WHAT SCORING RUBRICS TEACH STUDENTS (AND TEACHERS) ABOUT STYLE

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This collection argues that style should be considered central to the enterprise of composition, from how we theorize the work we do as a discipline to how we teach students to write. While the other chapters in this section provide ways to enact such a style-centered pedagogy, this chapter investigates a place where style already exists in many composition classrooms: the scoring rubric. I submit that grading style *is* teaching style, and that part of making style central to our pedagogies is recognizing the pedagogical function of our evaluation of student writing, and how it shapes students' understanding of what effective writing is. This means not just actively and consciously bringing style into our classrooms, but also interrogating the places where it silently lurks.

By examining how style is graded, we can better understand our processes as evaluators of writing, specifically how the ways we read and comment are captured in a final score and how those scores reflect greater ideologies about what constitutes good writing. Studying the process of grading further helps us understand how students internalize their performance as writers. For students, a final grade is a synecdochal representation of their performance that defines a semester-long experience well after the course has ended. Despite its influence, however, grading has been underemphasized in assessment scholarship in favor of the processes of reading and responding to student writing. Of the scholarship that addresses grading, "almost none confronts the task of actually deciding how to assign a grade" (Speck & Jones, 1998, p. 17). Process-oriented approaches to assessment stigmatize grading as merely a chore—not a part of the writing process, and certainly not a legitimate area of scholarly inquiry. Pat Belanoff famously calls grading "the dirty thing we have to do in the dark of our own offices," a practice that takes place behind closed doors, in isolation (1991, p. 61). Even more significant than our field's general devaluing of grading, though, is our lack of agreement about which features of student writing we value. This can be seen in a long history of low inter-grader reliability and single-grader consistency (White, 1994); even as a field of writing teachers, we cannot agree on what constitutes "good" writing. While this inconsistency can be explained in part by our inclination as rhetoricians to favor appropriateness

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(to genre conventions, audience, purpose, etc.) over fixed "rules" about what makes writing good, the fact still stands that the process of grading writing remains grossly under theorized.

In an effort to understand just how we assign style a grade and how we convey our expectations for effective style to students, I have analyzed scoring rubrics that I collected from composition teachers of various levels of experience and within a variety of institutional contexts nationwide. Because scoring guides are an attempt at standardizing grades and thus increasing inter-grader reliability and consistency from student to student and paper to paper, they serve particularly well as a site for analysis of grading practices. Further, all the rubrics that I have collected have been used in a composition classroom, making them genuine artifacts that were created by teachers, for students, and for specific writing assignments. As such, they provide insight into actual beliefs about style and how those beliefs are communicated to students.

What happens when the values that guide our judgments about style are placed into a format that compartmentalizes them into discrete criteria and assigns grades to them? What is gained or lost when we attempt to standardize and quantify good writing? Do our values remain intact? In order to address these questions, in this chapter I provide a history that establishes an important relationship between scoring guides and the concept of style in student writing. I then offer several definitions of style that emerged from my analysis of style's place within the rubrics and argue that based on those definitions, there are four key evaluative terms used to describe effective style: appropriateness, readability, consistency, and correctness. Finally, I argue that even when we tend to see style as global, we are restricted in how pedagogical our assessment can be because of the very structure of the rubric and the type of evaluation that the rubric encourages.

HISTORY OF STYLE AND RUBRICS

Rubrics and writing style have been intimately related throughout the history of writing assessment, making rubrics a useful place to begin a study of how style is graded. According to Bob Broad, "Modern writing assessment was born in 1961," when *Factors in Judgments of Writing Ability* was published by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) (2003, p. 5). The authors of the study, Paul B. Diederich, John W. French, and Sydell T. Carlton, sought to "reveal the differences of opinion that prevail in uncontrolled grading—both in the academic community and in the educated public" (1961, "Abstract"). To do so they recruited fifty-three readers in six fields—English, social science, natural

science, law, professional writing and editing, and business—to grade three hundred essays written by college freshmen. By choosing random readers and classifying their comments, Diederich, French, and Carlton developed fifty-five categories that were divided into seven main topics: ideas, style, organization, paragraphing, sentence structure, mechanics, and verbal facility (1961, p. 21). From these seven topics, the authors of the study decided on five factors that they felt best represented the readers' comments, acknowledging that the readers may or may not agree with these characterizations because they did not identify them as such:

> I. Ideas: relevance, concise-wordy, clarity of ideas, quantity of ideas, development, too brief or long, persuasiveness, ending, generality
>
> II. Form: spelling, clarity of expression, organization, coherence of ideas, reader agreement, analysis, maturity
>
> III. Flavor: quality of ideas, style (general), mechanics (general), originality, interest, beginning, sincerity, information and illustrations
>
> IV. Mechanics: punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, phrasing, idiom
>
> V. Wording: general, word choices, logic, clichés, jargon-slang (1961, p. 24)

This taxonomy initiated the birth of the "rubric" as we currently know it. Further, it established an important relationship between rubrics—as representations of value-systems—and style.

