

## Avondale University College and University of Technology Sydney

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### Peripheries and praxis: the effect of rubric co-construction on student perceptions of their learning

#### Abstract:

*If we could do this with every subject, open it up to a wider swathe of students having an input would be revolutionary in their learning.*

(UTS writing lecturer, Owning the Rubric project)

The construction of assessment rubrics is often educator-centric as lecturers work in isolation to compose grading tools. While there is a pedagogical goal to construct instruments that align with learning outcomes and guide the assessment of students' learning, students are often at the periphery of this process. In many higher education institutions, students are accustomed to receiving assessment feedback but they are not, typically, active participants in the feedback cycle. Increasingly, institutions are seeking evidence of greater student engagement in their tertiary learning experience. Accordingly, academics seek to innovate practice and enhance curricula by creating more opportunities for student involvement, thus creating a shared understanding of it and associated assessment tasks. Responding to a gap in rubric construction practice, this paper discusses an Office for Learning and Teaching Innovation and Development Grant research project where students moved from being rubric users to being central participants in collaborative design. Drawing on data collected from a team of rubric co-constructors from one Sydney university campus – first year students and an academic in a creative non-fiction writing subject – we set out to answer the following question: What effect does the co-construction and use of rubrics have on students' perceptions of their learning?

#### Biographical notes:

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Dr Sue Joseph has been a journalist for more than thirty-five years in Australia and the UK and began working as an academic at the University of Technology Sydney in 1997. As Senior Lecturer, she teaches journalism and creative writing, and is currently Joint Editor of *Ethical space: the international journal of communication ethics*.

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Dr John Seddon of Avondale University College has worked as a university lecturer and a researcher in online education, in addition to roles in project management in higher education. He has facilitated online and face-to-face professional development sessions for higher education teachers who are developing online course design and teaching skills. He was the Project Manager for the Office for Learning and Teaching Innovation and Development's Owing the Rubric project.

Key words:

Assessment practice – rubric co-construction – student learning – creative writing

## **Introduction: moving from the periphery of assessment design**

The Owing the Rubric project originated from a gap the researchers perceived in tertiary assessment practices across disciplines and institutions where there is a greater opportunity for including students as co-constructors in research design. Assessment has become a high stakes component of the tertiary education sector; the assessment of student learning is complex and typically attracts a range of strong views from both students and their lecturers. Students feel pressure to produce high quality work in order to achieve their best possible grades. Consequently, the processes of marking, grading and providing assessment feedback to students have become increasingly significant, requiring considerable skills and resources by university educators. It is not surprising then, that recent years have seen an increase in research projects and publications that report on how the assessment process can be improved to facilitate student learning (Boud et al. 2010, Sadler 2007, Hume & Coll 2009), and focus on how lecturers can use rubrics to assist in the assessment process (Bharuthram 2015, Dawson 2015). Projects have been conducted which analyse the decision making associated with marking, grading and the provision of feedback in response to students' assessment tasks with titles such as 'Improving assessment: understanding educational decision-making in practice' (Dawson et al. 2014) and 'Better judgement: improving assessors' management of factors affecting their judgement' (Schmidt & Schuwirth 2013). Much of this published research focuses on the role of assessment from the lecturer's perspective, or on assessment issues that have typically been the domain of academic staff (lecturers and tutors) and course designers, including designing assessment tasks, effective grading processes, distribution of feedback about assessment tasks and online assessment tools.

To further improve the quality, consistency, and accuracy of grading student assessment tasks, a number of educators have reported on the value of using rubrics to guide the processes of evaluating and providing feedback to students about their learning (Menéndez-Varela & Gregori-Giralt 2016, Jonsson 2014, Howell 2014). Advantages associated with transparency, consistency and shared understanding of criteria are often cited, alongside questions about their effectiveness (Ito 2015) or, to use the title of Sadler's article (2007), 'Perils in the meticulous specification of goals and assessment criteria'. Alongside the recommendations and cautions about their use, assessment rubrics have been used in diverse university education contexts to assist students, lecturers, and markers, especially for the purposes of accurate and consistent marking of students' assessment tasks (Stevens & Levi 2011; Wolf & Stevens 2007). The components of rubrics have been analysed (Dawson 2015), the use of rubrics to standardise assessment processes has been explored (Bloxham et al. 2015), the importance of shared understanding of rubric criteria by markers has been identified (Trace, Meier, & Janssen 2016) and the use of rubrics for self-assessment has been considered (Panadero & Romero 2014). In addition to research that suggests how lecturers, course designers and tutors can improve the assessment process in higher education contexts, the role of collaboration in research design has become increasingly evident in assessment research, and some researchers have called for greater involvement of students in assessment, from the design of assessment tasks through to negotiating methods of feedback (Boud & Molloy 2013).

