



# Single Point Rubric: A Tool for Responsible Student Self-Assessment

BY JARENE FLUCKIGER

Teachers who tap into the talents of each student involve students in goal setting and assessment of their own education. The single point rubric is an ethical tool to assist students with their responsibilities of goal setting and self-assessment of their own education. In this article, I describe key features of the single point rubric, how it is used, and how it is different from traditional multiple point rubrics. I also share some benefits of using single point rubrics along with suggestions of how to address concerns. Two sample, single point rubrics are provided.

## Introduction

Formative assessment promotes student achievement (Black & William, 1998; 2009). Formative assessment occurs when assessment results are used by both students and teachers to further student learning. Black and William's work has shown that student self-assessment is an integral component of formative assessment. This is supported by Stiggins (2001) who asserts "involving students as partners in assessment is the single best way to improve student learning

achievement" (p. 19). Effectively involving students in self-assessment enables students to answer three questions: a) Where am I going? b) Where am I now? And, c) How can I get there? (Chappuis, 2005). Engaging students in these steps of formative assessment requires that students self-assess or that peers give feedback to each other. The process of using the single point rubric embodies formative assessment and enables effective student self-assessment. This article describes how to use the single point rubric

to effectively involve students in self-assessment that furthers learning.

Many teachers see the value of involving students in self-assessment yet need more information about how to do it effectively. Teachers want to know how to get students to take responsibility for their own learning. Coercion does not result in quality, nor in lasting learning. Students need to be taught how to use assessment results to improve their own performance. Some students, after all, may not be willing to use feedback to improve because they just want to be finished with an assignment.

Teachers can help students to self-assess effectively by providing a non-coercive environment of self-determination. As suggested by Ryan & Deci (2000), students can be invited to use assessment results to set do-able goals to accomplish clear learning targets. When students choose to set their own goals, instead of goals being set for them, they show deeper learning (Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). In this context, students also show more engagement and higher persistence at learning activities.

### **The Single Point Rubric: One Set of Goals**

One especially useful tool for helping students use assessment results to set their own goals is the single-point rubric. The single point rubric provides a single set of criteria for quality work. I was introduced to a single point rubric by Mary Dietz (2000) while attending a professional development program. The single point rubric (See Table 1) is a different kind of rubric from a typical, multiple point rubric. The single point rubric is a tool for each student to indicate the following: a) I know where I'm going; b) I know where I am now; c) I know how to get there; and, d) I know how to go beyond.

*I know where I'm going.* First, the single point rubric is created and/or revised in collaboration with students. Students are invited to contribute to the creation or revision of a single set of quality criteria for an achievement target or task. Involving students in designing criteria helps them better understand what is expected. The single set of expected criteria is clarified

further when the teacher leads students in filling out a practice rubric based on sample work. A rubric is then given to students at the beginning of their own assignment. The single list of clear criteria allows students to use the rubric to guide the creation and revision of the assignment. Involving students in the creation or revision of the rubric leads to a clearer student vision of the goal. Having a clear vision promotes higher student engagement and levels of learning.

The difference between a single and a multiple point rubric is in the number of levels of performance described. The single point rubric describes only one level of performance, the proficient level. Therefore, the single point rubric has only one set of criteria, or "one point," and that is the list of criteria which shows proficient competence appropriate to the grade or learning context. It is not necessary to describe ahead of time all the ways to do poorly in detail. Students do not aim for the lowest level on a multiple point rubric. In addition, if the highest level is already prescribed then creativity may be limited to that pre-determined level. Using multiple point rubrics, students often only do as much as it takes to get the top level, then they stop. It can be self-defeating to set limits on student achievement. Students may surprise us if we leave quality open-ended.

*I know where I am now.* Second, in using the single point rubric, time and space are allowed for descriptive feedback. This feedback is provided through both self and peer feedback so students can identify their current status.

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Students write evidence on the rubric to support how they know they have demonstrated the expected criteria. Written descriptions clarify areas that require judgment. For example, if the rubric criteria requires that the writing “has impact on the reader,” then a reader can write a description on the rubric of how the writing had impact on her/him, such as “the story made me laugh.”

