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The Importance of a Rubric

Because effective writing consists of both subjective (natural verbal ability, grasp of language) and objective (correct grammar, attention to detail) elements, students need to keep a clear set of guidelines before them as they write and revise their papers. The rubric provides just this, and if attended to with diligence, will help to hone the writing of students at all levels of natural talent. By applying all four subdivisions of the rubric to one's paper throughout the writing process, one can expect at the very least a well-organized, readable, and grammatically correct paper.

The first two segments of the rubric, entitled "Content" and "Logical Organization," help students keep the big picture in mind. Working from thesis to outline to paragraphs to sentences and transitions will bring a paper into a "rough draft" state, with all the major components in place. At this level, students can work with adding or deleting details, rearranging paragraphs, and double checking for consistent adherence to the thesis. This provides a solid backbone for a paper, which is important for keeping readers engaged and oriented throughout the entire piece.

With the "Style" section, students move from larger units to individual sentences. For example, they examine *sentence variety*, making sure that their sentences are neither too simple and monotonous, nor overly complex and convoluted. They check *word choice*, replacing vague words or phrases with as many strong verbs and nouns as possible. And they ensure that the paper is not overly wordy or redundant. All of this takes the paper from clear outline to truly

effective prose.

Finally, when the bulk of the editing and revising is done, students double check for mechanical or grammatical errors. This is where each comma and period is properly placed, each quotation appropriately cited, and each aspect of formatting correctly adjusted. It is important for this to be the final step, to ensure both accuracy and efficiency; until all major changes are made, it makes no sense to attend to the smaller details of the paper.

After all is said (or written) and done (or printed), if students have followed the rubric carefully, they now hold in their hands a piece of effective writing. Learning to apply the rubric to one's writing process can help to improve writers of all talent levels. It also allows students to know exactly in what manner their papers are to be evaluated. But most importantly, it enables students to become graders of their own papers, which—in a world that relies so heavily on the written word for communication—is a skill that will last long after final exams and graduation.