Using Rubrics: Why should I?

There are five reasons rubrics, a form of criterion referenced scoring, should be the standard for assessing college level work.

1. **Transparency of Grading:**

A well-written rubric explains exactly what criteria will be used in assessing student work, how the criteria will be applied, and what level of work rises to the level of “success”. This lack of ambiguity means students have at their disposal, the same exact tool their instructor will use to determine how well they have completed the assignment. A well-written rubric should put an end to surprise grades.

2. **Improved Student Engagement:**

Student engagement for the purpose of this discussion is defined as learners participating and taking interest in their own learning process. A rubric promotes engagement because the student has in the rubric a diagnostic tool they can use to determine, in advance, their own grade. The well written rubric carefully details each criterion and the engaged student can then compare his or her own work to the criterion and produce a formative self-assessment before turning work in for grading by their instructor.

3. **Promotion of Active Learning**

Active learning occurs when students are engaged and take charge of their own learning process. Rubrics facilitate this by providing students with a method of formatively assessing their own work using the same assessment instrument the instructor will use. The main reason for this potential lies in the fact that rubrics make expectations and criteria explicit, which also facilitates feedback and self-assessment.

4. **Increased Consistency in Scoring:**

A published standard, available as a reference to faculty while grading and thereby hold each work by each student to the same standard. The tendency to hold back on awarding the highest marks to any of the first papers graded to ‘leave room’ for truly outstanding work is eliminated. Rubrics also help faculty resist ‘rounding up’ or pushing students just a little higher to reach the next grading plateau. Also avoided is the ‘A’ for effort syndrome where students who have not achieved competency are given credit for trying hard.

5. **Facilitate valid judgment of complex competencies:**

When judging a complex series of skills over time, retaining consistency from assignment to assignment and between draft and final versions can be challenging. Judging student portfolios for example, where different types of assignments are collected to form the proof of achievement for awarding a degree can benefit from a detailed and explicit rubric that helps organize the material into smaller, more cohesive units for assessment then judges each portfolio by the same set of standards.