EMPOWERING TEACHERS AND STUDENTS WITH GRAMMAR IRUBRICS

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Abstract

A rubric is a scoring guide that consists of specific pre-established performance criteria, used for evaluating students' work. iRubric is a comprehensive digital rubric development, assessment, and sharing tool that shows the major skills and sub-skills to be mastered, the different mastery levels, and marks allocated to each level. This article shows how digital rubrics can be created for grammar courses using the iRubric building tool of RCampus, an Online Learning Management System, and how they can be shared through the online learning community rubric gallery.

1. Introduction

Rubrics are tools for assessing instruction and performance according to a set of predetermined scaled expectations and criteria. Rubrics have been popular in assessing learning outcomes in education for over two decades. They are being used in countless classrooms to evaluate an individual work or a student's entire body of work. A review of the literature has shown that rubrics have been identified as an important tool for assessing student performance, teacher effectiveness and program quality. In a review of empirical research by Reddy & Andrade (2010) on the use of rubrics at the post-secondary level undertaken in a wide range of disciplines and for multiple purposes, such as student achievement, improving instruction and evaluating programs, the researchers found that student perceptions of rubrics were generally positive. Teachers also reported positive responses to rubric use. Two studies suggested that rubric use was associated with improved academic performance, while one did not (Al-Jarf, 2011).

The effects of teacher knowledge of rubrics on the achievement of students were studied by Schafer, Swanson Bene & Newberry (2001). Results favored the achievement of students whose teachers had received rubric training. Teachers who were mentored to use rubrics showed that those teachers found rubrics useful for grading assessments and for conveying assessment expectations to students (Maxwell, 2010). Instructional rubrics also drastically enhanced class engagement behaviors of students with mild mental retardation. The achievement of lesson objectives by all the participants evaluated through rubrics was statistically significant (Lee & Lee, 2009).

On the other hand, numerous researchers highlighted the need for developing and using rubrics to ensure the reliability of assessment as many instructors are unable to accurately and dispassionately assess the projects of their students. Another problem is discrepancies in scoring which is related to whether the task contains familiar or unfamiliar content and the mix of procedure and explanation required by the task. Other factors related to discrepancies are leniency errors, teacher knowledge, and the halo effect (Silvestri & Oescher, 2006; Shepherd & Mullane, 2008; Meier Rich & Cady, 2006).

In English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) in particular, there is a need for using rubrics in assessing language skills and proficiency levels. For example, students majoring in translation at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT), King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, take 4 levels of English language courses (listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary building, and grammar) in the first 4 semesters of the translation program. At each level, each course is offered to several sections taught by different instructors. COLT instructors teaching the same course to the different sections change from semester to semester. Those instructors have varying backgrounds,

experiences, expectations, assessment tools and criteria. In addition, the students in the different sections of a language course are often given tests and homework assignments with little or no description of how they will be graded and what an exemplary and poor performance looks like. They complete their assignments, and the instructor grades them based on some unseen criteria. For students, parents, program coordinators and college administrators, this method of student assessment seems vague and sometimes unfair.

To help EFL instructors at COLT follow reliable and valid assessment criteria, the present study proposes the use of digital rubrics to assess students' exams and assignments in the different language courses offered by COLT, especially grammar courses. This article shows how digital rubrics can be created for grammar courses in EFL using the iRubric tool of RCampus, an open access Online Course Management System (www.rcampus.org). It defines rubrics and iRubric; describes the components of a digital rubric; shows the steps of building a digital rubric and how a digital rubric can be applied to an assignment, how to analyze and report digital grading results to students, other instructors, program coordinators and administrators. It gives the benefits of using digital rubrics and sets some criteria for their development and use.

According to RCampus, digital rubrics have several advantages: They show levels of performance and what is expected from students; serve as a guide for beginning instructors and students; save grading time and empower schools with an easy-to-use system for monitoring student learning outcomes and aligning with standards. Rubrics can be collaboratively assessed with colleagues and can be shared with other members through the RCampus rubric gallery. Students and instructors can be engaged in building and assessing classroom activities. Students can get a copy of the scored rubric securely. The digital rubric scores are automatically adjusted to the coursework grading scale and posted on the gradebook. Teachers can bookmark rubrics for future reference. They can showcase their rubrics on their RCampus website. Teachers can find a rubric that they like and may re-purpose it for their use.

