

A Literature Review of English Writing Rubrics

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Abstract

English writing rubrics play an important role in English writing. Since the emergence of writing rubrics in the 1960s, “Rubric” has been used as a professional term in educational evaluation. Some educators have applied it to the teaching system to describe the professional term of performance evaluation, which is generally translated as “writing rubrics”. The research reviews the relevant research on English writing rubrics both domestically and abroad, in order to enhance the understanding of relevant scholars in this field.

Keywords

Writing rubrics, score, English writing.

1. Introduction

Rubric originally meant “red mark” or “place painted red”, referring to the guidance or commentary written in red by medieval religions; In legal documents, the title of the code is generally indicated in red; Later, “Rubric” was extended as a concise and authoritative standard, gradually applied in teaching; Since the emergence of writing rubrics in the 1960s, “Rubric” has been used as a professional term in educational evaluation. Some educators have applied it to the teaching system to describe the professional term of performance evaluation, which is generally translated as “writing rubrics”. Rubrics originate from different responses from educators. Many decades ago, measurement specialists scoring students’ written work initiated the use of the term and regarded rubrics as rules guiding their scoring (Popham, 1997). There has been to date abundant research on the effects of rubrics on language learning and teaching, particularly in the discipline of writing assessments (Dawson, 2017; Evans & Gustafsson, 2013; Gezie et al., 2012; Nordrum, Pearlman, 2003).

2. The definition of writing rubrics

Different scholars have different opinions on the definition of writing rubrics. Foreign scholar McNamara (1996) believed that writing rubrics are the theoretical basis for writing exams, specifically reflecting which abilities or skills the test taker considers to be the focus of the exam; Goodrich (1996) pointed out that writing rubrics are the rubrics established for important parts of a work; Jonassen (1999) believes writing rubrics are guidelines designed to control students’ learning behaviour; Arte and Mc Tigh (2001) defined the writing rubrics as a specific form of criterion - all written criteria, and provided explanations and regulations for all scoring points; Professor Andrade (2002) defined the writing rubrics as a “standard scoring tool” and provided a detailed description of the quality standards for each level.

There are also many different definitions of the concept of writing rubrics in China. Among them, Zou Shen (1998) believes that the main purpose of writing rubrics is to evaluate, referring to the persuasiveness of text and the main indicators of composition, mainly using grade or score as its quality indicator; Professor Zhu Zhiting (2003) believes that the writing rubrics is a structured quantitative writing rubric that is related to multiple aspects of scoring goals and scoring indicators, and has good operability and accuracy characteristics; Zhong Zhixian, Wang

Mi, and Lin Anqi (2007) pointed out that writing rubrics are a set of rubrics for evaluating students' learning performance and results; Luo Xiaojie, Zeng Jiayan et al. (2010) believed that writing rubrics is an evaluation tool used to measure students' English writing performance. They are composed of specific and actionable composition evaluation elements and set specific levels and performance evaluation standards for each element.

The author, based on the comprehensive definition of writing rubrics by domestic and foreign researchers, and for the research, believes that writing rubrics refer to a unified legal measure adopted in various exams and assessments due to differences in scorers, resulting in inconsistent evaluation and scoring results. The emergence of writing rubrics provides a relatively fair and reliable evaluation standard for various exams of students in China.

The writing rubrics first emerged in the 1960s. In recent years, more and more educators have applied writing rubrics to English writing teaching and learning, and have achieved corresponding results. The author believes that the writing rubrics for English writing are based on English writing, providing learners and scorers with a foundation for writing and a basis for evaluating writing results.

3. Studies on writing rubrics in English writing assessment

Writing rubrics, also known as rating/scoring categories (Lumley, 2005), refer to the language components, features, or aspects used to evaluate a candidate's performance. Writing rubrics plays a crucial role in performance tests arbitrated by scorers (Eckes, 2008). The writing rubric specifies which features scorers should focus on, which will affect the effectiveness and fairness of the final scoring (Weigle, 2002). The rubrics for English writing play an indispensable role in English writing. Many researchers have conducted research on the role of rubrics in English writing based on numerous theoretical studies.

