

# SCORING NARRATOR'S SCRIPT

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## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Grading papers and quizzes, assigning grades and scores to projects and performance tasks. Teachers do these things every single day. And so the fifth and final component of assessment design—scoring—will likely be the most familiar to you.

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This module, we hope, will help make you an even more effective scorer of your students' work and demonstrate for you how the more effective your scoring practices are, the more likely your assessment results will be reliable.

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By the end of this module, you should be able to define what “scoring” means for the purpose of these modules and explain how and why you should use well-designed tools, such as answer keys, scoring guides and rubrics, to score many assessments. You should also be able to explain what distinguishes one tool from another.

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## KEY CONCEPTS

### Scoring

Now, let's get started.

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We use a variety of strategies to score assessments and assessment items.

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For example, you may use an answer key to score an assessment composed of selected-response items, or you may use a rubric to score a complex performance task.

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You may score an assessment yourself, with another teacher or with a team of teachers.

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No matter what your strategy, you should use an appropriate, well-designed tool to ensure that your assessment provides accurate information about what students know and can do.<sup>1</sup>

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For example, let's imagine that you are on a team of sixth-grade English teachers who administer the same essay prompt to your students as a summative assessment. After students turn in their essays, you and the other teachers exchange papers to grade the assessment, with two teachers grading each student's essay. Over the course of a week, you and your colleagues read each student's work to assign a grade. At the end of the week, you average the two grades attributed to each student to determine his or her final grade.

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Why might this method fail to provide you with the most accurate information about what your students know and can do?

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First, you may unintentionally score the work of students on Monday differently from the work you score on Tuesday. Or you may compare one student's work to another's. This assessment will not only measure what students know and can do, but it will also measure when and in what order you scored the assessment.

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Second, you and the other teachers may apply different standards to the essays. Should you take points off for incorrect writing mechanics? Is it important for the essay to have a clear thesis statement or for students to cite evidence from texts? Without this level of agreement, students' scores may depend on their mastery of the relevant standard and on who happened to score their work.

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Third, although you read each essay carefully, you may miss an opportunity to identify specific skills with which your students are struggling.

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As we suggested at the beginning of this module, you should use an appropriate, well-designed tool to ensure that your assessment provides accurate information. Answer keys, scoring guides and rubrics are three tools that provide a concrete set of criteria to score the work of students. Collaborating with other teachers to design scoring tools and review student work can help ensure that you are assessing student mastery consistently in different classrooms.

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Let's now describe these three tools and how you can use them.

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## Answer Keys

Answer keys provide the correct answer to an assessment item.

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You would use them when a student response is either correct or incorrect, typically for selected- and constructed-response items.

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<sup>1</sup> Kansas State Department of Education, "Assessment Literacy Project"; Ohio Department of Education, "Assessment Literacy: Identifying and Developing Valid and Reliable Assessments" (2013); Relay Graduate School of Education, *Designing and Evaluating Assessments* (2014); and Rhode Island Department of Education, "Deeping Assessment Literacy."

Answer keys can be as simple as the correct letters to multiple-choice items or the correct words for fill-in-the-blank items. They can also be exemplar student responses to short-answer items.

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Some well-designed answer keys explain why each choice is correct or incorrect, and provide a rationale for an exemplar response. Taking the time to think about these rationales as you write your assessments can help you diagnose common student errors, adjust your instructional strategies and plan areas for re-teaching.

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Let's take a look at a multiple-choice item with this type of detailed answer key.

*The item asks students to read the poem about the moon and nighttime and then answer the question about the poem's first line, "The moon has a face like the clock in the hall."*

*What is the meaning of the simile used in this line?*

- a. The moon ticks like a clock.*
- b. The moon is facing the hall.*
- c. The moon is as round as a clock, or*
- d. The moon moves around the hall.<sup>2</sup>*

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*The answer key explains that:*

- Students who select answer "a" are likely thinking about the clock ticking.*
- Students who select answer "b" do not understand the context of the poem.*
- Answer "c" is the correct answer because the moon is being compared to the shape of a clock, and*
- Students who select answer "d" also do not understand the context of the poem.*

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This answer key explains why each choice is correct or incorrect. These rationales can help you understand why students answered the item either correctly or incorrectly. For example, if a large percentage of students selected choices "b" or "d," you may want to adjust your instruction to help students understand the context of this poem and possibly other texts.