In addition, numerous researchers have indicated that the development and use of rubrics in assessment have the several benefits:

- Instructional rubrics communicate instructor expectations clearly, provide students with constructive feedback, and support learning, skill development, understanding, and good thinking (Andrade, 2000).

- Rubrics can help teachers ensure that they are teaching the important points in a subject and that their students are learning them. They assist teachers with grading. Teachers can use rubrics to analyze student work, so that they can plan their instruction and provide beneficial feedback to students that will lead to higher quality work. Well-developed rubrics help instructors define learning objectives so that they can plan instruction more effectively, be more consistent in scoring student work, and be more systematic in reporting student progress (Cooper & Gargan, 2009).

- Rubrics set the standards for assessing both teaching practices and student achievement. They help specify which criteria should be used in evaluating students' performance and proficiency levels. They help define important outcomes for students. With the rubric as a guide, students learn to monitor their own progress. Rubrics guide students in their work. They help students to evaluate the quality of their work as they progress through a class. They encourage students to shift their thinking from "What have I learned?" to "How well have I learned it" (Yoshina & Harada, 2007; Montgomery, 2000).

- They are useful as a formative assessment tool. When good rubrics are used well, EFL instructors and students receive extensive feedback on the quality and quantity of student learning (Yoshina & Harada, 2007; Boston, 2002).

- Rubrics offer productive opportunities for enriching student-teacher relationships and improving instruction. Designing and using a rubric may expand the level of communication between the teacher and student regarding expectation of performance (Gallo, 2004; Martins, 2008).
- Interactive rubrics that involve both teachers and students in defining the criteria for an assignment or objective can be effective in involving students more actively in their learning and in establishing consistent standards of assessment at the program, department and campus level (Stevens & Levi, 2004).
- Rubrics help schools, departments and colleges assess the strengths and limitations of their instructional practices. They serve as a blueprint to communicate the high expectations of Public Instruction for all schools, as an internal self-assessment tool to be used by the educational community, and as an external assessment tool to be used by reviewers (Arizona State Department of Education, 2005).

2. The Grammar Curriculum at COLT

Students majoring in translation at the COLT take 3 English grammar courses in the first three semesters of college: Grammar I, Grammar II and Grammar III (2 hours a week each). The textbooks assigned by COLT and used in Grammar I, II, III are:

- *Kirn, E. & Jack, D. (2007). Interactions 1 Grammar (Silver Edition). McGraw-Hill.*
- *Werner, P., Nelson, J., Hyzer, K., Church, M. (2008). Interactions 2 Grammar, Silver Edition).*
- *Werner, P. & Nelson, J. (2007), Mosaic2: Grammar (Silver Edition). McGraw-Hill.*

In those courses the students cover all of the tenses, modals, regular and irregular verbs, linking verbs, use of articles, prepositions, Noun types, singular and plural forms, gerunds, infinitives, phrase, clause and sentence types, Reported Speech and complex sentences in detail.

3. *Use of Rubrics in Grammar Assessment*
3.1 What Are Rubrics

A rubric is a scoring device that includes the criteria and standards used to evaluate students' work. It is a rating scale - as opposed to checklists - that consists of specific pre-established scaled performance criteria, used in assessing students' skill levels and/or performances (Lund, 2000; Gallo, 2004; Mertler 2001; Callison, 2000).

Prior to designing a grammar rubric, a teacher must decide whether the performance or product will be scored at the word or sentence level. The process of developing a rubric has several steps: (i) Identifying the purpose or objectives of the activity in measurable student outcomes. (ii) Identifying the qualities that need to be displayed in a student's work. (iii) Defining the performance levels (excellent, average, poor) using observable behaviors and descriptions of the work rather than judgments about the work and marks allocated to each level. Scoring rubrics should be written in specific and clear language, and a clear separation between score levels (Moskal & Leydens, 2000; Moskal, 2003a & 2003b).

