

Assessing “Intellectual Quality” of Student Work (Grades 5–12)

Context

In the booklet from which this rubric comes, the authors’ premise is that innovative teaching techniques (e.g., cooperative learning, group discussions, hands-on experiments, and videos) do not guarantee a change in the “intellectual quality” of what students are asked to do. For example, “a portfolio that shows a variety of student work over a semester might replace the final exam taken in one sitting, but the portfolio itself could be filled with tasks” devoted to remembering and listing isolated bits of information. Thus, the merit of any teaching technique should be judged by its ability to improve the “intellectual quality” of student performance.

Therefore, the authors attempt to define “intellectual quality,” and then use this definition to develop three sets of rubrics to judge the intellectual quality of (1) the school work students are asked to do, (2) the intellectual quality of assessment tasks given to students, and (3) the intellectual quality of student work that results from the tasks. The rubrics appear to be appropriate for about grades 5–12.

There are three general standards for intellectual quality that are represented to various degrees in all the rubrics:

- a. Construction of Knowledge—The mere reproduction of knowledge is not enough. Students need to know how to use that knowledge to make their own interpretations, evaluations, analyses, and syntheses. The authors don’t expect students to perform like skilled adults, but they need to develop in that direction.
- b. Disciplined Inquiry—This involves use of prior knowledge to strive for in-depth understanding rather than superficial awareness, and expressing one’s own conclusions through elaborated communication. Again, the authors do not suggest that young students can be expected to make seminal contributions to the academic disciplines, but that they are capable of engaging in these forms of cognitive work when that work is adapted to students’ levels of development.
- c. Value Beyond School—Authentic achievements have meaning or value apart from documenting the competence of the learner. Adults use their information and skills to accomplish real tasks. We should help students to do this, too.

These three standards are applied in different ways to the three sets of rubrics in the booklet. Below, we present how the authors use these three standards to develop a rubric for the “intellectual quality” of student work in social studies. The Overview below is paraphrased. The remainder of what follows is verbatim from the original document.

Overview and General Rules

Since initial publication of these rubrics in 1995 additional research in mathematics and writing led to revision of the rubrics for scoring student work. See F. M. Newmann, A. S. Byrk, and J. Nagaoka, *Authentic Intellectual Work and Standardized Tests: Conflict or Coexistence*, Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2001; and F. M. Newmann, G. Lopez, and A. S. Byrk, *The Quality of Intellectual Work in Chicago Schools: A Baseline Report*, Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research, 1998 (<http://www.consortium-chicago.org>).

Two of the three general standards are used to assess the intellectual quality of student work in social studies: Construction of Knowledge (analysis) and Disciplined Inquiry (disciplinary concepts and elaborated written communication).

- A. Scores should be based only on evidence in the student’s performance relevant to the criteria. Matters such as whether the student followed directions, neatness, correct spelling, etc. should not be considered unless they are relevant to the criteria.
- B. Scores may be limited by tasks which fail to demand analysis, disciplinary conceptual understanding, or elaborated written communication, but the scores must be based only upon the work shown.
- C. Scores should take into account what students can reasonably be expected to do at the grade level. However, scores should still be assigned only according to “absolute” criteria in the standards, not relative to other papers that have been previously scored.
- D. When it is difficult to decide between two scores (e.g., a 2 or a 3), give the higher score only when a persuasive case can be made that the paper meets minimal criteria for the higher score. If the specific wording of the criteria are not helpful in making this judgment, base the score on the general intent or spirit of the standard described in the introductory paragraphs of the standard.

Social Studies

Social Studies Standard 1: Analysis

Student performance demonstrates higher order thinking with social studies content by organizing, synthesizing, interpreting, evaluating, and hypothesizing to produce comparisons/contrasts, arguments, application of information to new contexts, and consideration of different ideas or points of view.

This standard is intended to measure the extent to which students demonstrate cognitive activity that goes beyond mechanically recording, reporting, or otherwise reproducing information. Analysis may include proposing generalizations and supporting them with evidence; articulating and testing different theories or points of view; synthesizing and categorizing by applying abstractions to more specific information (this could include comparing similarities and differences); considering implications and application of information in new contexts; raising broad questions that help to interpret more specific information; or interpreting the meaning of personal roles, ideas, or events. The essential question is whether students demonstrate construction of knowledge through thinking and the organization of information, versus reproduction of knowledge by restating what has been previously given to them.