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Of course, you do not have time to develop this type of answer key for all of the selected-response items you design. You know that. In fact, one of the benefits of selected-response items is that they are efficient, which we discuss in another module. The key takeaway is that writing an answer key when you write an assessment item can help you uncover nuanced and valuable information about your students' learning.

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<sup>2</sup> Haywood County Schools, "Smarter Balanced Test Items Samples: ELA Grade 3."

## Scoring Guides

Scoring guides are another tool we use to score assessments. Scoring guides assign points to different levels of student performance. They are useful because they allow students to earn points for partial mastery of standards, and they ensure that students who earn full points have mastered the relevant standard or standards rather than simply guessed the correct answer.

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You would use them when a student response can earn some of the total possible points, typically for constructed-response items and performance tasks.

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Well-designed scoring guides reference the standards and/or skills addressed by the item, and sometimes they include an exemplar answer.

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Let's take a look at a constructed-response item with a well-designed scoring guide.

Students can earn 0, 1 or 2 points under this scoring guide. The scoring guide uses language similar to the standard and awards students points based on how well they demonstrate their ability to "solve multi-step word problems with whole numbers using multiplication and division." A student will earn 2 points if his or her response shows "a thorough understanding" and "provides a thorough explanation of reasoning." The student earns 1 point if he or she provides a correct answer with flawed reasoning or an incorrect answer with a thorough explanation of the reasoning. Finally, a student will earn zero points if he or she provides an incorrect answer and flawed reasoning. The item also includes an exemplar answer.<sup>3</sup>

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## Rubrics

Rubrics are a third tool at our disposal. Rubrics articulate levels of performance in relation to standards or other expectations. Unlike scoring guides, which describe how students earn points or credit for their answers, rubrics assign students ratings based on how well their response meets performance levels.

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We use rubrics to know when a student has reached or exceeded an expected level of performance or what he or she needs to do to make progress, typically with performance tasks and portfolio assessments.

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A well-designed rubric has three parts: dimensions, performance levels and descriptors.

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Dimensions are the discrete traits that you plan to assess. Each dimension should align with a standard, and they should be distinct from one another.

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For example, imagine that you ask your students to prepare and present an oral presentation on the use of imagery in the poetry of John Donne. You may plan to score the task with a rubric that includes seven dimensions related to oral presentation: content, organization, eye contact, gestures, language, visual aids and responses to questions.

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<sup>3</sup> Oregon Department of Education, "Grade 4 Mathematics Sample ER Item Claim 2."

Well-designed rubrics include between three and six performance levels. Many teachers design rubrics to include four performance levels, where the highest level indicates that the student exceeds standards; the second highest level indicates that the student meets the standards; the third indicates that the student is approaching the standards; and the lowest level indicates that the student is not meeting the standards. Others might decide that the highest level indicates that the student meets the standards.<sup>4</sup>

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To build on our example, you may plan to score your students' oral presentations with a rubric that includes four levels of performance: "exceeds standards," "meets standards," "approaching standards" and "not meeting standards."<sup>5</sup>

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Each dimension and performance level should contain a precise explanation of student performance. We call these descriptions "descriptors." Each descriptor should be discrete from the performance levels below and above it.

For example, let's imagine that the rubric you plan to use to score your students' oral presentations includes a descriptor for the "content" dimension in the "exceeds standards" performance level that reads, "The speech demonstrates thorough and accurate knowledge of the subject matter." This explanation is discrete from the content dimension on the performance level below, which reads, "The speech demonstrates accurate knowledge except in minor details." When writing descriptor language, avoid vague or subjective language like "usually," "sometimes," or "rarely."<sup>6</sup>

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Make sure that the descriptions of student performance in the highest category are aligned with—or exceed—mastery of the relevant standards.<sup>7</sup>

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### Generic and Task-Specific Rubrics

You may have in the course of your teaching used two types of rubrics: generic and task specific.

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Generic rubrics evaluate performance across similar tasks. For instance, you may have used a generic writing rubric to assess the essential qualities of good writing across a variety of writing assessments.