3.2 What Is iRubric?

iRubric is a comprehensive digital rubric development, assessment, and sharing tool (maker/builder). It shows the major skills and sub-skills to be mastered, the different mastery levels, and marks allocated to each level. The following are the basic terms used in an iRubric and their definitions:

- *Rubric Criteria:* Characteristics of a performance. They are generally listed in rows.
- *Criteria Descriptors:* describe what is expected at each level of performance.
- *Levels (of performance):* Describe quality of work. They are generally listed in columns.

- *Divider:* It is a special row that divides a rubric into sections. A *simple divider* only divides the section without changing the levels, whereas a *weighted divider* allows changing of level titles and weights for a section of rubric.

Steps for building a digital rubric using the iRubric tool of RCampus, for applying the digital rubric to an assignment, for entering the grades, for viewing the students' grades, for sharing and discussing the rubric with other instructors, and for categorizing the rubric are shown in webpages 1-15 in the Appendix below.

4. Conclusion

The effective use of Rubrics requires that rubrics be of high quality in order to have positive effects in the classroom. A well-constructed rubric identifies the criteria for a successful performance and describes the qualities of strong, adequate, and weak performances. The statement of goals and activities should be clearly aligned with the measurable outcomes of the performance activity. Scoring rubrics should be explained to students ahead of time. In scoring, interpreting, and using results, guidance is offered for using rates and anchor papers. With the rubric as a guide, students learn to monitor their own progress and make improvements in a timely manner. Finally, involving students in creating rubrics encourages them to think about the criteria of quality work and promotes ownership of the assessment process (Shepherd & Mullane, 2008; Yoshina & Harada, 2007; Moscal, 2003a & 2003b; Bush & Leinwand, 2000; Moskal & Leydens, 2000).

