**Common Assignment Study**

Unit Quality Rubric

Development

The Common Assignment Study (CAS) Unit Quality Rubric, developed by a CAS committee, can be used as a guide for the collaborative design and revision of instructional units. Early in the project, we recognized a need for a customized evaluative tool that would align with our design process and capture the project's values and knowledge about what makes for high-quality units. After developing and using a set of quality criteria for this purpose in year 1 of the project, CAS formed a committee to develop a more complete rubric for use in year 2. The committee comprised project leaders from the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE); The Colorado Education Initiative; The Fund for Transforming Education in Kentucky; and the Center for Assessment.

The committee began by building out our existing unit quality criteria with input from each of the project stakeholders. As part of this process, we consulted the tools that were already in use by partner states Kentucky and Colorado—namely the [Educators Evaluating the Quality of Instructional Products (EQuIP) rubrics](http://www.achieve.org/EQuIP), the [Jurying Rubric for Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) Modules](http://ldc.org/blog/posts/new-ldc-jurying-rubric-now-available), and the Colorado Department of Education’s [Assessment Review Tool](http://www.coloradoplc.org/assessment/assessment-review-tool-0)—as well as the SCALE Performance Assessment Quality rubric. After careful mining and synthesis of relevant criteria from these multiple sources, we finalized the categories for the rubric and developed a progression of quality across three performance levels.

This new rubric became a common tool used by the teacher teams to inform unit development and revision and by project leadership to ensure that any unit reviewed highly with our tool would also meet or exceed the criteria already in use by both partner states. We chose not to include criteria from the Jurying Rubric for LDC Modules, opting instead to use that tool separately to get a closer look at the LDC modules embedded within these larger units.

Organization and Design Features

The CAS Unit Quality Rubric …

Sequences four key categories to mirror our unit design process:

1. Performance outcomes.
2. Assessments and evaluative criteria.
3. Student engagement and agency, relevance, and authenticity.
4. Learning experiences and instruction.

Uses descriptive dimension titles to communicate that a high quality unit:

* has performance outcomes that are clearly defined, aligned to standards, and worthwhile and central to the discipline;
* uses assessments that provide evidence of learning; are aligned to performance outcomes, content, and skills in the discipline; are accessible; and have clear, aligned evaluative criteria;
* engages students through authentic purpose and product, essential questions, opportunities for diverse responses and choice/decision-making, and opportunities for self-assessment and peer and teacher feedback; and
* contains learning experiences and instruction that provide opportunities for learning; use appropriate, accessible texts and resources; and are aligned to both the letter and spirit of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

Uses

We use this rubric to guide the production and evaluation of our units and the curriculum-embedded performance assessments included within.

We encourage you to use this tool in ways that suit your purposes and local contexts. We have found it to be powerful both formatively and summatively for unit design and development; it can also be used to guide the selection and adaptation of already published units. Whether applied in toto or excerpted to focus on particular dimensions, the CAS Unit Quality Rubric can help you identify, build, and evaluate quality in instructional units.

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| 1. Performance Outcomes  (Desired Results: What will students know, understand, and be able to do?) | | | |
| **A quality unit has performance outcomes that are …** | **Work in Progress** | **Ready For Use** | **Exemplary** |
| **Clearly defined and aligned to standards.** | **Performance outcomes:**   * Are **unclear.** * Are **incoherent** across the unit and/or **overly broad or narrow** in scope for a unit of study. * Are **loosely aligned** or **misaligned** to content and skill standards. * Are **too difficult** or **too easy** for the range of student ability. | **Performance outcomes:**   * Are generally **defined** or may be listed only as verbatim standards. * Are **generally coherent** across the unit and **manageable in scope** for a unit of study. * Are **generally aligned** to grade level expectations of appropriate content and skill standards (CCSS, NGSS, etc.). * Represent an **appropriate level of challenge.** | **Performance outcomes:**   * Are **clearly defined** in the teachers’ own language.[[1]](#footnote-1) * Are **highly coherent** across the unit and **ambitious but manageable** in scope for a unit of study. * Are **tightly aligned** to grade level expectationsof appropriate content and skill standards (CCSS, NGSS, etc.). * Represent **appropriately high level of performance** and **appropriate depth of knowledge for the targeted standards.** |
| **Worthwhile and central to the discipline.** | **Performance outcomes:**   * Address ideas or skills with **unclear or questionable importance** within the discipline(s). * Require application of **minimal** higher-order thinking / 21st-century skills. | **Performance outcomes:**   * Address **key** ideas and skills that are **central to the discipline** and have **limited transfer** within and/or across the discipline(s). * Require application of **some** higher-order thinking / 21st-century skills. | **Performance outcomes:**   * Address key ideas and skills that are central to the discipline and have **broad transferability** within and/or across the discipline(s). * **Explicitly** require applicationof **a wide range** of higher-order thinking / 21st-century skills.[[2]](#footnote-2) |

