

Blending Traditional and Contract Grading on Rubrics for Multimedia Projects



During the "Frameworking Remote Multimedia Projects for Success" presentation at the Adapt 2020 conference on June 9, a request was made for a longer example of a way to blend traditional and contract grading on rubrics for multimedia projects. This document was created on June 10 to answer that request; please excuse the typos.

On rubrics, we frequently use a sliding-scale assessment in all categories correlated with our judgement of the quality of execution in that category. For multimedia projects where students may be working in a new genre with new technology for the first time, it may be helpful to remove qualitative assessment of many aspects of the execution of the final deliverable. Instead, that can be replaced with a more extensive list of exact criteria by which points can be awarded.

The goal is to ensure that students don't flounder trying to figure out what rhetorically effective technical execution would look like by trying to extrapolate it from vague rubric categories like "Design" or "Visual Appeal."

This practice does in spirit what contract grading frequently does when applied to classes at large. It should be noted, however, that contract grading as a grade-assigning practice is a vast and well-researched field and does not simply mean that you sometimes have boolean evaluation states for categories on your rubrics.

The blended rubrics that follow do have some potential drawbacks. By giving hyper-specific requirements for the technical execution of a project, you may inadvertently be setting up a more template-based student execution of the assignment. In other words, you might get back 25 podcasts, videos, infographics, or websites that all sort of look, sound, or function almost identically. Another drawback can be that the requirements may stifle some student creativity.

The following hypothetical rubrics are based on an infographic unit project where students in an upper-level environmental studies class are going to make infographics that cover one topic of UNCG's sustainability initiatives or practices.

Traditional Rubric

Category	Description	Points Possible	Points Awarded
Argument	There is a point to the infographic; by the end of viewing the infographic, the audience should think, feel, understand, or know something other than just the factual existence of the data you've provided.	20	
Structure	The layout and order of data visualizations and text support the central "argument" of the infographic by leading the audience intentionally through the information in a way that is logical and persuasive.	20	
Context	All information is contextualized well, enabling the audience to understand how impressive, distressing, unique, or commonplace that data is.	10	
Data Visualization	The types of data visualizations selected aid the audience's reception of that information and add both variety and visual interest to the infographic as a whole.	20	
Text	All text is necessary and concise and does not distract from the data visualizations.	10	
Design	Design choices of color, font, and icons/images are all intentionally made to help the audience engage, understand, and act on the information provided.	20	
Total		100	

Blended Rubric

In this rubric, I have kept the exact same categories to highlight how those categories would be treated on a blended traditional/contract grading rubric. Usually, it would make sense to proliferate the contract-graded criteria by crafting more narrowly defined categories than what has been given here.

As much as possible, the requirements for the contract-graded categories are open to very little interpretation. Occasionally, there are subjective qualities expressed. For example, the "Text" category gives a requirement of a "succinct title," for which succinctness is open to interpretation. Similarly, the description of the paragraph that "guides audience interpretation" can have multiple potential interpretations itself. The goal is to minimize that as much as possible as it can easily create an issue where students feel the grading is unfair.

Category	Description	Points Possible	Points Awarded
Argument	There is a point to the infographic; by the end of viewing the infographic, the audience should think, feel, understand, or know something other than just the factual existence of the data you've provided.	20	
Structure	The layout and order of data visualizations and text support the central "argument" of the infographic by leading the audience intentionally through the information in a way that is logical and persuasive.	20	
Context	All information is contextualized well, enabling the audience to understand how impressive, distressing, unique, or commonplace that data is.	10	
The categories below this line will be graded according to the exact requirements laid out in the "Description" column. Either all points or no points will be awarded for each category; no partial credit is possible in these categories.			
Data Visualizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 data visualizations • 1 must be a bar graph using stacked icons to form the bars • 1 must be a pie/donut chart • 1 must be a scale/size comparison using icons appropriate for data 	20	
Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A succinct title is located at the top of the infographic. • There is a brief paragraph (no more than 2 	10	

	<p>sentences or 30 words) at the top that explains the scope of the infographic and guides audience interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All axes are labelled • Numeric values are included on all charts and graphs for precise reading • For icon-based counts, a legend is included that shows how many each icon represents 		
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types of text (title, subtitle, caption, reference) are differentiated by at least font size; types of text are designed consistently such that all captions, for example, are the same size, font, and style across the entire infographic • The size of the infographic is set to a standard US Letter sheet of paper (8.5" by 11"), oriented either portrait or landscape • The infographic fills the entire page • Icons and not photos or clipart are used to create data visualizations and as design elements across the infographic 	20	
Total		100	