When Diederich, French, and Carlton condensed their seven topics into five "factors," style was repositioned from its own category to a component of the category "flavor." The flavor category is characterized by "a predominant emphasis on style and interest; a weaker emphasis on sincerity; and an emphasis … on the quality of ideas—ideas that will sell an article rather than ideas that will pass an examination" (1961, p. 37). That is, this category represents writing that is enjoyable to read. Furthermore, the comments on style that make up the factor of flavor have to do primarily with the "personality expressed in writing (forceful, vigorous, outspoken, personal, inflated, pretentious, etc.) rather than with the word choices and felicities of expression associated with [the "wording"

category]" (1961, p. 36). Not only did *Factors in Judgments of Writing Ability* establish a relationship between rubrics and style, then; it also instilled a notion of style as "personality" within the context of the rubric.

This study also illustrates the difficulty of assessing style in student writing: "It is likely that Factors IV and V can be measured by objective tests well enough for a practical judgment, but we see no way at present to measure Factors I, II, and III reliably, either by objective tests or by essays" (1961, p. 42). This could be the result of the conception that the "idea," "form," and "flavor" categories represent creative aspects of writing. The authors note that while the word "creative" itself did not appear enough in the readers' evaluation of the essays to be acknowledged in their study results, the description bearing the greatest similarity to creativity, "originality," was mentioned most frequently in Factor III, "Flavor." Cherryl Smith and Angus Dunstan reflect this romanticized notion of writing as a primarily creative endeavor when they argue that "[t]he writing student is not asked simply to learn about writing but to create it" (1998, p. 164). They elaborate on the idea that writing is a creative process, an art rather than a skill, and point out the subsequent problem this creates for assessment:

> Writing courses … can be considered to be much like other courses in the creative or performing arts, music or drawing or dance, in which the student's entire assignment consists of producing original work rather than mastering a particular body of knowledge… . Traditional grading is not appropriate for a creative activity and the result of this mismatch is that we have adopted … evaluation tools that are ultimately in conflict with our own pedagogical goals. (1998, p. 164)

This passage is useful when combined with Diederich, French, and Carlton's problematizing of style assessment because it illustrates the conflict, or "mismatch," that can exist between our beliefs about what constitutes effective style and how we assess it. If we value style as a productive art, rather than mastery of "a particular body of knowledge," then the means by which we assess it should allow for the encouragement of that productivity; it should be pedagogical as well as evaluative.

Furthering the notion that style is creative is another finding by Diederich, French, and Carlton that "the factors do not run along occupational lines … with one exception: the three readers with highest loadings on the factor called "Flavor" … were all writers or editors" (1961, p. 42-43). That is, of the six fields that comprised the essay readers (one of which was college English teachers),

the group "writers and editors" most noticed stylistic features of student writing. Susan Miller's oft-cited 1982 study, "How Writers Evaluate Their Own Writing," reports similar findings. Her study analyzed the ways in which three groups—professional writers, undergraduate and graduate students, and teachers and professionals in writing programs and publishing—self-evaluated their writing. Miller found that "[w]ith the exception of the English professors and graduate students attending the Big Ten writing directors' conference, none of the writers interviewed, student or professional, noted specific qualities of the sentences, form, dialogue, plot, or style of a piece" (1982, p. 180). The findings of these two studies—that those involved in commercial industry were more focused on style (i.e., effect), while those in academia were focused on ideas and precision—highlight the relativity of values related to writing and writing assessment and the contextual nature of value systems.

The historical connection between style and rubrics established by *Factors in Judgments of Writing Ability* marked style as an aspect worth considering in our evaluations of student writing, albeit one that is complex and inextricably linked to value systems guiding conceptions of good writing. Because rubrics are often created programmatically and then used in individual classrooms with little modification, they may encourage teachers who otherwise would not acknowledge or teach style to consider it in their evaluations of student writing. While this may increase style's presence in the classroom, it can also perpetuate negative and/or outdated notions of style:

> If … checklists are included in required texts for composition classes and alluded to in teachers' injunctions and paper responses yet are not being taught in the composition class, they become a means of mystifying the act of writing … [y]et if the items on style checklists are taught in composition classes, those classes become current-traditionalist purveyors of context-free standards for writing. (Howard, et al., 2002, p. 216)

Howard's statement illustrates the double-bind that exists if instruction and evaluation do not work together and if/when they are guided by problematic notions of style. However, while our commentary on student writing is shaped by and limited to our experiences with writing, reading, and teaching, rubrics allow us to move beyond personal experience and impressions by requiring specificity. We can see rubrics, in this sense, as not merely tools for assessment, but also for teacher education. Rubrics have the ability to guide teachers to

particular qualities of writing that otherwise may have gone unnoticed, and to teach students at least one definition of good writing.

