

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](#), the [Jurying Rubric for Literacy Design Collaborative \(LDC\) Modules](#), and the Colorado Department of Education's [Assessment Review Tool](#)—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.

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.	<p>Performance outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<p>Performance outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<p>Performance outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are clearly defined in the teachers' own language. Are highly coherent across the unit and ambitious but manageable in scope for a unit of study. Are tightly aligned to grade level expectations of 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.	<p>Performance outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address ideas or skills with unclear or questionable importance within the discipline(s). Require application of minimal higher-order thinking / 21st-century skills. 	<p>Performance outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<p>Performance outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address key ideas and skills that are central to the discipline and have broad transferability within and/or across the discipline(s). Explicitly require application of a wide range of higher-order thinking / 21st-century skills.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.

¹ Evidence for this indicator may be found in Stage 1 of the Unit Template, particularly in the Acquisition section.

² 21st-century skills may include critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, effective communication, meaningful use of technology, collaboration, global awareness, metacognition, etc.

2. Assessments and Evaluative Criteria

A quality unit has assessments that ...	Work in Progress	Ready For Use	Exemplary
Provide evidence of learning.	<p>Assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide some indirect evidence of what students <i>know and understand</i>. Provide some indirect evidence of what students <i>can do</i>. Do not require application of skills and knowledge to a novel context. 	<p>Assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elicit direct, measurable evidence of what students <i>know and understand</i>. Elicit direct, measurable evidence of what students <i>can do</i>. Include at least one performance-based task and require application of skills and knowledge to a novel context. 	<p>Assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are frequent and use varied strategies to elicit direct, measurable evidence of what students <i>know and understand</i>. Are frequent and use varied strategies to elicit direct, measurable evidence of what students <i>can do</i>. Are primarily performance-based and require application of skills and knowledge to a novel context.
Are aligned to performance outcomes, content, and skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments do not adequately measure the unit's targeted performance outcomes.³ Assessment item types are frequently mismatched to the type of knowledge or skill being measured. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessments measure all of the unit's key targeted performance outcomes. Assessment item types are mostly matched to the type of knowledge or skill being measured. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directions and explanations are unclear or impractical for implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directions and explanations are clear and practical for implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directions and explanations are clear and practical for implementation in diverse classroom settings.
Have clear, aligned evaluative criteria (rubrics).	<p>Evaluative criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Represent unrealistic or inappropriate expectations for the grade level. Do not describe expectations for student work. Use inconsistent language across levels. 	<p>Evaluative criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<p>Evaluative criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.

³ If performance outcomes are not clearly defined, this indicator should not be scored.

⁴ E.g., participation, length, etc.

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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Context for completing the tasks is not provided. The unit engages students in activities/products with little connection to the discipline. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tasks provide a real-world context⁵ 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.	<p>Essential questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<p>Essential questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a focus for the unit. Put the learner in an inquiry mindset. Are relevant to the discipline. 	<p>Essential questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prompts allow for diverse ways of responding, but resources (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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unit provides no opportunities to receive any feedback. Unit provides no opportunities for students to revise and resubmit work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unit provides opportunities for students to receive teacher feedback. Unit provides opportunities for students to revise and resubmit work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.

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.

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.	<p>Learning experiences and instruction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<p>Learning experiences and instruction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<p>Learning experiences and instruction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide <i>all</i> students with multiple opportunities to develop and demonstrate the unit's targeted skills, understandings, and knowledge. Include appropriate, targeted scaffolding so that <i>all</i> 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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources do not vary in format, complexity, or challenge. Most resources are inaccessible or too easy for most students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources are grade appropriate and vary in format,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.	<p>Learning experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<p>Learning experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<p>Learning experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 texts⁷ to produce clear and coherent writing that informs, explains, or makes an argument.

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.

⁷ Texts may include illustrations, charts, diagrams, audio/video, and other media.