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Appendix
Steps of Creating and Using Grammar iRubrics
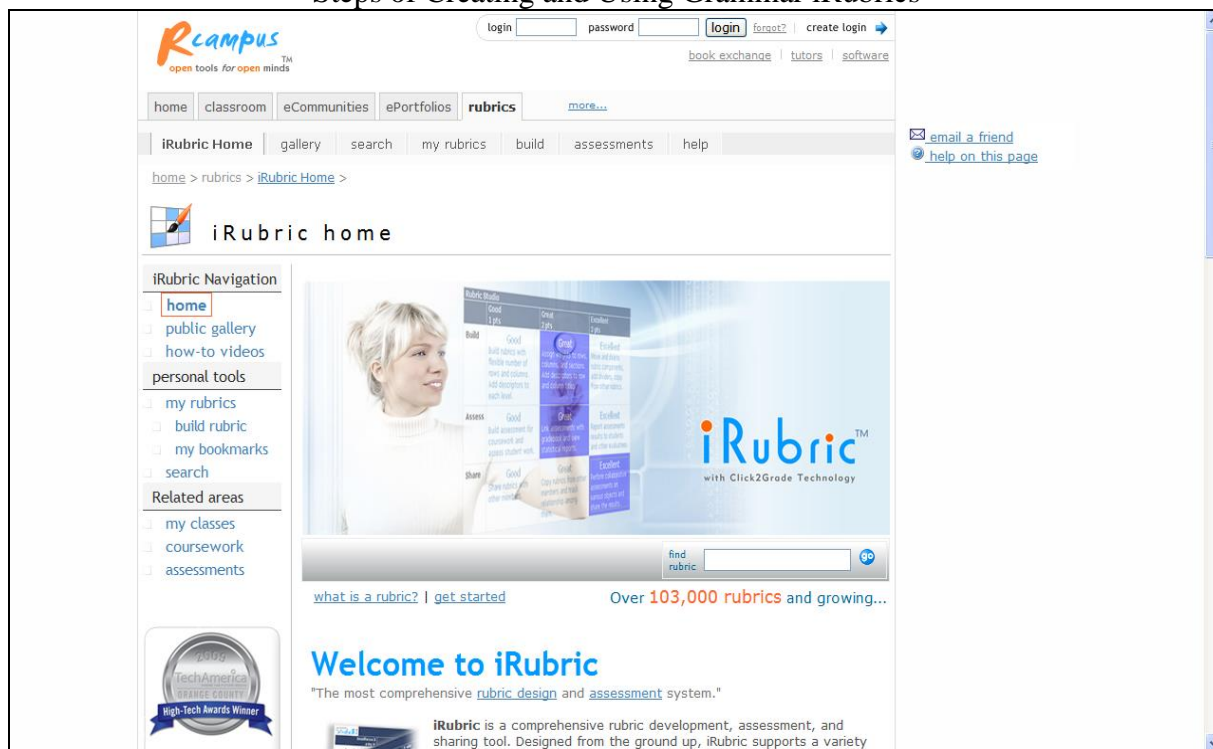
Webpage 1: Go to the RCampus iRubric Homepage at http://www.rcampus.com and register for an account.
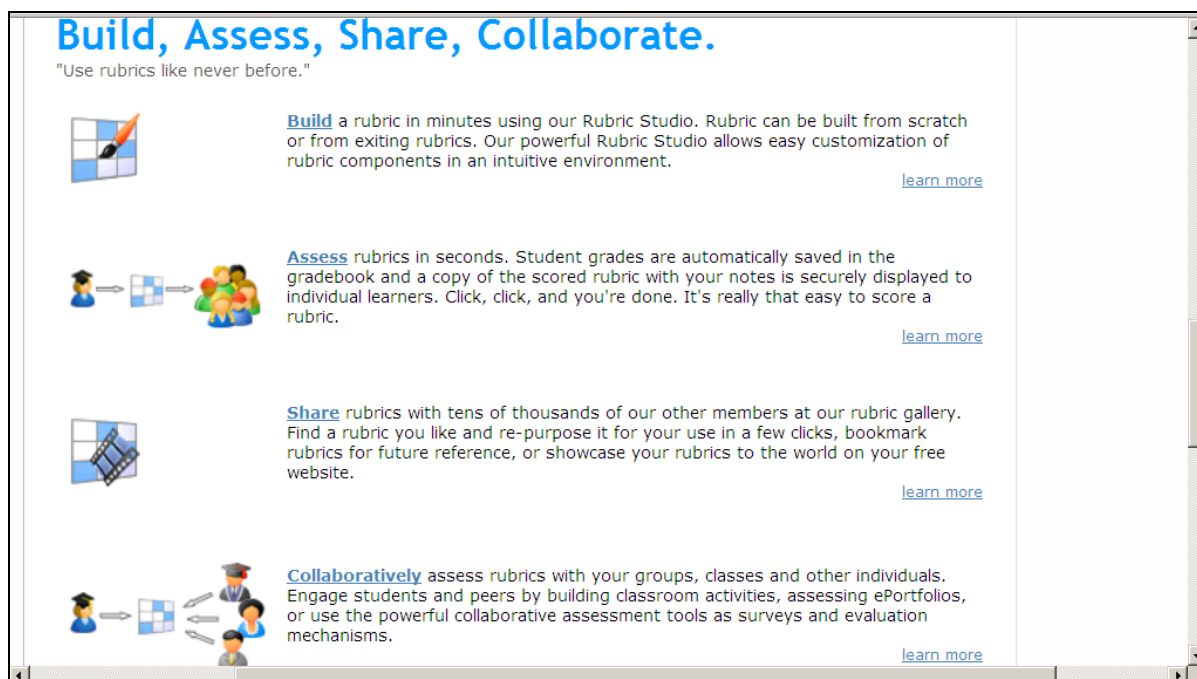
Webpage 2: To build a new digital rubric, lick "Build". Option (A) Create a new rubric from scratch; (B) Revise an existing rubric; (C) Duplicate and re-purpose an existing rubric.