3.1. Studies on English writing rubrics abroad

The current research status abroad mainly focuses on analyzing the perspectives of typical researchers since the 20th century.

Foreign researchers started the research of English writing rubrics relatively early compared to domestic researchers. Since the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, research on English writing rubrics in foreign countries has mainly been conducted according to the chronological order: Brown (1971) used the length of learners' writing and the time required for the writing process as the criteria to determine whether writing is good or bad; B. Carroll (1980) pointed out that the writing rubrics means that a good article should be based on a real-life perspective, should be a real-life story and realism; Hughes (1989) analyzed and studied on the different aspects of writing, such as speed and efficiency, from the overall perspective of writing, and concluded that the perspective of writing rubrics is reliable but ineffective from a certain perspective; Hamp-Lyons (1991) used analytical methods to consider various aspects of writing, such as language and structure, as factors for writing rubrics. Airasian (1997) researched writing rubrics and pointed out that clear writing rubrics can help students better understand how to write before writing.

After entering the 21st century, foreign researchers not only conducted research on the evaluation criteria and application of the writing rubrics but also researched the following aspects. Moskal & Leydens (2000) studied how to design reasonable and effective writing rubrics; Orsmond et al. (2000) investigated the results of writing between teachers and students, compared and discussed the rubrics for their writing, and finally selected a common writing rubric for both based on the results of the comparison and discussion; Andrade (2001) found in practice that presentation and explanation of writing rubrics can help students better understand writing. During the writing process, he proposed to have students and teachers

jointly design writing rubrics; Cohen et al. (2002) pointed out that students who participate in discussions and analysis of English writing rubrics during the writing process perform relatively better than those who do not understand the writing rubrics. In addition, students who participate in discussions also have significant results in team discussions during the writing process; Patri (2002) suggested that writing rubrics should be translated into students' native language unless students have no difficulty understanding the writing rubrics; Moskal (2003) studied on the global perspective to analysis how to design writing rubrics, clear requirements for writing rubrics, and a certain degree of objectivity in writing rubrics; Tierney, kobin & Marielle Simon (2004) researched the composition of writing rubrics by measuring students' levels; Manzu He (2006) compared and analyzed the impact of different writing rubrics on students' writing ability; Andrade et al. (2009) found and pointed out during the research that writing rubrics can not only improve the quality of students' writing but also expand the number of effective writing. Brookhart (2018) defines a rubric as a collection of criteria for assessing students' work; these criteria consist of descriptions of the performance and standards that students are expected to achieve.

Some scholars made theoretical arguments about the holistic and analytic rubrics as follows.

First of all, these two types of rubrics differ in terms of scoring methods. Holistic rubrics are less detailed. Scorers consider the text as a whole and assign one score to reflect the overall quality of the essay based on the impression (Goulden, 1992: 265, 1994). With an analytic rubric, scorers score an essay based on multiple individual writing features separately, and these scores then be added up to arrive at an overall score (Goulden, 1992: 265, 1994; Barkaoui, 2007; Weigle, 2002: 70).

Secondly, there are also disputes about the reliability and validity of the holistic and analytic rubrics, and the findings are mixed. Perkins (1983) believes that holistic scoring has high validity if the overall writing proficiency is being considered, but it's weak in reliability. Analytic scoring has high reliability but weak validity because it isolates the text features from the context. In contrast, O'Laughlin (1994) finds that holistic scoring has higher reliability, but is less valid for concealing important differences among scorers. In addition, Hamp-Lyons (1991, 1995) finds that the reliability and validity of the scoring rubrics were also affected by the writing context. He suggests that the holistic rubric is more suitable for assessing first-language (L1) essays, while the analytic rubric is better for assessing ESL essays.

