Short-form email: Rubrics and Peer Review

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Rubrics and Peer Review

As detailed in the attached piece, “Rubric use in formative assessment: A detailed behavioral rubric helps students improve their scientific writing skills” (2015), psychologist Kathleen P. Greenberg investigated whether a writing rubric she had created could act as a means of formative assessment for her students.

Students from select sections of her psychology courses were asked to use the rubric as a guide in preparing their own APA-style empirical research reports as well as in offering feedback on others’. Although they were not told specifically what to do with the rubric in either scenario, they had been exposed to it numerous times, through class discussions, handouts, and explanations, including how the rubric would be used by the instructor. After analyzing the students’ final submissions, Greenberg found that:

- When students used a rubric prescriptively to guide the preparation of their reports, they wrote higher quality papers, on average.
- When students used the rubric to ‘grade’ their peers’ papers, and were then given an opportunity to revise their own, they also wrote higher quality papers, on average.

The second finding, in particular, indicates that well designed rubrics can help students write better papers by facilitating more productive peer review. Using a rubric in this way may also help to address a common concern about the peer-review process that emerged during the Collaborative’s First-Year Experience lunches this fall: that it can so often seem like “the blind leading the blind.” Yet, as Greenberg’s and other recent research (e.g., Cho & MacArthur, 2011 and Nicol et al., 2014) suggests, students may learn just as much by giving feedback to their peers as by receiving it, if not more. When students base their peer-review feedback on the same rubric by which all papers will be eventually evaluated, they have an opportunity to refamiliarize themselves with the assignment’s criteria and to hone their reflective and critical skills (e.g., their ability to detect problems and to figure out how to solve them), skills that they can then apply to improve their own work. By shifting the focus to these potential benefits, instructors may be able to alleviate such concerns about quality control.

The Collaborative is home to a few select titles on rubrics (see a complete list of our library books here), but we are also always on hand to assist in rubric construction and use, for peer review or otherwise.

This will be the final short-form email of the Fall 2015 semester. Please let me know if you have any ideas/suggestions as we continue the practice into the spring. Have a wonderful Winter Break!

-Emily

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