

# Facilitating a rubric norming session for TAs

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

A description of a norming session, and a recommended facilitation process for holding a norming session that trains multiple TAs of the same course to grade consistently using a rubric.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Review the facilitation process for a rubric norming session with TAs of the same course. Work through the recommended steps to prepare TAs to consistently grade students in the course. For assistance, [contact CET](http://cet.usc.edu/).

### Norming session

In a norming session, all participants evaluate the same item independently, and then come together to discuss their individual evaluations until reaching consensus on a final evaluation. It is quite common, and a best practice, to use norming sessions when there are multiple TAs grading the same assignment. The goal of norming is to ensure that grading of student assignments is consistent across graders and course sections.

### Facilitation process

The following facilitation process can be used to conduct a TA norming session for grading a particular assignment with a rubric.

#### **Before the norming session**

* Instructor schedules the meeting, reserves the room (physical or online), and arranges for food and/or beverages if they are being provided.
* Instructor notifies TA participants of the meeting and manages RSVPs if they are being used. All TA graders of a course with multiple sections should attend.
* Instructor finalizes the rubric to be used in grading the assignment.
* Instructor provides TA participants with the grading rubric and instructions to independently grade the provided student work with the rubric, taking notes on their decisions. It is important that all participants review the exact same student work.
  + Ideally, more than one sample of student work should be examined, such as samples representative of A, B, and C level performance.
  + Samples can be anonymized work from students in previous semesters. If authentic student work is unavailable, the instructor may need to create samples to use in norming.
* Instructor reminds TA participants of the due date for completing independent evaluations, the importance of bringing their completed evaluation notes to the meeting, and the date/time/location of the meeting.
* Instructor prepares any handouts that will be needed during the norming session, such as copies of the rubric.
* Instructor prepares visual support materials, such as a PowerPoint slide deck if needed.

#### **During the norming session (also see the list of tips at the end of this resource)**

* TAs bring their notes from their independent evaluations of the student work samples.
* Instructor, or other assigned person, takes notes during of decisions made regarding interpretation and application of the rubric.
* If there is a large number of TA participants, Instructor asks TAs to assemble into small groups (about 4 per group).
* Instructor instructs TAs to compare and discuss their independent evaluations in small-group discussion.
* Instructor times and monitors the small-group discussion.
* Instructor ends small-group discussion and leads an all-group debrief. Instructor calls on a member of each small group to comment on how their group scored the student work in a particular row of the rubric. This all-group discussion continues until consensus is reached on how each rubric row should be applied to the student work.
  + Instructor may need to make executive decisions regarding interpretation or application of the rubric, overriding the TA opinions.
  + When a decision has been made, instructor should state clearly the decision being recorded.
  + It is possible that more than one meeting may be needed to reach consensus on the entire rubric.
* By the end of the meeting(s), the TAs should have a consistent understanding of how to apply the rubric.

#### **After the norming session**

* To close the session, Instructor reviews decisions established regarding use of the rubric.
* Instructor reminds all TAs to use the established decisions when using the rubric.
* Instructor consolidates session notes and emails established decisions to all TAs.
* It may be helpful for improving future norming sessions to distribute an anonymous evaluation survey to TA participants of the norming session.
* TAs grade actual student work using the rubric as agreed during the norming session.

### Tips for leading norming sessions

#### **Be a role model**

* Identify the consensus “rules.”
  + Consistency in grading processes is critical.
  + All voices must be heard. Collegiality is essential.
  + It’s okay to “disagree and commit.” Sometimes, individuals will need to go along with the majority or with executive decisions made by the instructor.
* Demonstrate how to explain the reasoning behind a decision. State an option, then give reasons for the decision based on principles and/or data.

#### **Discuss and reconcile options**

* Avoid addressing disagreement based on personality, past history with one another, or other factors that have nothing to do with grading. These cannot be resolved in the norming session.
* First establish points of agreement.
* Then establish points of disagreement.
* Establish strengths and weaknesses of options. Ask opponents of options to come up with the strengths. Then, ask supporters to come up with the weaknesses.
* Explore alternative options or compromises.