

Refining an analytic rubric to support second language writing development in online tasks

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Recently, educational stakeholders have seen an accelerated move to online learning, within which the ability to correspond effectively depends on good writing skills. Language learners are increasingly being asked to navigate new digital genres, such as blogs and discussion boards, without access to empirically-based guidelines for composing successful blog or discussion board posts. Furthermore, researchers have utilized multiple methods for assessing writing within this genre, ranging from full credit for completion to rubrics based on complexity, accuracy, and fluency. In this study, I tested the validity of a rubric designed specifically for academic blog posts. The new analytic rubric assessed five categories, including (a) genre specific features (i.e., use of emojis and hyperlinks), (b) task fulfilment and relevancy, (c) content (i.e., depth and development), (d) organization and balance, and (e) language use. Each category was assessed on a 1- to 6-point scale. Six raters used the rubric to score the posts written by 163 university English language learners in response to a prompt on the pros and cons of using technology for language learning. Subsequently, I investigated the raters' utilization of each of the rubric's cells via Rasch analysis. Results showed that the raters did not use the entire scale and that a 4-point scale would cover learner performance levels sufficiently. In the second phase of this research, 40 of the original 163 learners were invited to compose another blog post. To clarify writing expectations, half of the 40 participants received the revised rubric in advance of their second post. This presentation discusses the performance outcomes of both groups, highlighting the higher scores and syntactic sophistication of posts from learners who had access to the rubric. The results of this study will guide teachers and researchers concerned with students' online writing and the formative assessment of their performance.