While collaboration during the process of rubric construction is seen as useful among lecturers and graders by some researchers, collaboration with students during the

assessment design process has yet to be researched in depth. From the field of dental education, the collaborative design of rubrics is recommended by O'Donnell, Oakley, Haney, O'Neill and Taylor (2011) but this collaboration is largely described in terms of members of the teaching team, especially for the benefit of consistency among raters or markers. However, O'Donnell et al. do acknowledge that engaging students in the rubric design process could be useful: 'Collaboration with students, faculty, and/or other members of the teaching team ... is a key consideration in the development of a rubric' they say, with the caution 'the time involved to develop the rubric increases when stakeholders are included, but the benefits derived generally outweigh this investment in time' (2011: 1166). While such options regarding the engagement of students in assessment design processes are sometimes put forward by educational researchers in association with other assessment-focused research, this gap in assessment research has been identified by well-known researchers such as Boud and Molloy, who remind us of 'the importance of curriculum design in creating opportunities for students to develop the capabilities to operate as judges of their own learning' (2013: 698). As a result, explorations of rubrics and their role have increasingly featured in educational research.

Whereas substantial research has emerged from educational literature about the value of rubrics in general – especially in relation to benefits associated with consistency of grading, and the value of rubrics for communicating clear expectations to markers and students – more research is needed that focuses particularly on the role of rubrics in student learning and, in particular, the processes associated with engaging students in assessment design. Although a selection of research studies reported in more recent years investigate students' use and perceptions of rubrics for assessment processes (Prins, de Kleijn & Tartwijk 2017; Wang 2014; Jones et al. 2017), very few large scale projects engaging students in the design of assessment rubrics have been conducted to date.

Despite the lack of research about student engagement in assessment design processes and the impact of this on the quality of learning, a few examples of research studies from selected disciplines have been identified in which collaborative rubric design has been linked to learning. A further subset of researchers have extended student involvement in assessment processes by engaging students in the actual process of rubric generation (Becker 2016) and the co-design of rubrics (Rosenow 2014), and then linked this involvement to the quality of learning. For example, Becker (2016) found that second-language students' scores for assessment tasks were higher for those who were involved in the development of the assessment rubric when compared to students who were not involved in designing the rubric. When working with Honours students, Rosenow (2014) reported that the process of generating task-specific rubrics with her students provided opportunities for learning at the beginning and during an assignment, not only at the end of the assignment production process. Based on these projects, benefits have been identified through the use of rubrics in higher education contexts, with some indicators that rubrics may be even more valuable if students are engaged in their design.

Engaging students in assessment design encourages a shared understanding between lecturers and their students about what is expected in an assessment task, and it also prevents student misunderstandings that are often identified only during the marking process. Through collaborating with their lecturers to co-construct the assessment design process, students gain a better understanding of the purpose of the assessment task, and

they also develop a deeper appreciation for the meaning of the criteria and standards embedded in assessment rubrics. Involving higher education students in the collaborative design of assessment rubrics may improve ownership of their learning, and enable them to develop a clearer understanding of the requirements of high-stakes creative writing assessment tasks.

### **Creative writing assessment: ‘What is good, if you are talking about art?’**

In one of his earlier reflections on anxiety and power in relation to assessing creative writing, Kevin Brophy writes:

The problem with assessment in creative writing involves again the problem of power relations between pleasure and education. Any imposed grading re-inserts the authority of the teacher and the institution while the workshopping processes favoured in creative writing courses tend to offer some ‘authority’ to every participant. (1994: 55)

Those who teach creative writing might readily relate to the ‘power relations’ that Brophy highlights: on the one hand, the workshop process ideally offers a collegial space of safety where ideas, expression and textual form are freely explored without censorship or self-consciousness. The writing workshop is typically a space of shared authority where peers have agency, and their feedback can be, at times, more prodigious and forthcoming than that of the academic who wishes to validate and promote a diversity of views and input opportunities. Frequently, the lecturer may opt for a less dominant voice and encourage class peers to take on the role of expert and informed practitioner. And yet, on the other hand, once the writing is submitted for assessment, the lecturer commences the solitary and independent task of grading the work, an activity that is typically not shared nor the power distributed. The dynamic of the workshop process is communal, while the assessment process is usually a solitary value judgement by the grader.