So far, among numerous researchers abroad, the most outstanding research achievement is Andrew, an associate professor at Ohio State University in the United States. He has been conducting relevant research on English writing rubrics. He believes that English writing rubrics are not only a rubric for evaluating students' writing ability but also a rubric for students' writing score levels.

3.2. Studies on English writing rubrics in China

The studies on writing rubrics first began in the 1960s. With the emergence of writing rubrics, Chinese researchers have continuously studied and explored different perspectives. The author analyzes and studies more than 60 literature on English writing rubrics in the past 15 years (2008-2023) on China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), and concludes that research on English writing rubrics in China mainly focuses on the following four aspects.

3.2.1. Studies on the auxiliary factors of English writing rubrics

The factors that have auxiliary effects on writing rubrics mainly refer to computer corpus and Many-facet Rasch models, among which the Many-facet Rasch model refers to a model in FACETS that is an auxiliary tool for analyzing scoring results. The specific research results are as follows:

(a) Studies on the writing rubrics for English writing using computers and corpus

Zou Shen and Chen Wei (2010) conducted a study on the actual situation of the TEM4 exam, and combined and utilized the role of computer assistance to explore how to further improve the scoring validity of English writing rubrics through the computer-assisted reading of articles; Jiang Chunli and Zhang Chunmei (2010) pointed out that to improve the reliability of students' writing test scores, computers and corpora can be used to ensure objective and reasonable scoring, thereby achieving the goal of improving students' writing proficiency; Kang Hui (2011) conducted a study on the evaluation rubrics for English writing in various large-scale EFL exams both domestically and internationally, and found that using computer-assisted English writing rubrics can more objectively and accurately score test papers; Yang Dongmei (2013) based on the implementation of an English writing teaching model for college students based on online self-directed learning. The main purpose was to help and cultivate students' self-directed learning ability, further improve teaching quality, promote teaching reform, and preliminarily explore the monitoring strategies of teachers in intelligent scoring through the use of network assistance in the process of student writing scoring; Like Yang Dongmei, Qian Wenjuan (2014) also believes that the English writing automatic scoring system fully utilizes databases to promote students' English writing learning, and is a driving force for improving teaching quality and promoting teaching reform. Luo (2016) pointed out that the peer assessment mechanism in the MOOC environment should follow standardized scoring rubrics and evaluation steps in implementation by constructing a scaffold-type peer assessment mechanism, which improves learning participation and mutual assessment acceptance.

(b) Studies on English writing rubrics based on the Many-facet Rasch model

Tan Zhi (2008) used the Rasch model to assess the scoring behaviour of writing scorers through writing rubrics. The results showed that the Rasch model has a certain positive impact on the scoring behaviour of scorers, which can improve the scoring validity of scorers and increase the reliability of scoring results; Li Qinghua and Kong Wen (2010) analysed the Many-facet Rasch model of the analytic rubrics for writing in TEM4, and believed that the Rasch model can effectively distinguish different levels of writing ability among subjects. This model is relatively ideal and the results are reliable.

3.2.2. The comparative studies on the English writing rubrics

In China, researchers mainly analysed and explored the comparison between the holistic and the analytic rubrics, as well as the comparison between the writing rubrics of Chinese English exams and foreign English exams. The main research content is:

(a) Comparative studies of holistic and analytic rubrics in writing

Feng Lei and Gao Shufen (2012) used the Writing Road Map as a research tool to compare, observe, and research the writing process of learners, as well as the holistic and analytic rubrics. They analysed and found that using the analytic rubrics method in formative evaluation has a more significant promoting effect on English writing teaching; Zhan Huifang and Zhang Chunqing (2013) compared and analysed the validity of the writing scoring method in the final English exam for college students, and found that the validity of the analytic rubrics method is higher than that of the holistic rubrics, and the scoring process is more detailed and reliable; Li Qinghua (2014) made a comparative study on the holistic and the analytic rubrics for writing in the TEM4 exam. The preliminary conclusions drawn from the study indicate that the analytic rubrics are relatively suitable for the scoring process of the TEM4 exam. In addition, the analytic rubrics can to some extent improve the scoring validity of TEM4.