*This rubric is derived and adapted from the EQuIP rubric, the Colorado Department of Education’s Assessment Review Tool, SCALE’s Performance Task Quality Rubric, and the CAS Criteria for Unit Quality.*

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| 2. Assessments and Evaluative Criteria | | | |
| **A quality unit has assessments that …** | **Work in Progress** | **Ready For Use** | **Exemplary** |
| **Provide evidence of learning.** | **Assessments:**   * Provide **some indirect evidence** of what students *know and understand.* * Provide **some indirect evidence** of what students *can do.* * **Do not require application of skills and knowledge to a novel context.** | **Assessments:**   * Elicit **direct**, **measurable evidence** of what students *know and understand.* * Elicit **direct, measurable evidence** of what students *can do.* * **Include at least one performance-based** task and require application of skills and knowledge to a novel context. | **Assessments:**   * Are **frequent and use varied strategies** to elicit direct, measurable evidence of what students *know and understand.* * Are **frequent and use varied strategies** to elicit direct, measurable evidence of what students *can do.* * Are **primarily performance-based** and require application of skills and knowledge to a novel context. |
| **Are aligned to performance outcomes, content, and skills.** | * Assessments **do not adequately measure** the unit’s targeted performance outcomes.[[3]](#footnote-3) * Assessment item types are **frequently mismatched** to the type of knowledge or skill being measured. | * Assessments **measure all** ofthe unit’s key targeted performance outcomes. * Assessment item types are **mostly matched** to the type of knowledge or skill being measured. | * Assessments **directly measure** **all** of the unit’s targeted performance outcomes. * Assessment item types are **tightly matched** to the type of knowledge or skill being measured. |
| **Are accessible.** | * Directions and explanations are **unclear** or **impractical for implementation.** | * Directions and explanations are **clear** and **practical for implementation.** | * Directions and explanations are clear and practical for implementation **in diverse classroom settings.** |
| **Have clear, aligned evaluative criteria (rubrics).** | **Evaluative criteria:**   * **Are loosely aligned or misaligned** to performance outcomes and their associated standards. * Address **some** demands of the task; **may focus on surface-level features of the work.[[4]](#footnote-4)** * Represent **unrealistic or inappropriate** expectations for the grade level. * **Do not describe expectations for student work.** * Use **inconsistent** language across levels. | **Evaluative criteria:**   * **Are generally aligned** to performance outcomes and their associated standards. * Address **most** demands of the task. * Represent **generally appropriate** expectations for the grade level. * **Describe expectations for student work.** * Use **mostly consistent** language across levels. | **Evaluative criteria:**   * **Are tightly aligned** to performance outcomes and their associated standards. * Address **all** demands of the task. * Represent **appropriately high** expectations for the grade level. * **Clearly and explicitly** describe **what mastery looks** **like** in student work. * Use **consistent and coherent** language across levels. * **Provide anchor samples of student work to further illustrate mastery.** |

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| 3. Student Engagement: Relevance, Authenticity, and Agency | | | |
| **A quality unit has assessments that have …** | **Work in Progress** | **Ready For Use** | **Exemplary** |
| **Authentic purpose and product.** | * Context for completing the tasks is **not provided.** * The unit engages students in activities/products with **little connection** **to the discipline.** | * Tasks **simulate a real-world context** for engaging in learning and completing the tasks in the unit and makes connections to the work of adults in the real world. * The unit engages students in activities/products that are **connected to the discipline.** | * Tasks **provide a real-world context[[5]](#footnote-5)** that establishes a clear, "need to know" purpose for engaging in learning and completing the task(s) in the unit. * The unit engages students in activities/products that are **central to the discipline.** |
| **Essential questions.** | **Essential questions:**   * Create a **loose or unclear** focus for the unit. * Are **unlikely to interest or engage** the learner in inquiry. * Have **unclear or questionable connection** to the discipline. | **Essential questions:**   * Create a **focus** for the unit. * Put the learner in an **inquiry mindset.** * Are **relevant** to the discipline. | **Essential questions:**   * Create a **clear and explicit** focus for the unit. * Are compelling and lead learners to **deep inquiry.** * **Reflect central questions** or **big ideas/enduring understandings** in the discipline. |
| **Opportunities for diverse responses and choice/decision-making.** | * Prompts and resources (texts, materials) **bias students toward a particular response; or there is only one acceptable response.** * Unit provides **no decision points** for students. | * Prompts **allow for diverse ways of responding**, butresources (texts, materials) **inappropriately** **predetermine or limit the ways in which students can respond.** * Unit provides a **limited set of decision points, like topic or resources.** | * Prompts and resources (texts, materials) **allow for diverse ways of responding.** * Unit provides students **explicit opportunities to make key content and strategic decisions** for how to complete the task and **to extend their own learning by introducing new resources or strategies.** |
| **Opportunities for self-assessment and peer and teacher feedback.** | * Unit provides **no** **opportunities** to receive any feedback. * Unit provides **no opportunities** for students to revise and resubmit work. | * Unit provides opportunities for students to receive **teacher feedback.** * Unit provides **opportunities for students to revise and resubmit work.** | * Unit builds in **multiple** **opportunities** for students to gain feedback through **self, peer,** and/or teacher assessment. * Unit provides opportunities for students to revise and resubmit work and **reflect on their learning.** |