Webpage 3: Rubric Building Page. Click "add row (criterion) ", "add simple divider (section) ", or "add full divider (sub-rubric)" underneath the rubric.

iRubric	Worrd Level Grammar Rubric		
	Excellent 2 pts	**Average 1 pts**	**Poor 0 pts**
Articles	Correct use of definite and indefinite articles	Has one spelling error	Incorrect use of definite and indefinite articles
Prepositions	Correct use and spelling	Has one spelling error	Incorrect use of prepositions
Singular and Plural forms	Identifies correct singular and/or plural form	correct singular and/or plural form but with 1 misspelled letter	incorrect singular and/or plural form
Making tag Questions	Correct use of tag question (subject-verb agreement and inversion)	1 error in subject-verb agreement or subject-verb inversion	errors in subject-verb agreement and subject-verb inversion
Making Wh-Questions	Correct use of Wh-questions	1 error in subject-verb agreement or subject-verb inversion	2 errors in subject-verb agreement, subject-verb inversion or question word
Subject-verb	Correct subject-verb	Correct subject-verb	faulty subject-verb

agreement	agreement and correct spelling	agreement but misspelled verb	agreement and misspelled verb
Tenses	Correct tense selection and formation	Correct tense formation & selection but 1 spelling error	Incorrect tense formation or selection
Modals	Correct use of modals (form and meaning)	Correct use of modals with 1 spelling error	1 error in modal + verb (adding to, adding -s, -ing…etc)
Verb conjugation	Give correct forms with correct spelling	Give correct form but with 1 misspelled letter	Give wrong forms or misspell 2 or more letters
Noun types (count, proper, collective…etc.)	Identifies noun type correctly	-	faulty identification of noun type
Pronunciation of –ed in verbs and –es in verbs and noun	-ed & -s are pronounced /t/ & /s/ after voiceless consonants, /d/ & /z/ after voiced consonants, /id/ after t, d. /iz/ after sh, ch, z, s, dj	-	Incorrect pronunciation
Identifying transitive & intransitive verbs	Correct identification	-	Faulty identification
Pronouns	Give correct form according to person, number, case, type…etc	-	Give faulty forms or misspell pronouns
Identifying parts of speech of words in context	Correct identification of parts of speech of words in context	-	Faulty identification

Webpage 4: Word-level Grammar Rubric

iRubric	Compound and Complex Sentences		
	Excellent 1 points	Good 1/2 points	Poor 0 points
Distinguishing phrases and clauses	Correct identification of a clause/phrase (boundary, type, function)	1 error in identifying a clause/phrase (boundary, type or function)	2 or more errors in identifying a clause/ phrase boundary, type or function

Identifying types of sentences	Correct identification (connecting words, independent & dependent clauses)	Correct identification of sentence type but fails to identify 1 conjunction, independent or independent clause)	Faulty identification of sentence type
Combining sentences with conjunctions	Correctly combines sentences using correct conjunctions, and punctuation deleting subject where necessary	Correctly combines sentences but retains the subject, a comma is missing.	Incorrectly combines sentences using incorrect conjunctions or punctuation, or keeping subject
Distinguishing noun, Adjective and Adverb Clauses	Correct identification (relative pronoun, function of relative clause, identifying main and subordinate clauses)	1 error per sentence (relative pronoun, function of relative clause, identifying main or subordinate clauses)	2 or more errors (relative pronoun, function of relative clause, identifying main and/or subordinate clauses)
Noun clauses with anticipatory it	Correctly selects verbs and adjectives of urgency, subjunctive verb	1 error in use of anticipatory "it" or subjunctive verb	2 or more errors
Anticipatory "it" with Adjective clauses	Anticipatory it is used with subject followed by relative clause	Anticipatory it is with subject but there is 1 error in relative clause	Anticipatory it is not used with subject, not followed by relative clause
Reduction of Noun clauses	Deletes relative nouns and makes necessary changes	1 error (spelling, does not delete subject or does not use infinitive	2 or more errors in spelling, failure to delete relative pronoun, subject or use infinitive)
Reduction of adjective clauses (with verbs in the active voice, passive voice, perfect tenses, participial phrases, appositives)	Relative pronoun and verb' to be' are deleted, retain past participle, add –ing to main verb and 'have'	Relative pronoun and verb' to be' are deleted, retain past participle, add –ing to main verb and 'have' but there is 1 spelling error.	Did not delete the relative pronoun or verb' to be' or did not add –ing to main verb or 'have'
Changing Direct Speech to Reported Speech	Correct use (making correct changes in the verbs, pronouns and adverbs)	1 error in the verbs, pronouns or adverbs	2 or more errors in the verbs, pronouns or adverbs
Noun Clauses with embedded Wh-	Correct use (selecting if or whether, verb	1 error in the verb placement, or verb	2 or more errors in selecting if or whether,

