

Rubric Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (RAILS) Questions & Answers

What’s a rubric? A rubric is a scoring scheme, usually formatted on a grid or table, that includes two major components: 1) the criteria (indicators or hallmarks) of student learning, typically located down the left hand column, and 2) performance levels that describe what student learning “looks like” at a series of developmental levels, usually moving across the top of the rubric. Rubrics are used to assess student learning in a variety of disciplines. They are a basic tool of educators at K-12 levels and are gaining increasing prominence in higher education. One of the most important attributes of rubrics is that they allow a variety of student work samples to be assessed uniformly, over time or across programs, and by multiple raters. There are two types of rubrics: holistic (broad and general in scope and useful for communicating concepts in general) and analytic (specific in nature and suitable for scoring student work).

What’s the AAC&U VALUE information literacy rubric? AAC&U’s VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) Project “seeks to contribute to the national dialogue on assessment of college student learning. It builds on a philosophy of learning assessment that privileges multiple expert judgments of the quality of student work” (<http://www.aacu.org/value/>). As a first major effort, AAC&U gathered experts from higher education to develop rubrics for all 15 of AAC&U’s Essential Learning Outcomes. These rubrics are holistic; that is, they attempt to describe complex concepts briefly, and in a general way. They are great tools for initiating conversations about assessment and communicating the general hallmarks of student learning for each concept. They are also powerful tools for aligning the teaching and learning of these concepts across multiple institutions.

The VALUE rubric for information literacy includes 5 criteria and 4 performance levels (see below). The criteria are: Determine the extent of information needed, Access the needed information, Evaluate information and its sources critically, Use information efficiently to accomplish a specific purpose, and Access and use information ethically and legally. These criteria are aligned with the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*.

	Capstone 4	Milestones		Benchmark 1
		3	2	
Determine the extent of information needed	Effectively defines the scope of the research question or thesis. Effectively determines key concepts. Types of information (sources) selected directly relate to concepts or answer research question.	Defines the scope of the research question or thesis completely. Can determine key concepts. Types of information (sources) selected relate to concepts or answer research question.	Defines the scope of the research question or thesis incompletely (parts are missing, remains too broad or too narrow, etc.). Can determine key concepts. Types of information (sources) selected partially relate to concepts or answer research question.	Has difficulty defining the scope of the research question or thesis. Has difficulty determining key concepts. Types of information (sources) selected do not relate to concepts or answer research question.
Access the needed information	Accesses information using effective, well-designed search strategies and most appropriate information sources.	Accesses information using variety of search strategies and some relevant information sources. Demonstrates ability to refine search.	Accesses information using simple search strategies, retrieves information from limited and similar sources.	Accesses information randomly, retrieves information that lacks relevance and quality.
Evaluate information and its sources critically	Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts when presenting a position.	Identifies own and others' assumptions and several relevant contexts when presenting a position.	Questions some assumptions. Identifies several relevant contexts when presenting a position. May be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (or vice versa).	Shows an emerging awareness of present assumptions (sometimes labels assertions as assumptions). Begins to identify some contexts when presenting a position.
Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose	Communicates, organizes and synthesizes information from sources to fully achieve a specific purpose, with clarity and depth	Communicates, organizes and synthesizes information from sources. Intended purpose is achieved.	Communicates and organizes information from sources. The information is not yet synthesized, so the intended purpose is not fully achieved.	Communicates information from sources. The information is fragmented and/or used inappropriately (misquoted, taken out of context, or incorrectly paraphrased, etc.), so the intended purpose is not achieved.
Access and use information ethically and legally	Students use correctly all of the following information use strategies (use of citations and references; choice of paraphrasing, summary, or quoting; using information in ways that are true to original context, distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution) and demonstrate a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential and/or proprietary information.	Students use correctly three of the following information use strategies (use of citations and references; choice of paraphrasing, summary, or quoting; using information in ways that are true to original context, distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution) and demonstrates a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential and/or proprietary information.	Students use correctly two of the following information use strategies (use of citations and references; choice of paraphrasing, summary, or quoting; using information in ways that are true to original context, distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution) and demonstrates a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential and/or proprietary information.	Students use correctly one of the following information use strategies (use of citations and references; choice of paraphrasing, summary, or quoting; using information in ways that are true to original context, distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution) and demonstrates a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential and/or proprietary information.

How will the holistic VALUE rubric be operationalized? While the holistic VALUE information literacy rubric is a significant and critical start to an authentic, performance-based, and benchmarkable assessment of information literacy, it is far too general and broad in its scope to be used by librarians who examine student work samples or “artifacts of student learning” to determine exactly what students know and are able to do. Librarians require analytic rubrics that spell out specific learning behaviors students demonstrate at different developmental levels and can be directly applied to evaluating student learning. The RAILS project will provide analytic rubrics for each criterion included in the holistic VALUE rubric, thereby transforming an overarching conception of information literacy learning into specific tools that librarians and faculty can use to score work. Because the analytic rubrics are directly tied to the VALUE rubric (and therefore the ACRL standards), aggregated student information can be “rolled up” to report or compare data at an institutional level.

Determine the extent of information...

	Performance Level	Performance Level	Performance Level	Performance Level
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description

Access the needed information...

	Performance Level	Performance Level	Performance Level	Performance Level
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description

Evaluate information...