TREATMENT OF STYLE IN SCORING GUIDES

To better understand how style is defined, approached, taught, and evaluated in various classroom situations, I collected assignment sheets and scoring rubrics from composition teachers nationwide and conducted interviews to further clarify and elaborate on the teaching documents and the rationale for their use. On May 5, 2009, I made an initial request for these teaching documents via the Writing Program Administration listserv (WPA-L), which had 2,648 subscribers at the time of my query. I asked specifically for one assignment sheet for an essay of any genre (i.e., research, narrative, analysis, argument, reflection, etc.) and any level (i.e., first-year composition, advanced composition, etc.) and the corresponding grading sheet for that essay. One week later, I contacted individual composition instructors at institutions of various types, regions, and program sizes and asked them to post the same request to their Writing Program listservs.[1] On May 30, I followed up on the WPA-L to ask once more for participants.

As a result of these multiple requests, I received 120 total rubrics with corresponding assignment sheets. In a few instances, the grading criteria were embedded into the assignment sheets and therefore I received only one document from participants rather than two. Some participants sent materials for more than one assignment, as well. One hundred twenty represents the total number of rubrics I received, taking these other factors into account. After analyzing all 120 rubrics, I narrowed the documents down to the twenty-three that included the word "style." Those 23 are the subject of my analysis here.

Of these rubrics, 21 provided scores for individual subskills and are therefore considered analytic rubrics. The other two rubrics are holistic, grouping criteria together under the larger headings of letter grades ranging from A to F. While analytic rubrics are designed to provide information that holistic scoring cannot, they are often problematic in practice despite their prevalence here. As Edward White points out,

> [t]here is as yet no agreement (except among the uninformed) about what, if any, separable subskills exist in writing … [and] [r]eliable analytic writing scores are extremely difficult to obtain, because of the lack of professional consensus about the definition and importance of subskills. (1994, p. 233)

Most often, the scores in these analytic rubrics were in the form of descriptive words or phrases, such as *excellent*, *good*, *needs improvement*, and *unacceptable*. Letter and number scores were the next most frequent, and two of the rubrics used a combination of descriptions and numbers. The number of categories in the rubrics ranged from two to 11, within which there were subcategories in several of the rubrics. Despite this range in number of categories, however, the style category was located in the bottom half of the rubric in all but one instance.[2]

Absence

Of the 120 scoring guides collected, only 23 included the word *style*.[3] This means that in over eighty percent of the rubrics, features of writing that could be considered stylistic were either not assessed or were identified by synonymous terms. A reason for this absence could be the general resistance to style in our discipline in recent history. If we are not talking about style as a discipline and therefore not explicitly teaching it, style will not likely turn up in departmentally created rubrics to be used in composition classrooms or in those created by teachers to reinforce their assignments' expectations.

Table 1: Abbreviated Rubric- Style and Expression

	Competency	**Fails to Meet Competency** **F to D**	**Meets Competency** **C**	**Exceeds Competency** **B to A**
Style and Expression	Uses stylistic options such as tone, word choice, sentence patterns			
	Writing is clear and precise			
	Sentence meaning is clear			
	Sentence structures generally are correct			
	Reflects current academic practices, including non-sexist language			

However, that the word *style* is absent in the majority of the rubrics that I collected is not necessarily because it is not valued or assessed, but that it is not being *called* style. This may be less a result of a devaluing of style, and more an effect of the structure of rubrics themselves. That style is often not called style and is, instead, replaced with terms that better suit our discipline's current values is an observation that has been made by style scholar Paul Butler, and this idea is reinforced by the very nature of the rubric as an assessment method. Because it is the work of rubrics to compartmentalize features of prose into discrete categories and to assign them individual scores, concepts as broad as style may be broken down into subcriteria for the sake of the rubric. When the word *style* is not present, then, it may be because the elements that constitute effective style, according to the creator of the rubric, are replacing it. Because I am concerned here with how we define the word *style* and communicate our expectations for stylistic effectiveness to students through the use of that word, however, the remainder of this chapter will explore only those instances in which the term itself is used.