*I know how to get there.* Third, the single point rubric is primarily developmental (to further learning) and not summative (for scoring). A central purpose of the single point rubric is to provide specific written feedback on various aspects of students’ work that will help them know *how* to improve. Students set goals and make improvement plans based on closing the gap between where they are and where they want to be. Thus, revisions can be made before grading (if grades are to be given).

*I know how to go beyond.* Fourth, if students only accomplish predetermined goals set by others, initiative can be dampened and creativity trivialized. Teachers can facilitate inventiveness and problem solving by giving students encouragement and by giving time and space to stretch beyond minimum standards. To create a space for this creative engagement, the single point rubric has a third blank column where students can report ways in which they have gone (or could go) beyond the single, specified target.

The single point rubric is a tool for giving and getting feedback and for revising work along the way, not a tool for scoring or grading. Descriptive feedback is more helpful than a number, a grade, a score, a ranking, or a single descriptive label (proficient). The learner, her/his peers and teachers all write descriptive feedback. With specific and understandable feedback,

students are more likely to make needed changes and improve their products (Shute, 2007).

### **How the Single-Point Rubric Works**

While multiple point rubrics do offer predetermined descriptions of various levels of achievement, there is usually little space on such rubrics to write feedback for improvement or to write ways the student surpassed the criteria. In contrast, a single point rubric identifies only the proficient level of performance. This leaves ample space in which students are able to write their own descriptions of goals and how to achieve them, indicate their current status, and explain how they have surpassed goals.

The first empty column is where students write what they still need to do to achieve proficiency and to set their own immediate goals of things they will revise. In the second empty column, students write evidence to show how they have met proficiency. In the third empty column, students provide evidence of how they have gone above and beyond “proficiency.” Thus, the process of using a single-point rubric allows time for goal setting and revision, provides a place for noting current status, and sets an expectation of initiative and innovation.

To teach students to be able to self-assess effectively and give peer feedback, teachers should orally demonstrate the process of using a single point rubric. This can be achieved by using a sample of previous work before asking students to fill out a rubric on their own work. Teachers often orally analyze a previous sample of work while having the students practice filling out a single point rubric. During this process, the teacher and students brainstorm comments about the sample work to write on the rubric.

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### **Single Point Rubrics: A Collective Case Study Approach**

Several theories support using single point rubrics to enhance student learning. Key theories that provide helpful models explaining why it is feasible to expect this positive influence on learning are Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) and theories described in the category of self-regulated learning (SRL) (Boekaerets & Corno, 2005).

Over the past 10 years, I have taught a graduate course in classroom assessment at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Teachers who work in settings ranging from pre-school to high school typically enroll in the class. As part of their course requirements, these teachers have engaged in individual participatory action research (Creswell, 2002) projects in their own classrooms, trying to solve the problem of how to use assessment to enhance student learning. Each teacher gathered data including student work, student surveys, and teacher anecdotal observations to describe the results of involving the students in using single point rubrics. After analyzing and summarizing the data using descriptive statistics, each teacher wrote a reflection on what they'd learned and a plan of action of how to improve.

Using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2002), I selected 10 action research reports for the focus of my own, collective case study research into single point rubrics. The selected reports all dealt with single point rubrics and were instrumental in clarifying how self-assessment enhances learning. These 10, instrumental cases (Creswell, 2002; Lancy, 1993) were drawn from a seven-year period (years 2003-2010) and represented teachers working in settings ranging from first grade through high school and in a variety of subject areas. In each case, the teacher was implementing a single point rubric for the first time to see how involving students in self-assessment using a single point rubric would affect student learning. I read each case separately, then re-read all the cases to identify recurring themes in the collective case study (Stake, 1995). In the remainder of this article, I

draw on the synthesized results to demonstrate how effective the single point rubric can be.