Unpacking this complex interchange a little more, literary author and writing lecturer Fay Weldon notes from her own experience that:

The job consists not just of teaching, which is comparatively easy and natural, passing on the knowledge that you have and your students do not, but marking, which is not easy or natural at all.

Writing is an art. It is not a subject in which the student demonstrates his or her knowledge but one in which they perform, and that performance on the page indicates what they have learned and how well they have learned it. So yes, you, the tutor find yourself obliged to make a value judgment and value judgments make everyone uneasy, especially those who make them, because they are, in essence, indefinable. (2010: 171)

Weldon’s comments demonstrate the potentially uncomfortable shift from the ‘easy and natural’ aspect of teaching and utilising writing workshops, with a focus on shared learning – where a lecturer may collegially build a student’s general knowledge of form and craft – to a more rarefied role of ultimately passing perceived ‘indefinable’ final judgement on their work. Vandermeulen highlights the relational dynamics intrinsic to the creative writing workshop process, describing it as a learning space where ‘... a small group of

compatible writers can play the roles of fellow dreamer, listener, reader, interpreter, encourager and later on, helpful critic' (2011: 71).

However, a vital contribution of the Owing the Rubric project (our cross-disciplinary, cross-institutional OLT research project, described below) was the conscious creation of stronger and more visible synergies between process and final product, and greater student ownership of the criteria against which their writing was judged. As we highlighted in an earlier publication entitled 'Who are you to judge my writing: student collaboration in the co-construction of assessment rubric' (Joseph, Rickett, Northcote & Christian 2019), the final marking process does not need to be a segregated 'indefinable' activity that happens apart from a student's shared comprehension of the ways in which a rubric can inform and align with assessment practices. Instead, the marking process can incorporate the use of an assessment rubric that has been collaboratively designed by the lecturer and their students.

When reflecting on her return to academia after working in a community-based employment context, Kroll notes a shift in the university sector from a previously uncomplicated pass/fail model to a more sophisticated and nuanced marking process, along with the potentially complex relational undercurrents that can attend formally assessing a piece of creative writing:

When I returned to university teaching after an absence of seven years and a long stretch as a community arts worker, I had no choice but to teach creative writing as an assessed subject. I was forced into what George Marsh, an English writing teacher, calls 'periodic attitudes of disrespect'. Whatever relationship I had built up with students would be affected once I assessed a piece of work (as it is in any subject). (Kroll 1997)

Kroll is not alone in this experience. This tension between developing positive learning-teaching relationships and the sometimes-challenging process of providing assessment feedback is also noted by others in the higher education sector. With the investment of self and ego, particularly in crafting autobiographical pieces of writing, lecturers often find they juggle complex, and at times hostile, student reactions to formal feedback.

One of the motivating factors in concerning ourselves with the way in which students learn about the marking process in creative writing courses is more usefully contextualised by Vaezi and Rezaei's observations:

The last two decades has witnessed an increase in the popularity of creative writing courses and the recognition of this field as a well-established subject within the educational curricula. Yet, the escalation of enrolment in creative writing programmes was not accompanied by the development of appropriate, reliable, and valid evaluative measures which would be applicable consistently to measure the quality of students' creative works. (2018: 3)

These notions of 'appropriate, reliable and valid evaluative measures' inform many of the considerations and debates constellating creative writing subjects, and shape student expectations and ownership around feedback mechanisms.

