why Rubrics?

Think of baseball... of skiing... of driving...If you do, then you think of an extremely complex series of physical and mental activities, that must be carefully coordinated if the participant is to be successful. My daughter, who is just 16, is learning to drive. In order to obtain her Driver's Permit in New York State, Ingrid took a paper-and-pencil test to determine if she knew the basic rule of the road. Did that paper-and-pencil test show if she was ready to get a driver's license? Heck, no.

When I was still teaching high school English, I attended a series of workshops on Educative Assessment at the University of Rochester. The instructor, Meg Keller-Cogan, is an expert in the use of Performance Assessment (or Authentic Assessment). This system takes the many different areas of learning that a student has learned and combines them into one "real-life" activity that shows the student's level of mastery of all of the areas at one time. In her online article on Performance Assessment, Amy Brualdi says, "Performance-based assessments "represent a set of strategies for the . . . application of knowledge, skills, and work habits through the performance of tasks that are meaningful and engaging to students"" (Brualdi)

For example, instead of using the standard testing procedures in mathematics, biology, and English, a group of teachers in our workshop, devised a project where their classes designed, built, operated, and wrote about, a class vegetable garden. This involved math (measuring, geometry, and statistics), biology and other sciences (determining soil quality, choosing plants for the soil, tracking growth and taking action to promote healthy plants), and writing (keeping accurate journals, developing written plans, writing advertising for the sale of the crops, etc). This project was highly complex, long-term, and extremely interesting for the high school students who completed it. At the end, the students' work was assessed by their teachers and volunteers from the community, using a tool called a rubric.

During the course of the workshop, we were asked to think of real-life activities that could be subjected to Performance Assessment. I thought of activities in the SCA: autocrattng events, fighting, armoring, and the Ice Dragon Pentathlon. I had judged at Ice Dragon for several years and had found that the checklist we used (and still use to a certain extent) was frustrating. The activities that we judge at Ice Dragon are real-life: cooking, clothing, brewing, armoring, woodworking, metalworking, etc., and judging them could be done more completely by using a Performance Assessment model and developing a rubric for each activity.

What is a Rubric?

So what is a rubric, exactly? The term rubric comes from the red letters that were written at the beginning of sections of the Mass (like the illumination on the front cover of this article), giving the celebrant instructions for that section. They were never read aloud, and the red letters denoted this. Today, the term has take on a different meaning.

A rubric is a verbose description of what a piece of work looks like at various levels of mastery, ranging from beginning to expert. There are two types of rubrics: **holistic** (measuring the product as a whole) and **analytic trait** (measuring the product as the sum of several parts). For the Ice Dragon rubric, we use an analytic trait rubric which is comprised of six analytic traits corresponding to the six traditional judging categories (Workmanship, Documentation, Creativity, Complexity, Authenticity, and Aesthetics). The six traits are scored from Expert through Beginner, following lengthy written descriptions provided for each trait at each level. An entry can range from being "expert" on one trait to being "beginner" on another trait. The challenge for the entrant is to present a product that strives to achieve the highest level possible and to learn from the comments that are made about the product. The goal of the judge is to be fair and utterly objective, following the rubric, not his own opinions. This can be highly challenging, as quite often a judge may disagree with the rubric. This is what leads to judge's discussions of the rubrics. I have seen occasions where a team of judges has agreed to change a rubric and to bring that change to the notice of the rubrics supervisor later. This should lead to a revision of the rubric. Finally, the task of the author of a rubric is to write as complete a description of a piece of work at each level of expertise as he can, in a fairly compact style that is useful to both the judges and the entrants.

Reading A Rubric

In reading a rubric, it is important to remember the following points:

A well-written rubric is often the product of many minds working together, with one author as the lead writer and others as editors, critics, etc. The rubrics you are about to view have been developed by an editing process, and, in the case of the four that were used at Ice Dragon 2004 (Cooking, Pre-14th Century Clothing, Calligraphy, and Illumination), were field tested and commented on before they were used.

In beginning to write a rubric, I take three important steps. First, I visualize an expert product that I have seen and know very well. For example when I think of public speakers, I visualize former President Bill Clinton. Putting politics aside, Bill Clinton is perhaps the most successful public speaker of our times. He engages every audience member, whether he is speaking to a small group or to a convention hall. He is comfortable in shirt sleeves or in full-dress. He has an outstanding grasp of the facts, and he also can move an audience emotionally. Using him as a model, I attempt to describe how he does these things, what an expert level performance of Bill Clinton looks and sounds like for each of my analytic traits.. This goes in my "Expert" column.

Next I visualize the level of expertise I want my above average students to achieve for each analytic trait of public speaking. At this level, I want to describe the achievement of the above-average performance (this would be a 4 out of 6 on the Ice Dragon scale; the "Expert" level would be a 6).

Then I work backwards and forwards, filling in the level 3, then the level 5, then the level 2, and finally the level 1 performance descriptions. One thing I want to avoid is the negative statement.. This can be extremely challenging. For example, one general requirement for any documentation is a "Works Cited Page" – a list of those works (books, articles, web pages, etc.) that a student/entrant consulted. If there is no works cited page, then the omission should be noted in a positive statement: "the works cited page is missing", rather than, "there is no works cited page". It may seem a small thing, but it can be significant in other traits. Remember that you want the entrant to try again. In order to achieve that goal, it is necessary to be positive in the rubric, not insulting or or negative.