questions	placement, verb tense…etc)	tense	verb placement, verb tense…etc
Punctuation in quoted speech	Correct use of quotation marks and commas (after said, at the end of the quote, with exclamation and question marks…etc.)	1 error in use of punctuation marks.	2 or more punctuation errors
Relative Pronouns (who, whom, that, whose, when, where) replacing subject & object of a Verb/ Preposition, possessive, nouns/expressions referring time, place	relative pronoun matches and relativized noun, follows reltivized nouns where necessary, relativized noun is deleted	1 spelling error	Relative pronoun does not follow subject, verb or preposition; relativized noun is not deleted; possessive noun, pronoun, or adjective is not deleted.
Clauses with when & where	Correct choice of relative pronoun, relative pronoun follows subject or object to which it refers.	1 spelling error	Wrong choice of relative pronoun or relative pronoun does not follow subject or object; relativized noun or adverb is retained
Restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses	Commas are used when head noun is specific, preceded with 'this' or is a proper noun	One comma is missing when head noun is specific, preceded with 'this' or is a proper noun	Both commas are missing or commas are used when head noun is generic
Combining sentences with relative pronouns	Relative pronoun matches and follows relativized noun, deletes relativized noun	1 error (relative pronoun does not follow subject, verb or preposition)	relative pronoun does not follow subject, verb or preposition
Superlatives and Adjective Clauses	Superlative precedes the relative pronoun. Verb agrees with subject	Superlative precedes the relative pronoun. Verb does not agree with subject	Superlative does not precede relative pronoun or verb does not agree with subject
Clauses & expressions of quantity	Expression of quantity is used with 'whom' or 'which'	Expression of quantity is used with 'whom' or 'which', but there is 1 spelling error	Selection of wrong relative pronoun

Subject-verb agreement in clauses	Verb agrees in number with subject in main or subordinate clause	Verb agrees with subject but there is 1 spelling error in the verb	Verb does not agree in number with subject
Adverb Clauses of cause, result, time, concession, contrast, purpose, comparison	Connecting word is used at the beginning or in the middle of the sentence.	Connecting word is correctly selected but there is 1 punctuation error	Connecting word selected does not match meaning
Tenses in adverb clauses of time	verb tense in the main clause corresponds with verb tense in the subordinate clause	verb tense in the main clause corresponds with verb tense in the subordinate clause but there is a misspelling	verb tense in the main clause does not correspond with verb tense in the subordinate clause
Placement & punctuation of Adverb Clauses & phrases	Comma is correctly used when the connecting word is at the beginning of the sentence	1 spelling error	Comma is not used when the connecting word is at the beginning of the sentence or is used when connecting word is in the middle

