
Presentation #6: Student Learning Outcomes-A Focus on Results

Part 2. SLOs and Grading

Bill Scroggins, December 5, 2003

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In Part 1 of these reflections on student learning outcomes, I asserted that SLOs are “robust” course objectives that add the context and criteria for assessing student achievement of the outcome—SLOs as a bridge between course objectives and grading. In Part 2, the goal is to complete the footing for the “grading” end of the bridge.

Here’s one of the examples of the conversion of objectives into SLOs from Part 1:

Course Objective (English)

Compare and contrast the text and film versions of a literary work.

Statement of Desired SLO

Context: After viewing an assigned film based on a literary text,

Objective: write a review of the film.

Traits: Include an appraisal of the director’s selection and effective translation of content from the literary text and the dominant tone the director seems to be trying to achieve, supporting each statement with detail from the text and film and your personal reaction to the cited scenes.

The criteria for grading student work to meet this objective are referred to as “primary traits.” They constitute the bridge between the course objective and grading—they are the characteristics that are evaluated in assessing student work. Identifying primary traits for a given assignment involves listing those specific components that, taken together, make up a complete piece of work. They are the collection of things that we as teachers look for when we grade student work.

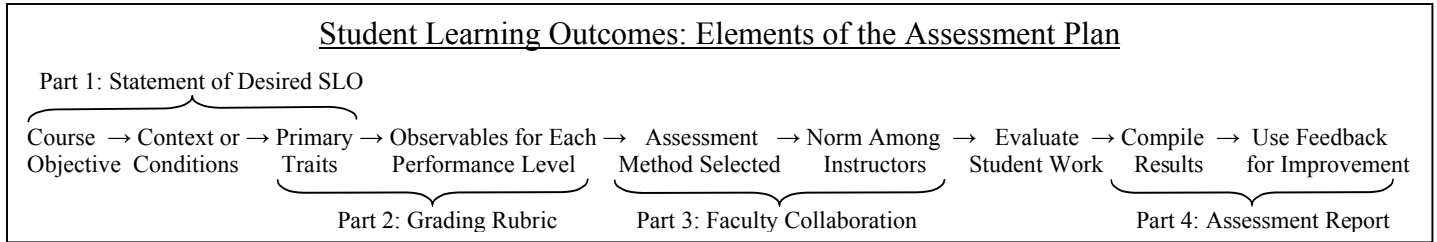
While “primary traits” are the categories into which we can sort competencies when we evaluate student work, we look for specific levels of performance in each of these areas. For example, an essay might be rated on development, organization, style, and mechanics. These primary traits are then rated on some sort of a scale—as simple as A/B/C/D/F or more descriptive as excellent/satisfactory/poor/unsatisfactory. Occasionally, points are given based on this scale. The challenge presented by the Student Learning Outcomes process is to *write down those observable student performance characteristics in an explicit way for each of the primary traits* we have identified. This system, known as a “grading rubric,” can be used to grade student work collected through all manner of assessment methods.

**Template for a Grading Rubric:
Primary Traits and Observable Characteristics**

Trait	Excellent	Satisfactory	Poor	Unsatisfactory
Plot Selection and Tone	Accurate plot review	Accurate plot review	Minor inaccuracies of plot	Glaring plot inaccuracies
Text Translation	Analysis of text beyond literal interpretation	Analysis of text beyond literal interpretation	Analysis of text includes literal interpretation	Literal analysis
Supporting Statements	Support with specific details from text/film	Weak support with specific details from film	Few specific details as support	No specific details as support
Personal Reactions	Personal evaluation based on analysis	Personal evaluation not based on analysis	Little personal evaluation	No personal evaluation

Rubrics can be applied in total by specifically rating each primary trait, an “analytic” grading rubric, or holistically by using the rubric as a guide to determine the overall rating of excellent, satisfactory (meeting minimum acceptable performance standards), poor or unsatisfactory—or whatever performance levels have been agreed upon. Grading rubrics can be applied to a wide variety of subjects and used in association with a range of assessment techniques.

To this point we have discussed stating the desired student learning outcome (Part 1) and developing a grading rubric (Part 2). These are the beginning steps that can lead us toward collecting and using the results of measured student learning outcomes. A road map of a possible “SLO Assessment Plan” is shown in the diagram below.



As the next step in moving toward useful assessment results, Part 3 will reflect on choosing the assessment method and improving consistency of evaluation among faculty doing the assessing.