### **Benefits of Using Single Point Rubrics**

The benefits of using single point rubrics are evidenced in the areas of student achievement, engagement in learning, and in students being effective at self-assessment. One sixth grade elementary teacher, Michael<sup>1</sup>, believed his students' work would be of higher quality if students had access to a multiple point rubric with all the criteria spelled out for each level. For one assignment, he created a multiple point rubric, and for the second assignment, he created a single point rubric. He involved his students in the creation of both rubrics. He was surprised to find that the quality of student work was either the same or better when using the single point rubric. He also noticed students were more engaged in the learning process and helped each other more when using the single-point rubric. Through surveys, his students indicated they thought a single point rubric helped them learn more and do a better job on their work. Michael also reported observing more student engagement when using a single point rubric. He concluded this was good news for teachers as well as for students because the multiple point rubric took much longer to create than did the single point rubric.

Analysis of the 10 cases of teachers' single point rubric action research projects, revealed Michael's results were typical of what other teachers reported when involving their students in creating and using single point rubrics to self-assess and revise work. For example, Ashley, a second grade teacher, also involved her students in self-assessing using a single point writing rubric. Ashley reported her students were more eager to write and revise their stories than had been previously demonstrated. They were also calmer and more relaxed during writing time. Instead of rushing through their work, her students took time to revise and edit. They all seemed to be striving for a "star paper" as described on the rubric.

Roberta, a fourth grade teacher, guided her students in developing a student-friendly,

single point writing rubric. In this instance, students used the rubric to give each other peer feedback. One fourth-grade student editor wrote the following about his peer's use of voice: "He was good at making the reader get into it." Regarding conventions, the same editor wrote, "He should use more ! for punctuation." Another fourth grade student editor wrote to his peer regarding word choice:

"There were lots of juicy details about how much you know about computers." He also wrote, regarding voice, "I could tell it was you writing without looking at the name." After one attempt at student self-assessment using the rubric, Roberta concluded her students had a better understanding of the traits of quality writing, but there was still work to be done for students to know exactly how to demonstrate each trait. What the students really "took to heart" was the self-assessment of their

own work. They were honest and accurate. This was gratifying for the teacher since with previous, similar tasks, students had always been in a hurry and had not taken time to really think about their responses.

Cristin Rold (2007) used a single point, persuasive writing rubric (See Table 1) and an assessment conference with eleventh grade, American Literature students. These students were already very familiar with the traditional use of rubrics for summative peer and self-assessment. What was new was that students were involved in developing the rubric and that the rubric had only one set of high quality standards. Thus, students were committed to pursuing the highest level of achievement and could not "settle for less."

What was also new was the increased level of detailed, written feedback describing strengths or deficiencies. In the new, single

point rubric approach, students were required to revise their work if performance standards were not met, and poor work was not accepted as it had been in the past. Students were required to provide specific, written evidence on the rubric of each standard met within their writing and then discuss those findings in an individual conference with their teacher. Students could 'dissect their

own writing' and receive immediate and relevant feedback from the teacher during conferencing.

Rold (2007) reported a marked increase in the student mastery of the content when using the single-point rubric and assessment conference. The biggest impact reported by Rold was a shift in students' focus from grading to learning. Students made the transition from "what is my grade" to "what have I learned" (p.4). As Rold summarized, "I have been working for the past three

years to shift student focus to learning, so this was a monumental step in the process" (p. 4).

Another useful and closely related tool that can be effectively used for student self-assessment is a checklist. It is mentioned here briefly to note how it is different from a single point rubric. A checklist is a yes or no list of requirements or directions. No descriptive feedback is required when using a yes or no checklist. However, descriptive feedback is required for a single point rubric. Some teachers combine a yes or no checklist and a single point rubric on the same page (See Table 2).