### **Students owning their rubric**

The Owing the Rubric project was a research-led initiative of a multi-case study, involving six cohorts of students and their lecturers across three higher education institutions, which

had as its ultimate aim a higher engagement of students with their learning. However, for this paper's readership and practice-based context we focus on a case study from the University of Technology Sydney, one of the cohorts within the study. Here, we share selected insights from student participants and their lecturer about the co-construction of a rubric for a writing assessment task, with a specific focus on how the process of rubric co-construction influenced students' perceptions of their learning. The subject selected for this project was 'a first year, mandatory creative writing unit called *Imagining the Real*, a creative nonfiction subject incorporating two assessments with a cohort of 250 students' (Joseph, Rickett, Northcote & Christian 2019: 3-4). The insights presented in this article are drawn from an analysis of the data gathered from this cohort, and are not intended to represent all cohorts in the study.

For those colleagues wishing to replicate a similar approach and design, we note here a few pragmatic parameters of the project and the challenges of navigating students' timetables and commitments:

The subject was due to be offered during UTS' spring semester beginning August 2017. To allow time for the rubric co-construction process to be undertaken, an email was issued to students in May, inviting them to participate in the rubric co-construction process with the lecturer. Of the total cohort of students, 13 originally indicated an interest in engaging in the co-construction process, but this number was reduced to five students once dates were scheduled for the co-construction meetings. (Joseph, Rickett, Northcote & Christian 2019: 4)

While the number of student participants were low compared to the cohort, there were valuable assessment insights gained from the input and feedback from these first-year students. Central to the aim of this project was the early and sustained engagement of students in co-constructing an assessment rubric with their lecturer. As Andrade highlights, 'Rubrics used only to assign final grades represent not only a missed opportunity to teach but also a regrettable instance of the teacher-as-sole-judge-of-quality model that puts our students in a position of mindlessness and powerlessness' (2005: 29).

Like Andrade, we know that rubrics are useful to students for providing informative descriptions of what is good and bad work, but lecturers often use them primarily for assigning grades. These instructional rubrics can then be employed to help students and lecturers better understand the required outcomes of an assessment task and to focus the students' efforts. As such, instructional rubrics are used not simply for evaluation, but also as a tool for teaching and learning. They are used throughout the assessment project instead of only at the end of the process when feedback is usually provided after the assignment has been marked.

### **UTS student reflections: rubric co-construction and learning**

When commenting on her own co-construction practices with students, Andrade notes a key benefit:

I often co-create a rubric with students by discussing strong and weak examples of student work with them, asking them to brainstorm criteria for their own work and using the

resulting list to write a draft rubric for their comment. As a result, I never hear a student complain that she “didn’t know what I wanted”. (2005: 29)

This value of engaging students in a co-construction process, as a means to help them know not only what is ‘wanted’ but also the rubric’s use, is a theme underscored by feedback from one first-year respondent:

*I think the process has helped just in knowing what a rubric is and what it’s supposed to do, because when we start it and we had our first session, I wanted to ask like what is a rubric but I just felt like it was assumed knowledge and I just don’t know.*

During the co-construction process, student participants found the lecturer’s explanation of holistic and analytic rubrics helpful, and identified several aspects of the co-construction process they found beneficial for orienting and empowering their own learning. Another of the respondents indicated the co-construction space as one which created time for deliberate and proactive reflection, rather than completing a task and reactively contemplating the mechanics in hindsight:

*... like spending time just thinking about the assessment task before you’re even thinking about what you’re going to do for the assessment task, like thinking about it as a task I think really preps you for actually when you start it.*

A number of the participants’ reflections exemplify the broader generalisation that, ‘If students do not understand the rubric terminology and cannot differentiate between the academic standards, rubrics have little value for either preparation or feedback’ (Jones et al. 2017: 131).

Interestingly, we found that while lecturers often understand the language among themselves, confusion can still exist for the students. One of the participants identified the initial gap between what a lecturer thinks students understand and the reality of their comprehension: ‘... *she didn’t realise what we were thinking and vice versa, so [the co-construction process] was super helpful.*’ As such, the UTS lecturer made sure students understood the language used in a creative writing rubric so that expectations were clear rather than utilising metalanguage foreign to the students.