Presence

When the word *style* was present, there was little agreement on what it meant. From the 23 rubrics that used the word *style*, I identified seven main definitions for the term, determined by the placement of style in the list of criteria and within the descriptive standards for a given assignment. The most frequent characterizations of style in the rubrics I analyzed were style as eloquence and style as rhetoric, each occurring in eight of 23 rubrics. Style was also defined as tone, mechanics, sentence structure, documentation, and word

Table 2: Abbreviated Rubric- Style and Readability

Style	Readability Readability
A	Essentially error-free. Demonstrates control except when using sophisticated language.
B	Demonstrates emerging control, exhibiting frequent errors that make reading slightly difficult.
C	Demonstrates developing control, exhibiting error patterns and/or stigmatizing errors that make reading difficult.
D	Repeated weaknesses in mechanics, spelling and/or grammar, demonstrating a lack of control.
F	Mechanical and usage errors are so severe that ideas are hidden.

choice, in that order of frequency. These characterizations of style, when listed from the most to least frequent, also tended to move from global to local, with eloquence, rhetoric, and tone comprising the most popular characterizations of style, and mechanics, sentence structure, documentation, and word choice comprising the least. I will explore each of these characterizations of style with examples from the rubrics I collected, in order to highlight the implications of these definitions of style on our evaluations of student writing.

MAJOR THEMES

In eight of the 23 rubrics, style was equated with eloquence, which includes references to expression, grace, and readability. Perhaps obvious because of the longstanding association of grace with style in Joseph Williams' work, as noted by other authors in this collection, this theme was also the most prominent in the interviews I conducted with teachers, which indicates that the teachers both valued expression and were aware that they assess expression in their students' writing. In other words, this category and its prominence in the rubrics appears to reflect most closely teachers' actual values. One of the eight rubrics had a criterion explicitly titled "style and expression," while the others related effective

Table 3: Abbreviated Rubric- Style and Rhetorical Effectiveness

Rubric	Style
Beginning Competencies	The style is appropriate for the rhetorical context and the language choices suit the audience.
Developing Competencies	The writing is clear and language is appropriate to the rhetorical context and audience but may call attention to itself in minor ways (e.g., the purpose of this paper is … ; I feel that … ; etc.). The student is beginning to use language in a way that is appropriate for the particular discipline and/or genre in which the student is writing.
Practicing Competencies	The writing is clear and language use is precise. The student makes above average use of language in a way that is appropriate for the particular discipline and/or genre in which the student is writing
Accomplished Competencies	The writing is clear and language use is precise. The student makes proficient use of language in a way that is appropriate for the particular discipline and/or genre in which the student is writing.

style to readability and grace. The one rubric that contained the criterion "style and expression" included five subcriteria, or competencies, that are evaluated on a scale ranging from "fails to meet competency" to "exceeds competency" with corresponding letter-grade scores (Table 1). This rubric functions differently than the others analyzed here because it does not include descriptive standards for every score category; instead, scores for each of the subcriteria are indicated to students by check marks in the appropriate boxes. The grouping together of style and expression in this example treats them as one criterion that can be achieved by the same means. While this may not have been the intent of the creator of this rubric, the lack of definition between the two criteria makes the referent of the subcriteria unclear. It cannot be determined whether "non-sexist language," for instance, is a concern related to style or expression, or both. Further, the inclusion of "sentence patterns," "sentence meaning," and "sentence structures" in the subcriteria for "style and expression" suggest that effective expression and style are achieved at least partly by local-level writing competencies and are evaluated by their correctness and clarity. This conception of style differs dramatically from those of the other rubrics in this category, despite the fact that they all relate to expression in writing.

In the instances in which style was its own criterion or was included within a descriptive standard for another criterion, it was defined as grace and/or readability. In two rubrics, style is defined by way of grace, while in two others, grace is defined by way of style. When style is defined as graceful writing,

