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Vermont Framework for Proficiency: Proficiency Scales and Rubrics

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide more information about proficiency scales and rubrics, including their similarities and differences, when to use each type of tool, and specific suggestions for classroom application.

Introduction

Proficiency scales and rubrics are both tools to evaluate student proficiency in relation to Priority Performance Indicators (PPIs). As such, they have many similarities. However, they differ in when and how they are used, as well as the purpose for using them.

Definitions

Critical Proficiency

Critical proficiencies (CPs) identify the enduring skills and knowledge that all students need to demonstrate (across contexts) to be prepared for future learning, including post-secondary career and college readiness. Critical proficiencies promote high expectations for all students and support students' personal, professional, and academic development. Students demonstrate proficiency in each CP through evidence collected at the Priority Performance Indicator level.

Priority Performance Indicators

Performance indicators delineate the knowledge and skills that comprise the larger grain size Critical Proficiency. These must be measurable and allow students to demonstrate their proficiency over time and across contexts. Performance indicators come from content standards or content standard clusters. Performance indicators that are chosen to determine proficiency of the larger grain size CP are referred to as **Priority Performance Indicators (PPIs)**. Student proficiency of PPIs will be formally assessed through use of proficiency scales as part of an SU/SD's LCAS. The overall proficiency of a student on a PPI is determined through multiple and varied assessments.



Proficiency Scale

A proficiency scale is a criterion-based assessment tool that is task-neutral and includes explicit expectations for learning at each level. A proficiency scale should be designed to show a continuum of distinct levels of knowledge and skills relative to a specific PPI. These distinct levels are qualitative (not quantitative) and describe what the student can do (rather than not do) at each proficiency level. The proficiency scale is used to assess where a student is along the learning progression and determine if a student has mastered the overarching CP. These results will be used in concert with those from other PPIs to report student attainment of the corresponding CP.

Rubric

A rubric is an evaluation tool used to assess performance against a task-specific set of criteria. Rubrics clearly define academic expectations for learners in a particular context and help to ensure consistency in the evaluation of academic work from learner to learner, assignment to assignment, or course to course. Rubrics can contain more than one criterion to be measured and are tools to evaluate student work, as opposed to overall proficiency.

What Do Proficiency Scales and Rubrics Have in Common?

There are many ways in which proficiency scales and rubrics are similar. Here are just a few of the ways:

- Both are tied to PPIs;
- Both provide descriptors of proficiency levels;
- Both can be used formatively and summatively;
- Both are used by teacher and students;
- Both are valuable for providing feedback; and
- Both are good for reflection, peer review, and self-evaluation.

While proficiency scales and rubrics share many of the same characteristics, they are used in different contexts.

How Do Proficiency Scales and Rubrics Differ?

The following table provides more information about how proficiency scales and rubrics differ, based on their purpose and use.

Proficiency Scales...	Rubrics...
Illustrate what overall proficiency of a PPI looks like.	Are tools to evaluate student work, as opposed to overall proficiency.
Are tools to determine overall synthesis of student performance at end of unit/course/year.	Are tools to determine student performance on a specific assignment, task, or assessment.
Measure student learning.	Measure student performance on a specific task.
Focus on a single PPI.	Contain more than one criterion to be measured (may be more than one PPI or breaking up a single PPI into several discrete skills).
Are developed at the SU/SD level to create cohesion across a system.	Can be developed at the classroom, department, or school level, ideally with student input.
Show a continuum of distinct levels of knowledge and skills relative to a PPI.	Provide more information about achievement levels for the specific task to which they are connected.
Contain broad language that allows for flexibility in demonstrating evidence of proficiency.	Tend to be more descriptive and detailed.
Are task neutral.	Are task- and/or content-specific.

Why Do I Need a Proficiency Scale and a Rubric?

Some situations call for the use of a proficiency scale while others call for a rubric. It is important to note that whichever tool is being used, the information gathered should inform instructional practices. The following table provides information about when to use each type of tool, including specific ways to use them in the classroom.