Also important to student learning was the clarification phase, where the students could begin to connect the writing process with the formally assessed product:

*And the fact that it just really clarified what the actual task was, was helpful, because often when you get those rubrics you’re like, okay like the general outline that you go off and you do your thing and then you come back and you’re like oh well that wasn’t really what it was meant to be but I felt like when I started I knew completely what I was meant to be doing ...*

The lecturer found the co-construction of an instructional rubric can be used as a teaching tool for improving writing quality in students. During this process, students learned how to use a rubric, expectations were clearly articulated, vocabulary used in the rubric was readily explained, and questions or misconceptions were addressed. Students indicated they could now use the rubric for self-assessment and as a consequence became more engaged learners: ‘*I think us changing it to an instructional rubric really helped because then it felt like it was [sic] more instructions for the assessment task.*’

Importantly, when co-constructing a rubric with their lecturer, some of the previous perceptions surrounding the mystery of what an academic looked for when formally assessing their submitted work were laid bare:

*In making expectations around the writing task more transparent, and reducing anxiety [and] actually getting to see where the rubric related to the breakdown of marks ... and where your marks come from, I thought was really useful.*

Another participant confirmed that the co-construction process helped to minimise confusion and uncertainty when navigating and completing a piece of writing, thus building greater confidence:

*... because usually you're kind of never sure ... especially with this kind of writing it's just like am I dedicating too much time to my style? am I dedicating too much time to a particular scene or something like that like? it's kind of nice to know where your marks are going, it kind of removes a lot of anxiety when you approach a task.*

The reported reduction of student anxiety was an important feature of the shared production of the rubric:

*I think another affect that it had on me was that I felt like the process of doing the co-construction actually solidified all the things that I needed to learn in the course. Like it was almost like having a study session for what we've already learnt, because it was like an overview of all of the things that you need to achieve that you should have already covered. And I felt like it really just like put the whole course into perspective.*

Another observed this wider sense-making process afforded by the interaction and rubric co-construction with their lecturer:

*I think just having a context of how those things actually are marked and the process behind that ... learning about the CILOs and the SLOs and how that all filters down to actually what you end up having and then how [the lecturer] has to go through the process of equalising the marks of everyone else ... I feel like that just made more sense, it made the assessment task have more sense.*

Clearly, one of the central benefits of co-constructing a rubric with students was the enhanced learning partnership that was achieved, along with an appreciation for the considerations and challenges that a lecturer navigates during the marking process.

Participants also revealed the rapport that developed during the co-construction process as having a positive impact on their learning:

*a safe space [where] we could feel like we could say anything, we could criticise it or we would like say good things about it and it was like really helpful in terms of like our relationship with her and the subject in general and I think it really added to our approach to the subject.*

Importantly, Dick offers an interesting insight into dichotomous approaches to student learning stating, 'It's tempting to assume that one either instructs people what to do or offers them autonomy – to be an autocrat or a democrat' (2013: 50). However, we posit the co-construction model of distributed responsibility can help resolve some 'of the tension between those alternatives' (2013: 50). As one participant said, '*I think just having the*

*understanding about the relationship between how students and how teachers approach ... assessment tasks just gives you such a better perspective of the whole experience.'*

This sharing of perspectives and magnified understanding enabled students to critique existing models of centralised power and distil what they and their lecturer both need from a rubric. One student said:

*I think all of us agreed that we were amazed that [the co-construction process] is not something that happens already, like this just seems so simple that this should happen. And I guess like the reason why that is that we realise that what students need from a rubric and what lecturers and tutors need from rubrics are just completely different. And it seems weird to have one form that's only written by one party, you know, like in that relationship.*

This observation also helps to explain why lecturers at times may feel students have missed the point when they submit their work, and why students are then confused or disappointed by the formal feedback. One participant put it this way: '*... a lot of the time the teacher writes the rubric and the students try interpret it, but a lot of it is lost in translation and we discovered that when we did these [co-construction] workshops.'*

Inherent in this observation is the value of a collaborative rubric design process which promotes alignment between a lecturer's pedagogical goals and the resourcing of a student to reach them. Jonsson and Svingby highlight the general significance of rubrics as having the 'potential of promoting learning and/or improving instruction, at least as perceived by the lecturers and students using them,' arguing that 'the way in which rubrics support learning and instruction is by making expectations and criteria explicit, which also facilitates feedback and self-assessment' (2007: 139). And, we further contend that co-constructing rubrics, not just using them, deepens a student's capacity to self-reflect and more accurately interpret formal feedback. The process of creating a rubric together also enables a lecturer to identify gaps in knowledge and interpretive disjunctions within the cohort's approach to completing a writing assignment. As one participant signalled at the conclusion of the rubric co-construction process, '*I think it will probably change the way [the lecturer] talks ... knowing that we just don't have 20 years of marking experience and assessment tasks.'* While another participant also highlighted the beneficial way in which their lecturer's comprehension of how students engage in learning grew, arriving at '*a more well-rounded view of the way that we approach an assessment task, because [this] was very different to the way that [the lecturer] thought we approached it.'*