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| 4. Learning Experiences and Instruction | | | |
| **A quality unit contains learning experiences and instruction that …** | **Work in Progress** | **Ready For Use** | **Exemplary** |
| **Provide opportunities for learning.** | **Learning experiences and instruction:**   * Provide students with **limited opportunities** to develop and demonstrate the unit’s targeted skills, understandings, and knowledge. * Include **scaffolding** that **does not adequately support students** in analyzing, interpreting, integrating, and/or applying rich, complex stimuli in order to make sense of a disciplinary problem or topic. * Are **loosely connected** **to each other.** | **Learning experiences and instruction:**   * Provide students with **some opportunities** to develop and demonstrate the unit’s targeted skills, understandings, and knowledge. * Include **adequate scaffolding** so that **most** students can analyze, interpret, integrate, and/or apply rich, complex stimuli in order to make sense of a disciplinary problem or topic. * **Relate to each other** to give students a **coherent set of opportunities** to develop knowledge and understandings within the discipline. | **Learning experiences and instruction:**   * Provide *all* students with **multiple opportunities** to develop and demonstrate the unit’s targeted skills, understandings, and knowledge. * Include **appropriate, targeted scaffolding** so that *all* students can analyze, interpret, integrate, and/or apply rich, complex stimuli in order to make sense of a disciplinary problem or topic. * **Build on each other** to give students a coherent set of opportunities to develop **increasingly deep and sophisticated** knowledge and understandings within the discipline. |
| **Use appropriate, accessible texts and resources.** | * Resources **do not vary** in format, complexity, or challenge. * Most resources are **inaccessible or too easy for most students.** | * Resources are grade appropriate and vary in format, complexity, **or** challenge. * Resources are generally appropriate, engaging, and accessible for **most students;** **one or more sources may be inaccessible** for the grade level. | * Resources are grade appropriate and vary in format,[[6]](#footnote-6) complexity **and** challenge. * Resources are **carefully selected, excerpted, or adapted** to improve accessibility for **all students, including those with reading challenges and learning disabilities.** |
| **Are aligned to the letter and spirit of the CCSS.** | **Learning experiences:**   * Are **loosely aligned or misaligned** to grade-level standards. * **Do not require** close reading of texts, examination of textual evidence, or discernment of deep meaning. * **Do not expect** that students draw evidence from texts to produce writing. | **Learning experiences:**   * Are **generally aligned** to grade-level standards. * **Require some** close reading of texts, examination of textual evidence, and/or discernment of deep meaning. * **Occasionally** expect that students draw evidence from texts to produce writing **that informs, explains, or makes an argument.** | **Learning experiences:**   * Are **tightly aligned** to grade-level standards. * Make close reading of texts, examination of textual evidence, and discerning deep meaning **a central focus of instruction.** * **Routinely** expect that students draw evidence from texts[[7]](#footnote-7) to produce **clear and coherent** writing that informs, explains, or makes an argument. |

1. Evidence for this indicator may be found in Stage 1 of the Unit Template, particularly in the Acquisition section. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 21st-century skills may include critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, effective communication, meaningful use of technology, collaboration, global awareness, metacognition, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. If performance outcomes are not clearly defined, this indicator should not be scored. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. E.g., participation, length, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Real-world context” includes not only non-school contexts such as writing a newspaper editorial or designing a roller coaster, but also what college students and professionals within a discipline would do, e.g., write a lab report, write as a literary critic, think like a historian, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Resources that vary in format (e.g., multiple sources representing different perspectives or writing purposes, audio or visual resources, and hands-on experimentation) provide multiple ways for students to engage with content and thereby provide multiple entry points into the task. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Texts may include illustrations, charts, diagrams, audio/video, and other media. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)