When to Use a Proficiency Scale	When to Use a Rubric
Assess where a student is along the learning progression of a PPI and determine if they have achieved proficiency.	Provide more detail about what proficiency looks like within the context of a particular assignment.
Measure growth throughout a course or particular unit of study.	Measure the quality of student work.
Provide feedback about where students are along the continuum of learning.	Provide feedback about how students performed on a particular task or assessment.
Collect high-quality student work as evidence of proficiency on a proficiency scale, as work is evaluated using rubrics.	Provide specificity about what skills need to be developed to increase a student's level of proficiency on a given PPI.

When to Use a Proficiency Scale	When to Use a Rubric
Students can self-evaluate by reflecting on where they are along a continuum of learning and what they still need to do to be proficient on a PPI.	Students can self-evaluate by reflecting on what they did well on a specific task or assessment as well as identifying areas for growth.
Show overall student performance at the end of a unit of study, course, or year.	Show student performance on a specific assignment, task, or assessment.
Report out on overall student progress at conferences or for report cards.	Report out on specific skills and knowledge developed by students as they relate to a particular assessment.

From Proficiency Scale to Rubric: An Example

Consider the Textual Evidence PPI for English language arts as an example to illustrate some of the ways a rubric could be developed from a proficiency scale:

Textual Evidence: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence to support conclusions drawn from the text, analysis, reflection, and/or research.

Here is a sample high school proficiency scale for this PPI:

Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Expanding
<p>I can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use suggested close-reading strategies to determine what a text says explicitly; and Cite textual evidence that relates to an interpretation of what a text says explicitly. 	<p>I can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use close-reading strategies to determine what a text says explicitly; Cite textual evidence to support an interpretation of what a text says explicitly; and Use close reading strategies to draw inferences from a text. 	<p>I can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze what a text says explicitly; Draw inferences from a text; Cite strong and varied textual evidence to support an analysis of a text; and Determine where a text leaves matters uncertain. 	<p>I can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extract and integrate precise textual evidence to support and enhance an analysis of what a text says explicitly and implicitly; and Make connections to other texts, self, or current world events (where applicable). <p>- or -</p> <p>I can create alternative evidence that expands upon proficient.</p>

Rubrics for an assessment connected to this PPI would be task- and/or content-specific and provide more detail about what proficiency looks like within the context of the assessment. For example, a student could demonstrate proficiency of this PPI by writing an analytical essay, defending a position in a debate, or participating in a

discussion. Therefore, there are many ways to construct rubrics associated with this PPI.

Here is an example of a high school ELA essay assignment:

You have just finished reading [insert name of novel]. Write an essay in which you identify an important theme and trace its development over the course of the novel. Be sure to include quotes and other evidence from the text to support your analysis of the theme and its development.

Single-Point Rubric

A single-point rubric lists the criteria for proficient in the center column. These criteria reflect discrete skills necessary to be proficient in the Textual Evidence PPI within the context of this essay assignment. In a single-point rubric, students can self-evaluate by reflecting on what they did well as well as identifying areas for growth, making this an excellent formative assessment tool. Teachers can also use the single-point rubric to provide specific feedback to students.

Single-Point Rubric for Textual Evidence in a High School ELA Essay

Evidence of Meeting or Exceeding the Standard (Reflect on what you did well.)	Criteria for Proficient	Areas for Growth (Reflect on what you could improve.)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I identified a major theme in the text and analyzed its development.• I chose quotes that support my analysis of the theme.• I explained how my quotes support my analysis of the theme.• I cited my quotes correctly.	

Holistic Rubric

Similar to the single-point rubric, this rubric provides assignment-specific criteria for assessing the Textual Evidence PPI in the context of an analytical essay. Unlike single-point rubrics, holistic rubrics provide descriptors at every level of achievement, making them useful for evaluating summative assignments in which it is necessary to differentiate clearly and consistently between levels of achievement (McTighe, et. al. 2020).

Holistic Rubric for Textual Evidence in a High School ELA Essay

Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Expanding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I identified a major topic in the novel. I chose quotes that relate to the topic of my essay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I identified a major theme in the novel. I chose quotes that relate to the theme. I explained how my quotes relate to the theme. I included citations for my quotes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I identified a major theme in the novel and analyzed its development. I chose quotes that support my analysis of the theme. I explained how my quotes support my analysis of the theme. I cited my quotes correctly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I connected a major theme in the novel with current events or other texts I've read. I chose quotes that enhance my analysis of the theme. I embedded complete and partial quotes throughout my essay so that the writing flows smoothly.

