Solving the Rubrics Cube: Using Assessment to Sharpen Library Instruction

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/elisa_acosta/1/
Introduction
Loyola Marymount University’s (LMU) Reference Department designed a rubric to measure student learning outcomes for freshman English. Students sequentially complete an “English 110 Library Research Worksheet” during library instruction. After which the rubric is used to analyze learning outcomes from parts of the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, is applied to collected student worksheets.

Student Learning Outcomes
1. Given a broad research topic, use the 4W questions (where, when, what, who) to write a research question.
2. Given a research topic, compile a list of search terms or keywords.
3. Given background information about Google and the Library, list two differences between the two related to content, organization, or quality.
4. Given a research topic and access to the library’s catalog, find relevant books on the research topic.
5. Given a research topic and access to a general article index database (ProQuest), find relevant articles on your topic.

Instruction Materials
- Figure 1. English 110 Worksheet
- Figure 2. English 110 LibGuide

Assessment Tool
During fall semester 2009, 7 reference librarians collected 755 worksheets and graded a random sample of 100 students. The rubric outlines learning outcomes for each module and the evaluation criteria for scoring the worksheet. Ultimately, students are ranked as beginning, developing, or proficient for each module.

Results
On average, students scored at least a “developing” rank (equivalent to a “2”) on all modules. The lowest scoring skill was listing differences between library resources and the Internet or Google. Students also scored lower on narrowing down a broad research topic, picking out key components, and generating keywords. They scored high on finding books and articles, but needed more help in matching citation elements into the correct fields. They also needed help with article relevancy.

Conclusions
The project resulted in several changes for next year, including more consistent and precise instructions for the rubric and the worksheet. The worksheet will be redesigned for fewer scoring modules, changes include less teaching material for module 2. Better reflection of the cyclical nature of the research process by letting the research question and keywords evolve throughout the exercise, a practice keywords exercise; additional examples of how to narrow down a research question; and the separation of elements needed to cite a book. The goal for next year is to have students achieve an average score of 2.5 or above on all 5 modules.

Discussion
• 96% of the Reference Librarians felt the teaching expectations for ENGL 110 were clearer as a result of the rubric.
• 81% of the Reference Librarians agreed that the rubric made it easier to see the connection between our ENGL 110 learning outcomes and ACRL standards.
• Reference librarians identified several limitations of the rubric, including difficulty in ranking relevancy of articles, gray areas in trying to judge “good” research questions, length of time it takes to create and calibrate a rubric, the challenging aspect of quantifying the research process.
• Standardization can be painful for staunch individualists.
• Calibration process led to many “lively discussions” but hopefully in the long run an improved curriculum and stronger assessment tool.
• By using the rubric, we established evidence of student learning and a target outcome for next year’s results.
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Results

On average, students scored at least a “developing” rank (equivalent to a “2”) on all modules. The lowest scoring skill was listing differences between library resources and the Internet or Google. Students also scored lower on narrowing down a broad research topic, picking out its key components, and generating keywords. They scored high on finding books and articles, but needed more help in matching citation elements into the correct fields. They also needed help with article relevancy.
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• 86% of the Reference librarians felt the teaching expectations for ENGL 110 were clearer as a result of the rubric

• 71% of the Reference librarians agreed that the rubric made it easier to see the connection between our ENGL 110 learning outcomes and ACRL standards

• Reference librarians identified several limitations of the rubric, including: difficulty in ranking relevancy of articles; grey areas in trying to judge “good” research questions; length of time it takes to create and calibrate a rubric; the challenging aspect of quantifying the research process

• Standardization can be painful for staunch individualists

• Calibration process led to many “lively discussions” but hopefully in the long run an improved curriculum and stronger assessment tool

• By using the rubric, we established evidence of student learning and a target outcome for next year’s results

Conclusions

The project resulted in several changes for next year, including more consistent and precise instructions for the rubric and the worksheet. The worksheet will be redesigned for lower-scoring modules: changes include less teaching material for module 3; better reflection of the cyclical nature of the research process by letting the research question and keywords evolve throughout the exercise; a practice keywords exercise; additional examples of how to narrow down a research question; and the separation of elements needed to cite and find a book. The goal for next year is to have students achieve an average score of 2.5 or above on all 5 modules.

Links

• ENGL 110 LibGuide: http://libguides.lmu.edu/ENGL110


• Rubric: http://bit.ly/b5LzEY

Thank You:
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