How to assess a cookie

Webinar handout

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Scoring rubrics can provide teachers and students with invaluable opportunities to assess the level of achievement, to reflect on the learning process and to move learning forward. To understand the role of scoring rubrics in the assessment process, it may be useful to think about what we mean when we talk about assessment. This definition gives us a good starting point:

*"In education, the term **assessment** refers to the wide variety of methods or tools that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students." (Great Schools Partnership, 2014)*

The "*wide range of methods or tools*" includes observations, anecdotal records, tests, quizzes, projects, portfolios, checklists, brainstorming activities or individual teacher-student conferences, among others.   This definition of assessment in education can easily be adapted to assessment in other areas. For example, bakers or factories can use different methods or tools to "*evaluate, measure and document*" the quality of a certain product, such as chocolate chip cookies, its success on the market and the needs of bakers and manufacturers to keep or improve quality standards.

We can assess "*academic readiness, learning progress skill acquisition*" (as we can assess cookies) for formative or summative purposes. We assess for **formative** purposes **before the end of a process, as often as possible and with the objective of providing feedback and guidance for improvement.** We assess for **summative** purposes **at the end of a process and with the objective of determining the value or quality** of a student's academic product or achievement (and the value and quality of the cookies that are on the market).

A scoring rubric is a list of characteristics that describe different levels of performance or quality. There are two main types of scoring rubrics: holistic and analytic.
1. Holistic rubrics provide an overall judgement that takes into account several characteristics at once. We can use holistic rubrics to assess cookies as in this example:

a. Level 1: delicious
b. Level 2: very good
c. Level 3: OK
d. Level 4: horrible

2. Analytic rubrics, instead, examine and rate each specific aspect of the assessed product in detail. To assess chocolate chip cookies, for example, Professor Gavin Brown suggests we could focus on the number of chocolate chips, the colour, the taste and how creamy the cookies are.

Although both holistic and analytic rubrics can be useful at different stages and for different purposes, analytic rubrics are particularly important for formative assessment, self-assessment and reflection since they provide learners with specific details about their performance and what is expected. Designing analytic rubrics is a task that requires expertise and careful planning.

Steps for creating an analytic rubric

1. **List the criteria to assess performance.** The criteria will depend on the subject and activity. For instance, to assess chocolate chip cookies the criteria chosen was: number of chips, colour, taste, richness. When assessing oral presentations the criteria could be, for example: content, fluency, eye contact, use of academic vocabulary.
2. **Determine the performance level**. Ideally, four to six levels. If we use four levels, they could be: exemplary, proficient, approaching, not yet.
3. **Write a description for each performance level**. This is the step that requires expertise and careful planning since it implies thinking about the characteristics and details of each performance level. These are subjective considerations that teachers need to take into account and which depend on the activity or task being assessed, the teaching context, the students' age and language level..

Here is an example of the description of each performance level for an oral report for content and fluency (the first two criteria suggested in step 1):

	EXEMPLARY	PROFICIENT	APPROACHING	NOT YET
CONTENT	Sticks to the topic consistently and gives complete information	Sticks to the topic most of the time and gives sufficient information	Sometimes wanders and/or does not give sufficient information	Does not have a main topic or sufficient information Oral report is erratic
FLUENCY	Fluent. Uses clear and correct pronunciation	Stumbles a few times with fluency or pronunciation	Stumbles many times with fluency or pronunciation	Stumbles with fluency or pronunciation all the time

Designing effective scoring rubrics can be challenging and takes time and expertise. On the other hand, scoring rubrics are a very useful tool because:

- They provide learners with clear descriptions and expectations and are therefore a key element in **assessment FOR learning,** or **formative assessment.**
- Students can also use them for **self-assessment and reflection**, so they are suitable tools for **assessment AS learning.**
- Teachers can also use scoring rubrics as a **grading tool** for **assessment OF learning.**
- The process of designing scoring rubrics encourages teachers to reflect meticulously on "what counts" and gives teachers a specific and practical way to **give effective feedback** to students.

References:

Great Schools Partnership (2014). The Glossary of Education Reform.
www.edglossary.org/assessment