Analytic Rubric

Unlike holistic rubrics, analytic rubrics list criteria separately so they can be evaluated independently, making them a useful tool for complex assignments and for providing specific feedback (McTighe, et. al. 2020). This example combines Textual Evidence with other criteria a teacher may want to include in an analytical essay assignment. As is the case in this example, additional criteria may come from other PPIs. Additional criteria may also include other elements of the assignment a teacher wants to evaluate, such as overall presentation quality, creativity, impact on the audience, etc.

Analytic Rubric for High School Essay that Includes Textual Evidence

Criteria	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Expanding
Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I identified a main topic and details that support its development of over the course of the novel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I identified an important theme and described its development over the course of the novel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I identified an important theme and analyzed its development over the course of the novel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I identified multiple themes and analyzed their development and interaction over the course of the novel.

Criteria	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Expanding
Textual Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I chose quotes that relate to the topic of my essay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I chose quotes that relate to the theme I identified in the novel. I explained how my quotes relate to the theme. I included citations for my quotes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I chose quotes that support my analysis of a major theme in the novel. I explained how my quotes support my analysis of the theme. I cited my quotes correctly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I chose quotes that enhance my analysis of the theme(s). I embedded complete and partial quotes throughout my essay so that the writing flows smoothly.
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I introduced my topic. I organized my writing. I provided closure at the end of my essay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I introduced my topic/thesis in an introductory paragraph. I organized my writing into paragraphs. I provided a conclusion that summarizes my essay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My introduction includes my thesis and establishes a logical progression for my essay. I organized my writing so that each new element builds on the one before. I provided a conclusion that follows from and supports my analysis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I connected my thesis to a universal theme or global message or event. I used effective organizational techniques to enhance my analysis. I provided a conclusion that creates a purpose for the audience, leaving an impact on the reader.
Conventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I used spellcheck and other resources to identify errors in my writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I used resources to correct errors in my writing. My errors do not distract the reader or impact readability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I sought out and used resources to edit my writing. My writing is clear with few errors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My command of conventions enhances my writing.

Final Thoughts

Proficiency scales and rubrics are vital components of a strong Local Comprehensive Assessment System (LCAS). They provide a clear vision for teaching and learning that enables all stakeholders to know where students are in relation to identified expectations. Additionally, proficiency scales and rubrics help to build a common understanding for determining proficiency and therefore reduce teacher bias. Alternatively, when criteria are vague, implicit stereotypes can “fill in the blanks” and create inequitable assessment of student work ([Quinn, 2020](#)). Finally, clear expectations for assessing learning allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and growth over time in multiple ways and therefore can support flexible pathways to graduation.

References

- McTighe J. Doubet K. and Carbaugh E. M. (2020). *Designing authentic performance tasks and projects: tools for meaningful learning and assessment*. ASCD.
- Quinn, D. M. (2020). [Experimental Evidence on Teachers' Racial Bias in Student Evaluation: The Role of Grading Scales](#). Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 42, 375-392.

For Further Reading

- [Proficiency Scale Quality Criteria](#) – This document provides criteria to evaluate and discuss the quality of proficiency scales.
- Priority Performance Indicators and Transferable Skills Connections – These documents outline connections between the transferable skills and the PBGR Hierarchy for each content area. They exemplify how transferable skills related to Priority Performance Assessments can be embedded into instruction and performance assessments within a unit of study.
 - [Arts Priority Performance Indicators and Transferable Skills Connections](#)
 - [English Language Arts Priority Performance Indicators and Transferable Skills Connections](#)
 - [Financial Literacy Priority Performance Indicators and Transferable Skills Connections](#)
 - [Mathematics Priority Performance Indicators and Transferable Skills Connections](#)
 - [Science Priority Performance Indicators and Transferable Skills Connections](#)
 - [Social Studies Priority Performance Indicators and Transferable Skills Connections](#)