Echoing the participants' self-reported feelings of empowerment and autonomy during the co-construction process, the lecturer commented, '*I think the name of the research project is really true, Owning the Rubric; they really owned the rubric. They disrupted it, they inverted it, their agency was just exponentially increased by taking part in this project.'* By giving the students 'permission' to critique and improve an assessment tool the lecturer empowered the students to move from an opaque '*scholarly mystery to them and make it their own,*' eventually co-creating a rubric defined by its transparency and usefulness. When evaluating the end product of the shared design enterprise, the lecturer indicated pride in their collaborative effort:

*The rubric that the students created is even more forensic in its description of criteria. I've already had feedback from one of the tutors saying what an excellent help it has been in her grading. So, I'm really excited about that. I think that will help casuals and tutors –*

*it's going to make them feel more confident about their grading and help instruct them in becoming future academics. If we can get a good practice going about the grading that makes sense to the students it's going to be a much more productive area.*

While the lecturer was at first surprised by how disparate the views were between her and her students, there was benefit in ‘*seeing it through their eyes and understanding how they perceived our language, our format, our structure ...*’. The lecturer’s approach to pedagogy also underwent a calibrating process:

*I found it very humbling. All the time I think my own teaching is really aligned with what the students want. But what I discovered from this is that there is still a huge disjunct from what I think they want and can understand to what they actually do want and understand, what they expect from a rubric. And again, I'll say unpacking the language for me — I was very pleased about that because we're in the creative industries and language, that's our tool, that's our strongest tool of the trade, and that's what they homed in on, the language.*

Thus, the study found multiple examples of how the students benefited from an increased understanding of the lecturer’s expectations, and the lecturer benefited from viewing learning through the eyes of the student. The lecturer explains:

*The value to me was seeing through their eyes, which informs all my teaching, which will inform all my teaching from now on. I tried to make it that I was on the same level as them, that I was learning from them, sort of inverting the usual relationship. And I made that quite clear at the outset that I wanted to learn from them. I think academia is quite highfaluting and it's good to show the students that we are human beings who can be approached and who can help them and support them in their learning. So, I hope that's a value they took away from it.*

One of the lecturer’s major realisations was the importance of challenging any ongoing or automatic assumption of a shared interpretative knowledge about a rubric’s language and marking criteria in future class assessment tasks: ‘*what I have learnt from this [co-construction] experience is how far apart we really are in our views, and trying to bring that closer back down to their expectation I think is really going to improve my teaching.*’

### **Conclusions and recommendations for future rubric co-construction**

In dispelling some of the myths associated with teaching creative writing in academia, Rodriguez notes:

Of the preconceptions regarding creative writing, there are three elements which are most troubling: the idea that it is unteachable; that it is therapeutic; and that it is sociologically and/or politically driven. The most pernicious myth, of course, is that creative writing is unteachable; if this is true, creative writing can never belong in the confines of a university. (2008: 168)

Based on the experiences of some students from one creative writing cohort and our own lived experiences from the Owing the Rubric project, we recommend that part of enhancing the teaching of creative writing in a university context could involve the rubric co-construction process (or elements of it), and there is an increasing field of research which supports this conclusion (Andrade & Du 2005; Reddy & Andrade 2010; Boud & Molloy 2013; Becker 2016; Jonsson 2014; Williams, Northcote, Morton & Seddon 2017).