Table 4: Abbreviated Rubric- Style and Audience

Rubric	**Assignment's Audience**
Great (10-8)	The paper is written in a style and genre applicable to the assignment's audience, which are members of the scientific community.
Good (7-5) Competencies	The paper is written in a way that either the style or genre is not applicable to the assignment's audiences, which are members of the scientific community.
Fair (4-2)	The paper is written in a way that the style and genre have problems which make the paper not applicable to the assignment's audience, which are members of the scientific community.
Grim (1)	The paper is written in a genre that does not fit the purpose of the paper, nor does it meet the needs of the intended audience.
Total	

grace describes local-level writing features. For example, within a criterion titled "Prose," the descriptive standard for A-level work is that the writing "exhibit stylistic grace and flourishes (subordination, variation of sentence and paragraph lengths, interesting vocabulary)." That is, writing will be graceful when sentences and paragraph lengths are "varied" and when vocabulary is "interesting." In another example within a holistic rubric, A-level writing is described as such: "The style is energetic and precise: the sentence structure is varied and the words are carefully chosen. *How* the writer says things is as excellent as *what* the writer says." Again, varied sentence structures and word choice are the primary factors contributed to graceful, or "energetic," style. In this case, the description of words as "carefully chosen" is slightly more specific than the former description of "interesting," but both assume that there is a universal standard for graceful style.

In other instances, grace was defined by way of style. One holistic rubric includes a category titled "Grace" that includes "organization, sentences, source-use, and style" as its subcriteria. The expectations for performance for each of these qualities are not defined. But what is significant is that this particular rubric measures the degree to which several aspects of the prose ranging from global to local (organization, sentences, source-use, and style) embody grace. Grace, then, is not a quality related solely to sentences or words, but rather one that describes prose as a whole. Another rubric includes the criterion "how gracefully you present your writing (including grammar and style)." Grammar and style act as the subcriteria, or means, to creating graceful writing. That grace is defined two different ways means that how we frame the relationship

Table 5: Abbreviated Rubric- Style and Ethos

Style	Ethos
A	Sentences are clear and concise; may use advanced vocabulary; demonstrates knowledge, credibility, and trustworthiness.
B	Sentences are mostly clear and concise; diction is generally appropriate; tone is mature and appropriate to audience, subject, and purpose; demonstrates knowledge and credibility.
C	Sentences show some variety and complexity; may use words inaccurately; leaves some question about knowledge and credibility.
D	Uneven control; sentences are simplistic; diction is inaccurate; tone is inappropriate for audience, subject, and purpose; creates questions about knowledge and credibility.
F	Superficial and stereotypical language; oral rather than written language patterns, erodes confidence in knowledge and credibility.

between style and grace is meaningful. When style is graceful, it is because it is functioning at the sentence level in a way that is appealing to a reader. When style is a component of grace, however, it is but one contributing factor to an overall effect.

Categorized under the larger heading of "eloquence" is another conception of style: readability. Despite readability being an effect of writing and not a quality that can be created by a writer, in one of the examples of style as readable writing, readability is defined in terms of an author's control over his/her prose (see Table 2). What this assumes is that when a writer is in control, his/her prose will be error-free and thus easier to read. In another example, style is defined as "[h]ighly readable, engaging prose that provides evidence of the writer's ability to think critically and read/view/listen closely." In this instance, readability is not defined as control over error but rather a reflection of the writer's thinking and analytical processes.

What is significant about the category of style as eloquence is that expression, grace, and readability are all related but interact in complex ways that are based in the element of control. Expression is something a writer does, a way of describing a writer's control over his/her prose; grace is a quality a writer embodies but that serves the aesthetic desires of a reader; and readability lies solely with the reader but is expected to be somehow created by a writer. In these three conceptions, which are all related to each other by way of the rubrics, varying degrees of control are represented, as is the expectation that style is a way to relate to a reader.

Rhetoric was another characterization of style occurring eight times in the 23 rubrics. To demonstrate how I arrived at the characterization of style as rhetoric, I use segments—the heading columns and the relevant row only—of three rubrics to demonstrate the relationship between style and various rhetorical aspects of writing. In the first example, the criterion on which the student writing is evaluated is style and the descriptive standards that outline expectations for stylistic performance are rhetorically focused (see Table 3). That is, whether or not a student paper meets the "beginning competencies" or the "accomplished competencies," or any level in between, for the criterion *style*, is based on how rhetorically situated the student's style is. In this particular example, the emphasis on rhetoric can be seen in the use of the terms *audience, context,* and *genre.* What is of particular importance in this rubric is not only how each level of competency is defined but also how the expectations for stylistic performance change as competency levels increase. In the transition from beginning to developing competencies, the expectations become much more specific, moving from "appropriate" style to that which is clear and appropriate "but may call attention to itself." The word *audience* also becomes

much more specifically defined as "the particular discipline and/or genre in which the student is writing." In the transition from developing competencies to practicing competencies, clear writing becomes clear and "precise" writing, and language use develops from "call[ing] attention to itself" to "above average." The specificity of the teacher's expectations similarly shifts just as the standards from writing that calls attention to itself to that which is above average do. Specific examples are given for writing that calls attention to itself while no examples are given for the already ambiguous description of "above-average" writing.