	Performance Level	Performance Level	Performance Level	Performance Level
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description

Use information...

	Performance Level	Performance Level	Performance Level	Performance Level
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description

Access & use information ethically...

	Performance Level	Performance Level	Performance Level	Performance Level
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description
Criteria	Description	Description	Description	Description

	Capstone	3	2	Benchmark
Determine the extent of information needed	Effectively defines the scope of the research question or thesis. Effectively determines key concepts. Types of information (sources) selected directly relate to concepts or answer research question.	Defines the scope of the research question or thesis completely. Can determine key concepts. Types of information (sources) selected relate to concepts or answer research question.	Defines the scope of the research question or thesis incompletely (jargon are missing, remains too broad or too narrow, etc.). Can determine key concepts. Types of information (sources) selected partially relate to concepts or answer research question.	Has difficulty defining the scope of the question or thesis. Has difficulty (determine) concepts. Types of information (sources) selected do not relate to concepts or answer research question.
Access the needed information	Accesses information using effective, well-designed search strategies and most appropriate information sources.	Accesses information using variety of search strategies and some relevant information sources. Demonstrates ability to refine search.	Accesses information using simple search strategies, retrieves information from limited and similar sources.	Accesses information randomly, retrieves information that lacks relevance and quality.
Evaluate information and its sources critically	Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes one and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of content when presenting a position.	Identifies one and others' assumptions and assesses relevant content when presenting a position.	Questions some assumptions. Identifies several relevant content when presenting a position. May be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (in view notes).	Shows an emerging awareness of content assumptions (demonstrates basic awareness of assumptions). Begins to identify some content when presenting a position.
Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose	Communicates, organizes and synthesizes information from sources to fully achieve a specific purpose, with clarity and depth.	Communicates, organizes and synthesizes information from sources. Intended purpose is achieved.	Communicates and organizes information from sources. The information is not yet synthesized, as the intended purpose is not fully achieved.	Communicates information from sources. The information is fragmented and/or used inappropriately (misquoted, taken out of context or incorrectly paraphrased, etc.), to purpose is not achieved.
Access and use information ethically and legally	Students use correctly all of the following information use strategies (use of citations and references, choice of paraphrasing, summarizing, or quoting, using information in ways that are true to original context, distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution) and demonstrates a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential and/or proprietary information.	Students use correctly three of the following information use strategies (use of citations and references, choice of paraphrasing, summarizing, or quoting, using information in ways that are true to original context, distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution) and demonstrates a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential and/or proprietary information.	Students use correctly two of the following information use strategies (use of citations and references, choice of paraphrasing, summarizing, or quoting, using information in ways that are true to original context, distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution) and demonstrates a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential and/or proprietary information.	Students use correctly one of the following information use strategies (use of citations and references, choice of paraphrasing, summarizing, or quoting, using information in ways that are true to original context, distinguishing between common knowledge and ideas requiring attribution) and demonstrates a full understanding of the ethical and legal restrictions on the use of published, confidential and/or proprietary information.

What kinds of “artifacts of student learning” will be assessable using the RAILS rubrics? Analytic rubrics are appropriate tools for assessing a wide range of artifacts of student learning. These artifacts may emerge from assignments given in first year experiences, general education courses, courses required for a major, or senior capstone experiences. They may emerge from library instruction sessions, either single instruction sessions or credit-bearing IL courses. Academic librarians and/or disciplinary faculty may even use rubrics to assess artifacts of student learning from co-curricular experiences outside the classroom such as new student orientation, service learning projects, and study abroad. Example artifacts may include, but are not limited to:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research journals • reflective writing • “think alouds” • self or peer evaluations • research drafts or papers • open-ended question responses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • group projects • performances • portfolios • library assignments • worksheets • concept maps |
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • works cited pages • annotated bibliographies • speeches • multimedia presentations • posters • exhibits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • citation maps • tutorial responses • role plays • lab reports • focus group transcripts • interview transcripts
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What librarian and faculty training materials will be developed? What materials will be available to academic librarians that do not participate in RAILS directly? Rubric training will follow a multi-step process developed by Maki (2004) and extended by Oakleaf (2006; 2009a). During the RAILS project, the PI will produce a variety of training materials based on educational best practices. These materials will help librarians prepare artifacts of student learning, develop and norm rubrics, analyze data, report rubric assessment results, and use results to improve student learning. Training materials will include draft and finalized analytical rubrics, lesson plans, worksheets, presentation slides, checklists, tutorials, and videos; all materials will be revised continuously throughout the grant project and posted on the RAILS website for comment and use by librarians not directly involved in the project.

Why is this project essential for the profession? Academic librarians are increasingly asked to demonstrate their value. A primary contribution of academic libraries to institutions of higher education is student learning, but, thus far, librarians have struggled to articulate exactly how they contribute to student learning. They've explored test-based measures with some success, but they need multiple methods of assessment, including tools that are more authentic and performance-based. The VALUE information literacy rubric (based on the long-standing ACRL *Standards*) represents an important step towards this goal. Still, the VALUE rubric is far too general to be of practical use in assessing examples of student work that show students are learning. The RAILS project provides the analytical approach needed to create a bridge between the process of examining student work by individual librarians/faculty and demonstrating evidence of overall academic library impact.