Webpage 5: Sentence-level Grammar Rubric
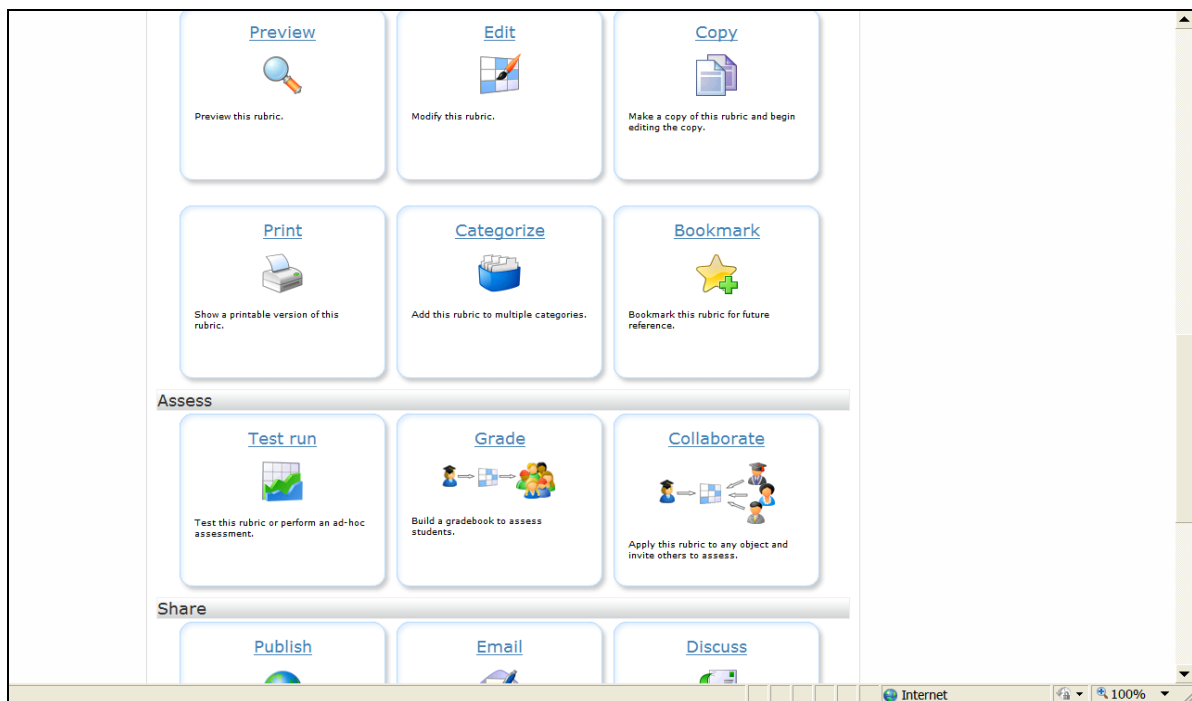
Webpage 6: These action buttons appear underneath the rubric after saving it. Click any of the links if you need to preview, edit, copy, print, categorize, bookmark, test-run, grade, collaborate, publish, e-mail, or discuss the rubric that you have built. An explanation of each action button is given.

Webpage 7: To apply the rubric to an online assignment, click "apply to" in the menu above the saved rubric.

Webpage 8: Applying the rubric to a coursework or an object for collaborative assessment such as a document, a website, a book or any object.

Webpage 9: To apply the rubric to a coursework, select the course title and type of coursework to be evaluated from the drop-down menus.

Webpage 10: Customize the Courswork Properties by selecting the course name, assignment title, total points, due date, due time, access dates

Webpage 11: To enter the grades, click on the rubric in front of a students' name. This will transfer you to the rubric page.

Webpage 12: To score a student's assignments (i) Click on one level per criterion to select it. (ii) Once finished, click on [save] below the rubric. (iii) Student grade will be calculated and entered in gradebook