The rhetorical form of students’ statements might qualify as analysis (e.g., “The main reason for the American Revolution was taxation without representation”), but to score high on analysis, the student’s work must appear to be reasonably original, not merely a restatement of some analysis that was given previously in a text or discussion. In assigning a 3 or 4, the rater should be reasonably confident that no significant portion of the response has been virtually copied from some other source (i.e., text or oral statements of others).

4 = Substantial evidence of analysis. Most of the student’s work includes analysis. At least three statements indicate that the student has successfully generalized, interpreted, tested, or synthesized specific information.

- 3 = Moderate evidence of analysis. A central portion of the student’s work includes analysis. At least two statements indicate that the student has successfully generalized, interpreted, tested, or synthesized specific information.
- 2 = Some evidence of analysis. A small, but not central, portion of the student’s work includes analysis. At least one statement shows that the student has successfully generalized, interpreted, tested, or synthesized specific information.
- 1 = No evidence of analysis. Almost all statements consist of recording, or reporting specific information, without evidence of the student’s organizing it or reflecting upon it; OR virtually all analysis offered is unsuccessful or in error.

In scoring analysis, the proportion of work that illustrates analysis is more important than the actual number of statements indicating analysis.

Social Studies Standard 2: Disciplinary Concepts

Student performance demonstrates an understanding of ideas, concepts, theories, and principles from the social disciplines and civic life by using them to interpret and explain specific, concrete information or events.

This standard is intended to assess the extent to which students use important ideas of the social disciplines to make concrete information and events more meaningful. Substantive concepts (e.g., depression, social class, culture) are often grounded in disciplinary knowledge from history and the social sciences, but many important ideas in social studies (e.g., justice, freedom, citizenship) may have no exclusive origins or associations within a single discipline. The main issue is the extent to which the student has used substantive social ideas to organize, explain, interpret, summarize, and extend the meaning and significance of otherwise discrete pieces of information.

Social studies concepts may be used even though they may not be stated explicitly, and this may vary with student grade level. For example, an elementary student’s discussion of conditions or oppressed groups might indicate use and understanding of the concept of equality, without stating the specific word.

If the topic of the task is itself a substantive idea (e.g., revolution), students should get full credit for successful use of it. Give credit only for ideas that are used appropriately in the context of the assignment. No credit should be given for serious errors in application or interpretation. The phrase “social studies concepts” means a minimum of one social studies concept.

- 4 = The student has used social studies concepts to organize, explain, interpret, summarize, and extend the meaning and significance of otherwise discrete pieces of information. The use of the ideas illustrates exemplary understanding.
- 3 = The student has included social studies concepts to organize, explain, interpret, summarize, and extend the meaning and significance of otherwise discrete pieces of information. The use of the ideas is somewhat limited and/or shows some flaws in understanding.
- 2 = Social studies concepts are included, but their use is significantly limited and/or shows significant flaws in understanding.
- 1 = The work includes virtually no social studies concepts, or the use of any that are included shows almost no understanding.

The score for social studies Disciplinary Concepts should be based on the quality of use of social studies concepts, not on the proportion of student work that reflects social studies concepts.

Social Studies Standard 3: Elaborated Written Communication

Student performance demonstrates an elaborated account that is clear, coherent, and provides richness in details, qualifications, and argument. The standard could be met by elaborated consideration of alternative points of view.

To use the criteria below, the scorer should identify specific points in the student work that are elaborated, and should make a judgment about the coherence of the overall framework in which various points are communicated.

- 4 = Exceptional: The writer provides substantial and accurate elaboration for two or more important statements. The details, qualifications, and nuances are expressed within an overall coherent framework intended for the reader, and relevant to the topic. The response is so rich as to be worthy of display as an outstanding example of writing in social studies.
- 3 = Elaborated: The writer provides some elaboration for two or three important statements OR provides substantial elaboration for one important statement. In either case, the details, qualifications, and nuances are expressed within a coherent overall framework intended for the reader, relevant to the topic, and without major inaccuracies.
- 2 = Minimal: The writer provides reasonably accurate elaboration for at least one important statement.
- 1 = Unsatisfactory: The writer provides virtually no information or provides only disjointed details. OR, the writer provides discrete claims, broad generalizations, slogans, or conclusions, but none are elaborated.

When a task includes several parts, the score for elaboration should be based on the part(s) answered in prose.

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