### **Addressing Teacher Concerns with Using Single Point Rubrics**

Teacher concerns using single point rubrics focused in two areas. One area was the amount of time it took to involve students in creating and/or revising single point rubrics. Secondary

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Table 1: Single Point Rubric – High School (Rold, 2007<sup>1</sup>)  
Persuasive Writing

Not Yet (Areas that need work)	Proficient (Performance Standards)	Evidence (How you've met the standard)	Advanced (Areas that go beyond the basics)
	<p><b>IDEAS &amp; CONTENT</b></p> <p><b>a) Creates a clear understanding of the writer's opinion.</b></p> <p><b>b) Well-focused on the prompt.</b></p> <p><b>c) Contains numerous, relevant supporting examples, reasons.</b></p> <p><b>d) Contains arguments that are distinctive in approach.</b></p>		
	<p><b>ORGANIZATION</b></p> <p><b>a) Structural development includes a functional introduction, body, and conclusion.</b></p> <p><b>b) Sequencing is thoughtful, logical, and effective.</b></p> <p><b>c) Pacing is well-controlled.</b></p> <p><b>d) Transitions clearly show how ideas connect.</b></p>		
	<p><b>WORD CHOICE</b></p> <p><b>a) Uses language that is specific and precise.</b></p> <p><b>b) Uses language that seems natural and appropriate to the purpose and audience.</b></p> <p><b>c) Effectively uses vivid words and phrases.</b></p> <p><b>d) Avoids clichés and jargon.</b></p>		
	<p><b>VOICE</b></p> <p><b>a) Shows strong commitment to the topic.</b></p> <p><b>b) Engages the reader throughout.</b></p> <p><b>c) Uses tone appropriate and effective for the purpose and audience.</b></p> <p><b>d) Anticipated reader's questions throughout.</b></p>		
	<p><b>CONVENTIONS</b></p> <p><b>a) Paragraphing is sound.</b></p> <p><b>b) Grammar, usage, spelling and punctuation is correct.</b></p> <p><b>c) Conventions may be manipulated for stylistic effect.</b></p>		

Table 2 – Checklist and Single Point Rubric Combination  
Theme Self-Editing Checklist and Rubric

Part I. – Yes or No Checklist of Directions – Please revise until all are Yes.

1. Does your heading include:
  - a. English 1 (top-left corner) Yes    No
  - b. Period (top-left corner, below English 1) Yes    No
  - c. First and Last Name (top-right corner) Yes    No
  - d. Full Date (top-right corner, below name) Yes    No
  
2. Did you...
  - a. Write on front side of theme paper? Yes    No
  - b. Write with a blue or black ink pen? Yes    No
  - c. Skip a line between the heading and assignment title? Yes    No
  - d. Title your assignment “Theme I Rough Draft? Yes    No
  - e. Skip a line between the assignment title and essay title? Yes    No
  - f. Include an essay title that describes your essay? Yes    No
  - g. Skip a line between your essay title and your paragraph? Yes    No

Part II. – Single-Point Rubric – Use the rubric to revise your paper.

How I will revise to better meet criteria	Performance criteria	How I know met the criteria	How I went beyond the criteria
	Attention getter and clincher sentence are creative and quickly capture the reader’s attention.		
	Grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors are so minor that they do not distract the reader.		
	Vivid words contribute to detailed, powerful sentences.		
	Third person point-of-view is maintained throughout the piece.		

teachers who used the same rubric in multiple sections of the same subject had to go through a re-creation/revision process with each class section. The teachers' concern over spending this time was overshadowed, however, by the benefits of using the single point rubric in terms of student achievement, engagement, motivation, work quality, and focus on learning. Thus, teachers perceived the additional time it took to develop and use single point rubrics to be a most worthwhile investment.

The second concern was in teaching the students how to use the rubric to self-assess and give peer feedback accurately and effectively. Teachers found students needed practice using the single point rubric before they could effectively use it to self-assess their own work. Teachers met this need by modeling using the rubric and guiding the students in giving feedback on sample work. Teachers found that after practicing using the rubric, students were more accurate in self-assessing, more willing to revise and more helpful to peers.

### Conclusion

Single point rubrics can be an appropriate tool for giving qualitative feedback on the processes, performances, and products of constructed responses in any subject area, but are best suited for helping students assess their own learning in any subject area in which students construct an original response. Using a single point rubric helps students to analyze their own work and to identify areas of quality and areas needing growth. Through both self-analysis and conferencing with peers and teachers, students become better at making self-adjustments and become more focused on the quality and importance of the learning itself.

i. Michael, Ashley, and Roberta are pseudonyms.

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