Webpage 13: View of the students' Gradebook while scoring the assignment

Webpage 14: View of Students' Gradebook after scoring has been finished
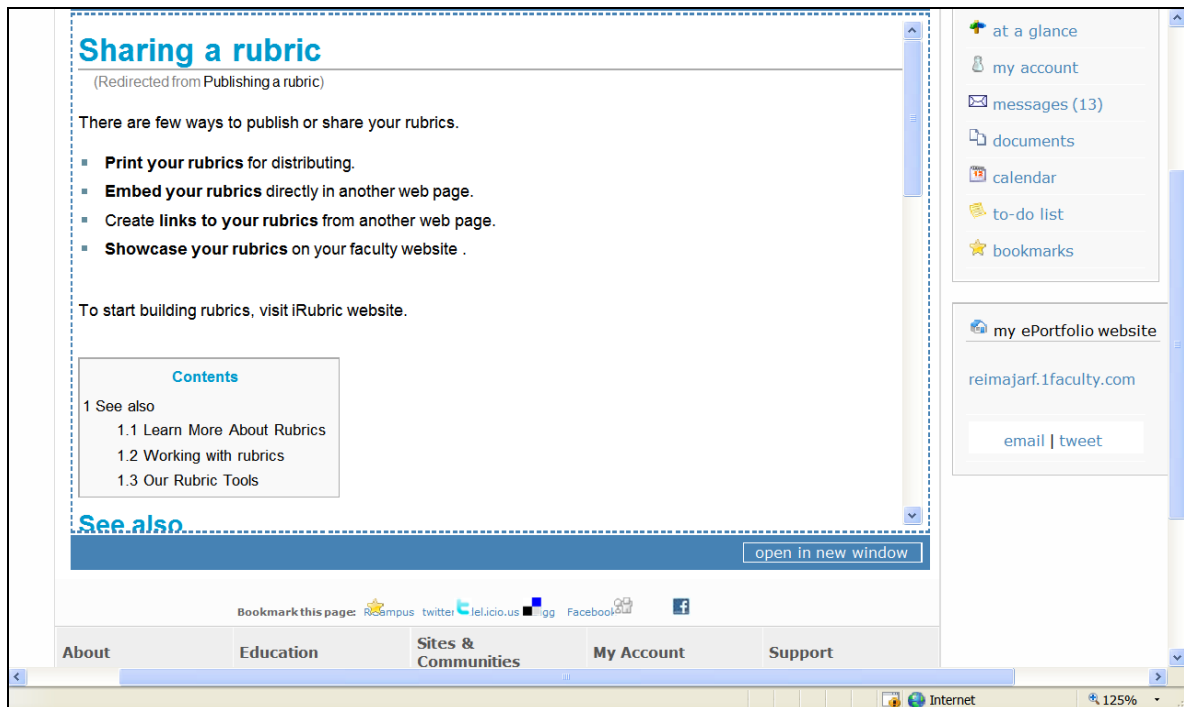
Webpage 15: To share a rubric with other teachers, select one of the options on this page
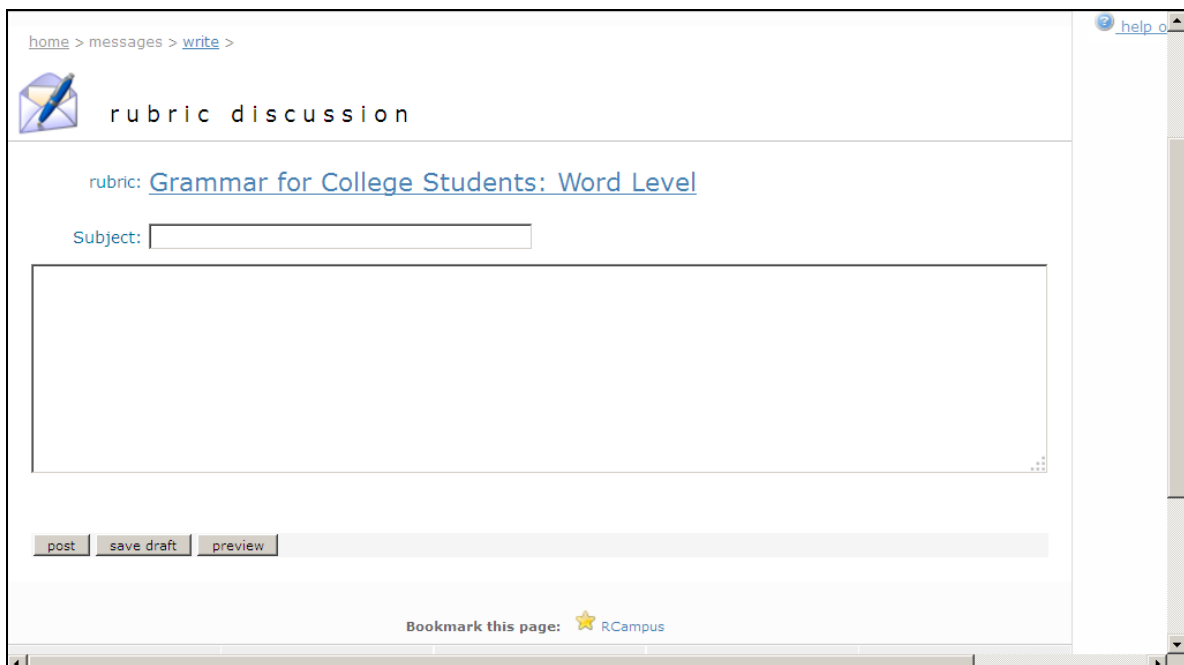
Webpage 16: Discussing a rubric with colleagues or students

Webpage (17): To categorizing a rubric, select the subject area and the type of task to which the rubric will be applied