Finally, as the rubric progresses from practicing to accomplished competencies, there is one minor change in the descriptive standards—from "above average" to "proficient" use of language. Again, the expectations are expressed in terms of value judgments, which can already be assumed by the titles given to each category, instead of referring to textual features of the student writing. Here, the most specific descriptive standards are those in the "developing competencies" category, which appears to correlate with a C or D grade. More importantly, the categories all seem to be communicating to students the same basic standards, just with varying levels of specificity. That is, the "beginning" competencies (of style that is "appropriate for the rhetorical context" and "suit[s] the audience") are essentially the same as the "accomplished" competencies, except that the accomplished competencies are more accurately defined within the rubric.

In another rubric that equates style with rhetoric, "audience" is one of the criteria on which the writing is being evaluated while style is included in the descriptive standards (see Table 4). That is, in this rubric, *style* is a term used to define what constitutes audience awareness. Even though style is not the criterion being evaluated here, it is defined though this rubric in relation to audience and genre, two recurring rhetorical concepts. Here, style and genre are defined as ways in which a writer can and should reach an audience. As in the last example, the expectations change as competency levels change (in this case, decrease, from "great" to "grim"). "Great" consideration of audience requires that the essay "is written in a style and genre applicable to the assignment's audience;" both style and genre must be considered. Attention to audience is "good" when *either* style or genre is "not applicable to the assignment's audiences." So, style and genre are no longer joint considerations, but rather they are interchangeable and given equal value, such that a "good" paper is one that uses a style applicable to audience *or* uses a genre applicable to audience. The "fair" essay is one that has style and genre problems and therefore is "not applicable" to the intended audience. Style is dropped out of the "grim" category altogether, suggesting that either "grim" writing would not embody style anyway, or that it ceases to be an important consideration at that grade level.

In another example of style as rhetoric, "ethos" is a subcategory of the criterion "style" (see Table 5). So implicit in the structure of this rubric is that ethos is one contributing factor to style and that effective style is that which is rhetorically situated, a point Rosanne Carlo explores in the first section of this collection. Because style is defined in terms of ethos here, we can look to the descriptive standards that measure the effectiveness of the writer's ethos to see how they relate to specific stylistic features of the student prose. For instance, the descriptive standards for an A-grade include "clear and concise" sentences and "advanced vocabulary," as well as the demonstration of "knowledge, credibility, and trustworthiness." We can assume, although not stated outright, that there is a causal relationship between how students use sentences and vocabulary and how knowledgeable, credible, and trustworthy they appear to be in their writing. In the B-grade and D-grade categories, tone is also a consideration and is measured according to its maturity and appropriateness for the rhetorical situation of the writing assignment.

These examples illustrate three ways in which the theme of style as rhetoric was communicated through the rubrics I analyzed. While they all measured different criteria—style, audience, and ethos, respectively—they used the term *style* in regard to rhetorical concepts including audience, context, ethos, and genre.

In all eight of the rubrics that defined style as rhetorical, including the three discussed here, stylistic effectiveness was evaluated according to appropriateness. In the first example, effective style is that which is appropriate for context, audience, and genre. Appropriateness for audience and genre are also considerations in the second example. And in the third, diction and tone were judged on their appropriateness for the assignment's particular rhetorical situation. What these rubrics reveal is that when style is tied to rhetoric, it is also evaluated according to appropriateness. To make language choices appropriate is to understand the conventions of the genre and the needs of a particular audience. As a result, what is being evaluated in these instances is students' understanding of the *effects* of their prose, more so than individual stylistic features.

In six instances, style was defined by how it is "heard." In five of the six rubrics, the word *tone* was used to describe style while in the other instance, effective style was defined more broadly as that which "pleases the eye and ear." Despite the fact that sound metaphors such as tone describe the reaction of a reader, rather than the actions of a writer, tone was described twice as a tool, something to be "used" by the writer. In one instance, good writing is that which "uses stylistic options such as tone, word choice, sentence patterns."

While tone is certainly achieved by the relationship between a subject and writer and is accomplished by word choice and sentence patterns, the listing of tone, word choice, and sentence patterns together as "stylistic options" treats them all as tools a writer can control and "use" to create a particular style. All three "stylistic options" are given equal weight, instead of word choice and sentence patterns being "stylistic options" that *contribute* to tone. Another rubric defines good writing as that which "uses a formal, academic tone, devoid of the words "you," "thing," and other informal styles." Again, tone is "used," but in this case, it is defined in terms of formality, which itself is even further defined by specific words (*you* and *thing*) that should be avoided. Using tone as a tool, then, requires avoidance of "informal styles" created by specific word choices.