So, in reading and using a rubric, you need to visualize the "perfect exemplar" first. Just as a rubric author pictures how to describe the finest reproduction armor, costume, painting, woodworking piece, etc., you need to see it in your mind as well. Once you have that picture, compare it to what you have made.

Try to judge where your work falls on the scale of the rubric you're looking at. Break your work down according to the six Analytic Traits that are present in the Ice Dragon rubric. Try to "score" your work on that scale. Remember that your authenticity may only be average, but your workmanship above average and your documentation below average. Then try to improve your weaknesses. At its absolute best, a rubric is meant to be a tool for improvement. If you have used it as such and made good modifications, you should find that the judges' scores are higher than your original scores.

Judging Using a Rubric

As I said before, the goal of a rubric is to provide both teachers and students (judges and entrants) with a "verbose" or extensively worded description of what a student's/entrant's work will look like at various points of achievement, from beginning to expert levels. In my experience as an educator, rubrics were originally intended to be learning tools that a student and teacher can use to help the student increase his level or proficiency. While rubrics are used for grading purposes, the best use of rubrics is as a teaching tool.

This implies that you approach a rubriced judging activity as a teacher, trying to keep your remarks positive. It is necessary to point out flaws in a person's work, but do so with an eye toward improving their future work. There are a set of guidelines we offer to judges at Ice Dragon to help them use the rubrics more efficiently and increase the utility of the rubrics as learning tools. The guideline is appended to this paper.

In Conclusion

It is my belief that continuing to develop new rubrics for Ice Dragon (and other A&S projects and competitions), editing and revise older rubrics, and promote the use of rubrics as a positive teaching tool, we can expand our knowledge of the Arts and Sciences within the SCA and help artisans and artists to achieve higher and greater levels of expertise. I hope that you will be encouraged to help write rubrics, to use them in looking at your own work in order to improve your work, and perhaps join us at Ice Dragon as a judge of a rubriced category.

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Appendix A: A Rubric Template

One or more traits or **dimensions** that serve as the basis for judging the student response

Definitions and examples to clarify the meaning of each trait or dimension

A **scale** of values on which to rate each dimension

Standards of excellence for specified performance levels accompanied by models or examples of each level (Chicago Public Schools)

QUALITY	9-10	7-8	5-6	3-4	1-2
Documentation: the extent to which the entrant provides written material that explains what they were trying to produce, the materials used, and the processes followed, as well as appropriate historical background and source(s) for the entry	A piece at this level	A piece at this level	A piece at this level	A piece at this level	A piece at this level
Authenticity: the extent to which the entry uses period materials and techniques to create an item of any specified period (may be influenced by process, materials, or aesthetics).					
Complexity: the extent to which the entry was difficult to make (materials used, availability of materials, difficulty of style, number and difficulty of steps, intricate details and overall size)					

QUALITY	9-10	7-8	5-6	3-4	1-2
<p>Creativity: the extent to which the artist combined original elements and substitutions with a knowledge of period styles to create a piece that did not exist in the Middle Ages</p>	A piece at this level	A piece at this level	A piece at this level	A piece at this level	A piece at this level
<p>Workmanship: the extent to which the entrant uses their skill combined with knowledge of materials and techniques to produce an entry</p>					
<p>Aesthetics: the extent to which the elements of an entry work together to create a pleasing whole while maintaining the "flavor" of a period piece (may include elements like content, size and shape of piece, proportion, style, historical accuracy, composition, color choice, how it interacts with the viewer, and overall appeal to the viewer)</p>					

Appendix B: Judging Guidelines from Ice Dragon

Guidelines for Ice Dragon Judges of Rubricated Categories:

1. Read the rubric over very carefully. Think about it.
 2. Discuss with your fellow judges what you think the language of the rubric means
 3. Read the rubric again by yourself.
 4. Discuss & look at the pieces you'll be judging. Share information on time periods styles, techniques, etc., with your fellow judges.
 5. **WHEN JUDGING, AVOID DISCUSSING THE ENTRIES WITH YOUR FELLOW JUDGES.** While it is a good thing to discuss the finer points of techniques, save those discussions for later.
 6. **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO ARRIVE AT A CONSENSUS SCORE WITH YOUR FELLOW JUDGES.** Let your score, your analysis of the item, stand on its own.
7. ***IN EACH SCORING CATEGORY, YOU WILL SEE THAT THERE IS A SCORING RANGE (9-10, 7-8, 5-6, 3-4, & 1-2). IF AN ENTRY FALLS INTO A SPECIFIC SCORING CATEGORY, PLEASE GIVE IT A SCORE IN THAT RANGE. THIS IS A CHANGE FROM THE PAST AND WILL GIVE YOU A SCORE OF X OUT OF 60.***
8. Scores may vary from one analytic trait to another. An item may be average in documentation & excellent in workmanship, for example.
 9. In the interest of efficiency, scores should be given to Baroness Orianna or Baron Fridrikr BEFORE you begin writing comments
 10. Write comments!!!!!! On the back, in the margins, wherever. Remember, this is an educational experience for the entrants (& ideally for you, too!), so comment in a positive & helpful manner. As an example, instead of saying "your stitching SUCKS!" suggest where improvements can be made.
 11. When judging, do your best to move quickly. If you are stuck between one score & another, make that "gut feeling" decision.
 12. **ENJOY YOURSELF, HAVE FUN, & THANK YOU!**