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Task-specific rubrics evaluate mastery of specific skills. For example, you may have used a task-specific rubric to determine the extent to which students can describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

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Generic rubrics are useful because they are efficient, and you can repurpose them to score multiple assessment items. You can also share them with students in advance of an assessment so that the students understand what's expected of them.

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Task-specific rubrics are useful because you can use them to measure conceptual understanding or mastery of specific skills. For example, suppose you are measuring students' understanding of "the separation of powers." A student might

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<sup>4</sup> Ohio Department of Education, "Assessment Literacy: Identifying and Developing Valid and Reliable Assessments" (2013).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

meet expectations if he or she identifies the three branches of government and describes their roles and responsibilities. A student might approach expectations if he or she is able to identify the branches of government but cannot describe the roles of one or more branches. Finally, a student's work might be below expectations if he or she cannot identify the three branches of government or their roles and responsibilities.

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### Scoring Methods

We score these rubrics in two ways.

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You could rate student performance across several dimensions. You would use this method for formative assessments to help you pinpoint specific areas in which the students are struggling.

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For example, you may assign your students a two-week performance task that culminates in an oral presentation. You plan to measure student mastery using a rubric with three dimensions: content, organization and eye contact. At the end of the first week, you might assess students' progress to date and discover that one particular student has exceeded expectations on the content dimension but is below expectations on the eye contact dimension. You can share this information with the student so that she can practice and work toward meeting or exceeding expectations on all dimensions of the rubric.<sup>8</sup>

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You could also rate the quality of student work as a whole if your rubric has several performance levels but only one dimension. You would use this method for summative assessments.

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For example, instead of the rubric we have been describing, let's imagine that you plan to score your students' oral presentations with a rubric that has a single dimension. To score the assessment, you would look at each student's work holistically and determine the performance level that best describes the performance as a whole.

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Note that this module introduces the *basic concepts* for how we score assessments. The module scratches only the surface of how you can create high-quality rubrics and use them as part of a reliable scoring process.

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## CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

We have addressed the key concepts in this module, so let's review our goals.

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At the outset of the module, we set goals that you would be able to define what "scoring" means for the purpose of these modules; explain how and why you should use well-designed tools, such as answer keys, scoring guides and rubrics, to score many assessments; and explain what distinguishes one tool from another.

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To determine whether we have achieved our goals, let's check your understanding with two assessment items.

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Here's the first item:

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Describe in a paragraph the differences between answer keys, scoring guides and rubrics.

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Pause this video if you want a few moments to think about your answer or discuss it with colleagues.

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A sample answer to the first item would be: *Answer keys* provide the correct answer to an assessment item. Teachers use them when a student response is either correct or incorrect, typically for selected- and constructed-response items. *Scoring guides* assign points to different levels of student performance. Teachers use them when a student response can earn some of the total possible points, typically for constructed-response items and performance tasks. *Rubrics* show a clear progression toward mastery with descriptions of specific levels of student performance. Teachers use them to know when a student has mastered a skill or what he or she needs to do in order to make progress, typically with performance tasks and portfolio assessments.

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Here's the second item:

Describe in a paragraph why you should use an appropriate, well-designed tool to make sure that your assessment provides accurate information about what students know and can do.

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Pause this video if you want a few moments to think about your answer or discuss it with colleagues.

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A sample answer to the second item would be: Answer keys, scoring guides and rubrics are three tools that provide a concrete set of criteria to score the work of students. They support consistency when a teacher or team of teachers score an assessment. For example, if I score an assessment without a scoring tool, I may unintentionally use one set of criteria to score the work of some students and different criteria for other students. In this case, the assessment will not only measure what students know and can do, but it will also measure when and in what order I scored the assessment. A group of teachers scoring an assessment without a scoring tool can face the same challenge. Without agreement on the criteria that they will use to score an assessment, a student's score may depend on his or her mastery of the relevant standard *and* on who happened to score his or her work. Finally, if they do not use a scoring tool, teachers may miss opportunities to identify specific skills with which their students struggle.

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Good work! Thank you for completing the module on scoring. Please view additional modules to continue your learning.

## SOURCES

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