However, we also acknowledge there are researchers who challenge the usefulness of rubrics in a creative writing context. In her provocative work on *Rethinking rubrics in writing assessment*, Maja Wilson seeks to interrogate the ways in which ‘rubrics may violate the complexities of the writing process so that we can begin our search for more promising practices’ (2006: xxiv). She recognises that:

Writing teachers are a passionate group. Our earliest and deepest experiences with language led us to this profession. We were seduced by the rhythm of language, or by the connection stories brought us with our parents, or by the way words allowed us to form and express our humanity. We were comforted by the way that writing anchored our thoughts on paper, allowing us to build solid ideas from fluid thoughts. We were amazed by the way that scribbles on paper could create understanding. We are convinced that there is something fundamentally sacred about teaching writing – about helping another person to express and shape their humanity through language. (2006: xx)

But despite this aspirational calling, as Alfie Kohn points out in the forward to the book,

what seems to trouble Wilson most of all, though, is how rubrics are relentlessly reductive ... High scores on a list of criteria for good writing do not mean that what has been written is good ... because quality is more than the sum of its rubricized parts.’ (Kohn 2006: xv)

As writing practitioners and lecturers, we concur that the sum of quality writing is greater than its atomised parts. However, we concurrently see the co-construction process as a strategic way in which to create an inclusive and expansive tool that not only enhances students’ learning about the complexities embedded in writing processes and products, but also equips lecturers and tutors to equitably and transparently provide formative and summative feedback.

In reviewing Wilson’s radical push to subvert the use of rubrics, Condon notes:

Writing, as a full construct, cannot be captured on a rubric. Only a reductive sense of writing can be judged in that way. Given that fact, we have a responsibility to develop rubrics that are as robust and non-reductive as possible ... (2011: 178)

The final rubric produced by the UTS students and lecturer evidences and exercises this kind of ‘responsibility’ when designing a rubric which is non-reductive and fit for purpose. This co-constructed rubric is presented here as an example of how the rubric co-construction process can produce an artefact that is designed in partnership between lecturers and students, and is beneficial to both groups.

Instructional Rubric				
This table provides a guide to producing an exceptional standard of work (D/H).				
	Criteria	Weight	Explain	Exemplars
Language	Inventiveness and originality of concept	20%	Demonstrates a unique perspective and/or approach in sourcing a creative non-fiction narrative, and evidence of practice-led research, which includes the ethical integration of primary and secondary sources.	Inventive and original concept: <i>Consider the Lobster</i> David Foster-Wallace; <i>Manoly</i> , Debra Adelaide  Integration of sources: <i>Lanfranchi</i> , John Dale
	Inventiveness and originality of writing	40%	Demonstrates an excellent sense of originality and experimentation in writing; clear, effective and sophisticated use of structure and fictional techniques (including, but not limited to: perspective, tense/s, scene re-creation and dialogue) to construct a creative non-fiction narrative.	Structure and experimentation with form: <i>Lanfranchi</i> , John Dale; <i>Kate Holden</i> , Sue Joseph  Inventiveness and originality: <i>Hiroshima</i> , John Hersey  Scene setting: <i>Schindler's List</i> , Thomas Kenneally; <i>The Hanging</i> , George Orwell
	Consistency of writing	20%	Demonstrates a clear and controlled narrative arc, pace and tone. Excellent written clarity; no spelling or grammatical errors, correct use of tense/s and perspective. Adheres to word count.	Most of the readings in this course, but in particular: <i>Alan Jones</i> , David Leser
Peer-review	Self-assessment/ critical feedback integration	5%	Demonstrates an excellent sense of critical analysis/ engagement. Demonstration of sophisticated critical editing/writing skills.	n/a
	Level of informative & creative exchange	5%	Demonstrates an excellent sense of critical analysis/ engagement with classmates online through discussion board. Demonstration of sophisticated critical reading/editing/proofing skills of their work.	n/a
Aesthetics	Expression & presentation in line with professional standards	10%	The visual presentation of the piece is professional; clear, suitable to form, double-spaced, adheres to word count, showing evidence of intuitive paragraph structure and correct footnoting and/or referencing (if necessary).	Most of the readings in this course, but in particular: <i>Consider the Lobster</i> , David Foster-Wallace; <i>Man or Myth</i> , Mark Mordue

Here we find a practice exemplar which also represents a ‘... recursive and fluid path of the knowledge spiral’ where ‘new knowledge also flows from the larger writing community back to creative writers, and knowledge creation transforms pedagogically’ (Donnelly 2015: 223). Or, in the more concrete words of a student participant, ‘*It is like our thoughts are valid too.*’

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