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Subject: Teaching Toolbox: How Rubrics Help in Peer Review (It's Not How You Might Think)
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Teaching Toolbox: How Rubrics Help in Peer Review (It's Not How You Might Think) **by Emily O. Gravett**

Recently, the CFI hosted a wonderful workshop, by Drs. Kristina Doubet and Eric Carbaugh (both from the College of Education), on "Creating Quality Rubrics." Kristina and Eric reviewed the many ways rubrics can improve teaching, expectations, directions, assessing, grading quality, etc. They also suggested that rubrics can improve the quality of assignments as well as students' self-evaluation. In ["Rubric use in formative assessment: A detailed behavioral rubric helps students improve their scientific writing skills" \(2015\)](#), psychologist Kathleen P. Greenberg set out to investigate these very benefits.

Across multiple courses, Greenberg asked students to use a writing rubric when preparing their own empirical research reports as well as when offering feedback on others'. Although students 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 in grading. After analyzing the students' final submissions, Greenberg found that:

- When students used the rubric to guide the preparation of their own reports, they wrote higher quality papers, on average.
- When students used the rubric to provide feedback on their peers' reports, and were then given a chance to rewrite their own, they also wrote higher quality papers, on average.

The second finding, in particular, affirms what other research on peer review (e.g., [Cho & MacArthur, 2011](#) and [Nicol et al., 2014](#)) has demonstrated: that students *learn just as much, if not more, by giving feedback* to their peers as they do by receiving feedback from their peers. When students give feedback to their peers based upon the same rubric by which all projects (including their own) will eventually be 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). Students can then apply these skills to improving their own work. By highlighting these often-overlooked benefits, faculty may also be able to allay a common concern from students: that they do not receive helpful feedback during peer-review processes.

The CFI is home to [several titles on rubrics](#), such as [Stevens and Levi's Introduction to Rubrics \(2013\)](#), and we are available to assist in rubric construction and use—for peer review or otherwise. Please also let me know if you'd like to view the videorecording that Jessica Weaver-Kenney and her team in [Innovation Services](#) created of the rubric workshop.

Otherwise, I hope everyone has a wonderful Spring Break!

About the author: Emily O. Gravett is Assistant Director of Teaching Programs at the Center for Faculty Innovation and a faculty member in the Philosophy & Religion department. Some of the material found in this Toolbox email has been adapted from original content she generated during her time at Trinity University. She can be reached at graveteo@jmu.edu.