If tone is a tool to be "used" by a writer, other rubrics offer insight into the ways it should be used. Two rubrics contained categories that pair style with tone and describe effective use of style and tone as consistent ("style and tone consistent" and "consistent style and tone"). In another example, writing should "maintain an articulate tone." The word *maintain*, like *consistent*, assumes a degree of control and regularity. Perhaps the most relevant premise apparent in this grouping of rubrics, then, is that when style is defined as tone, it becomes a tool a writer can use and that must be used consistently. Consistency as a measure of tone is a carry-over from the sound metaphor itself; it is the conceptualization of tone as a tool that one uses that disturbs the metaphor. Evaluating a criterion that resides solely with the evaluator on the basis of the writer's control over it, however, presents conflicting expectations to students and a challenging assessment task to teachers. It is not the conceptualization of style as tone that is problematic here; when style is tone, it is inherently audience-based and therefore rhetorical. Rather, the concern is the placement of an audience-based criterion into a structure that purports to evaluate a student writer's use of particular "tools." The major themes analyzed here begin to illuminate the ways in which our values (specifically, a rhetorical notion of style) are communicated to students when placed into the scoring guides that are supposed to accurately represent and quantify them.

MINOR THEMES

The other conceptions of style present in the rubrics were much more local, defining style as synonymous with, or the result of, mechanics, sentence structure, documentation, and word choice. While these themes emerged in the other categories already discussed, they were all framed as means to a more

global conception of writing. For example, style, when equated with tone (a global feature), is created by word choice (a local feature). In the rubrics I discuss in this section, however, style was equated directly with local features of writing. This suggests that unlike the more global conceptions of style as rhetoric, expression, and tone, these local conceptions define stylistic effectiveness by adherence to rules. Style is not evaluated by appropriateness, readability, or consistency, but rather by correctness.

Style was defined as mechanics six times in the rubrics. In four of these instances, style was grouped with a term that suggests this relationship: two rubrics included categories titled "style and mechanics," another included a "style/grammar/format" category, and yet another had a "style/conventions" category under which the descriptive standard of "mechanical precision" was listed. It can be assumed that when qualities of writing are lumped into one category together, the creator of the rubric sees them as parallel, if not synonymous. In another example, the criterion style fell under a larger category titled "language use and mechanics," signifying that style and mechanics were not synonymous but that "appropriate style" is one element that contributes to effective language use and mechanics. The opposite was also present, a category called style under which "correct use: sentence fragments, run-on sentences, misspelling, usage, punctuation" were listed. While all of the rubrics that conceive of style as mechanics also impart a rules-based notion of style, this last example does so more obviously through the phrase "correct use." Also relevant is that many of the features listed after "correct use"—"sentence fragments, run-on sentences, misspelling, usage, punctuation"—are negative and therefore cannot be used correctly.

Style was defined in terms of sentence structure in five instances. In one rubric it was simply listed as "sentence structure" within the criterion heading "style." In the others more specificity was given as to what qualifies as effective sentence structure: maturity ("mature style"), variety ("varied sentence patterns"), clarity ("sentence meaning is clear"), and correctness ("sentence structures generally are correct"). Despite these qualitative terms, there is still little indication of what constitutes maturity and clarity. Variety and correctness are slightly more specific but still depend on a knowledge of how to vary sentence patterns and compose a structurally "correct" sentence. One rubric that lists "sentence-level issues" as a subcriterion under the heading "Style and Language" provides more insight, as it offers a list of descriptive standards on which the prose will be evaluated:

- Varies sentence length (avoids short, single sentences in favor of stylistic variation that includes compound-complex sentences)
- Uses effective parallel structure

- Does not overuse "to be" verbs (is/are/was/were, etc.)
- Remains consistent in point of view, without switching between 1st, 2nd, ("you"), and 3rd person

When style is defined at the sentence-level, as these examples and others show, it is equated with correctness and, therefore, with a student's ability to follow specific rules in his/her writing.

Four times, style was defined in terms of documentation style, or proper use of MLA or APA formatting. This use of the word *style* is perhaps the broadest, though, because it refers not to the concept of *style,* but to the concept of *a style*, or a way of doing something. Twice in categories titled "style," the descriptive standards for the category involved documentation. In one rubric "MLA format in heading, paging, Works Cited" were listed as stylistic concerns. In another, "Uses MLA citation conventions without error (at least eight sources are cited in the Works Cited page)" was a descriptive standard within a style category. Style also appeared as a descriptive standard for the criterion of documentation, as well. In one category explicitly called "documentation," effective documentation was defined by "appropriate style accurately used in documenting sources." In an "incorporation of research" category, style was also listed as a standard. This use of the term *style*, because it relates to a method versus traditional rhetorical style, is conceptually very different from the others this chapter explores. However, its prominence in the rubrics is an argument in itself for its inclusion in this chapter. Its presence in these rubrics also further illustrates the ambiguity of the word *style* and the consequences of basing our evaluations of writing on a term with so many meanings.

The phrase "word choice" was actually present in more rubrics than any other language feature analyzed here, but it was the least popular characterization of style. That is because although word choice was mentioned in ten of the 23 rubrics, it was grouped with other writing features. Word choice was the primary descriptor of style in only three instances. In only one of these instances, descriptions were provided for what constitutes effective or ineffective word choice once. In this example, "word-level issues" included writing that is "correct in terms of diction and usage, avoids wordiness, avoids cliché, shows sensitivity to gender, ethnicity, religion, class, nationality, and disability, [and] offers effective sensory detail and figurative language." The other two times, the criteria were simply listed as "diction" and "word choice," with no indication as to what makes its use effective or ineffective. Word choice, when considered an element of style, was never described with specificity and never held a prominent place in the rubrics. It was listed, in every instance, as a single item in a list of equally vague criteria.

CONCLUSIONS

From the definitions of style conveyed by the rubrics emerge four evaluative criteria for style: readability, appropriateness, consistency, and correctness. When style was equated with eloquence, its effectiveness was judged by the readability of the prose, including the reader's enjoyment of it. In the rubrics where style is seen as inherently related to rhetoric, appropriateness is the primary criterion for effectiveness. Style is not developed by adherence to rules but rather by an awareness of genre and audience expectations. Tone was another term linked to style, suggesting that style is not only created, but also heard. This conception of style is tied to audience perception and thus creates a reciprocal relationship between writer and reader, or listener. Finally, in the more local conceptions of style, stylistic effectiveness is determined by correctness, or how well the student writer follows a particular and universal formula. What all of these conceptions and their related evaluative criteria reveal is that there is little agreement on what we mean by style, at least within these rubrics, and that each definition we attribute to style results in its own expectations for effectiveness.

Despite the prioritization of global conceptions of style in the rubrics, the form of the rubrics themselves matters: When global conceptions of style are placed into an assessment method that serves to compartmentalize and quantify aspects of writing that are conceptually bigger than the rubric allows for, they are reduced to the same quantification as local writing concerns. That is, the rubric in itself restricts how we can evaluate style, regardless of how we conceptualize its value. What this means is that we are more specific about those aspects we value least (according to their frequency in these rubrics) while we are less specific about the qualities we value most. Qualities like eloquence, rhetorical appropriateness, and tone are less quantifiable when placed into the context of a rubric than are the qualities we value less about style—mechanics, sentence structure, documentation, and word choice.

While this critique can be made about rubrics in general, it is especially relevant to style, as rubrics that are created programmatically often supply the word *style* for teachers who otherwise would not consciously assess it. Consequently, teachers are forced to acknowledge style's presence in student writing and to assess it, perhaps without even knowing how to define it or what it constitutes in student writing. This means that a rubric's confining structure has the potential to impede how teachers and students alike understand style.

Further, the rubric, restricted by its form, may not serve a pedagogical function beyond designating right and wrong, despite its users' intentions. Building on the premise of this chapter, that assessment is a form of style instruction (and often the most explicit form students ever receive), the fact

that rubrics do not teach students how to *reproduce* the style we value means that they may serve more as judgmental measures than instructional ones. This is a limitation of rubrics in general, one that is further enhanced by a term whose ambiguity already poses problems for assessment. Assessing style in a way that is productive for students, then, requires much more than conceptualizing style in ways that move beyond mere form. It requires assessment practices that allow us to express our values and to teach students how to achieve them.

NOTES

1. Institutions include University of Maine, Duke University, University of Alabama, Highline Community College, University of Hawaii, Mount Union College, Fort Lewis College, Columbia University, Madisonville Community College, and Denver University.

2. In seven of the 23, it was the bottom category, in nine the second-to-last, in six the third-to-last, and in one it was in the second of four categories.

3. In fourteen of these 23 rubrics, style was a criterion, and in nine, it was a descriptive standard. I use the term criteria to refer to the features of writing assessed by the rubrics (typically falling in the left-most column) and descriptive standards to refer to the statements that describe expectations for performance for each criterion.

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