(b) Comparative study on the writing rubrics of Chinese English exams and foreign English exams

Fei Qian and Zhao Yuqin (2008) compared the scoring methods, content, and proposition forms of the College English Test Band 4 for Chinese students with the corresponding aspects of the writing section of the TOEFL exam, pointing out the problems in the scoring standards of the

CET 4 in China and its negative impact on students' writing process training; Han Shouyu (2011) compared the writing rubrics for the writing section of Chinese college entrance examination with the writing section of the SAT exam, and proposed that students' creative thinking and imagination were overlooked in Chinese college entrance examination, and proposed corresponding suggestions for the two; In addition, Chen Rui (2011) pointed out that to ensure fairness in English exams, by comparing it with writing rubrics in the UK, US, Germany, and Australia, while improving the English writing rubrics in China, it is also necessary to reform the data reporting and usage mode of China's writing rubrics.

3.2.3. Studies on the role of English writing rubrics

There are many functions of English writing rubrics, and Chinese researchers have mainly researched the effectiveness of English writing rubrics on writing teaching, scorer validity, reliability of scoring results, and the promoting effect of writing rubrics on teachers and students.

(a) Studies on the auxiliary effect of writing rubrics on English writing teaching

Luo Xiaojie (2010) pointed out through his research on the analytic rubrics that rubric is an effective evaluation tool for promoting teachers' English writing teaching; Yan Jinglan (2012) researched and analysed the new writing rubrics in the Test for English Majors Band 8 and concluded that the writing rubrics have a certain positive and backwashing effect on English writing teaching; Wu Jinping (2013) pointed out that rubric plays a positive guiding role in college English writing teaching, promoting students' learning of writing skills while also playing a certain positive role in improving their writing level.

(b) Studies on the validity and reliability of English writing rubrics

Zou Shen and Chen Wei (2010) studied and analysed the validity of the TEM4 writing rubric using a computer-assisted scoring model, and the results showed that the use of computer-assisted forms can help improve the scoring validity of writing; Zhan Huifang and Zhang Chunqing (2013) compared the scoring validity of the holistic and the analytic rubrics for the English writing section in the final exam of college students and concluded that the analytic rubrics have relatively higher scoring validity in the final English writing exam of college students. Some scholars have focused on the development of the English writing peer assessment rubrics and have validated their validity and reliability (Bai, 2012; Xie et al., 2020; Chen, 2021; Ma et al., 2022).

(c) Studies on the promoting effect of writing rubrics on teachers and students

Yan Jinglan (2012) found in her research on the new writing rubrics in TEM8 that the writing rubrics have a certain positive backwash effect on teachers in English writing teaching; Yang Dongmei (2013) pointed out that writing rubrics also have a certain promoting effect on students' autonomous learning of writing. She combined with the network proposed the use of writing rubrics to further promote the reform of English writing and the quality of teaching based on helping students cultivate their autonomous learning ability. Wang (2014) introduced and modified the argumentative rubric and narrative rubric, and put forward specific implementation suggestions for the writing rubric according to its characteristics. This study proves the effectiveness of using writing rubrics in process writing teaching and makes a positive exploration of the function of rubrics in promoting learning. Zhang (2016) applied the writing rubric to writing teaching. Through three months of empirical research, the results show that students' composition scores have improved significantly. Among them, there are significant differences in the four dimensions and total scores of the content of the article, the organization of the article, the use of sentences, and spelling as well as punctuation. Most students have made progress in some specific dimensions after the experiment. Based on the 6+1 writing rubric.

3.2.4. Studies on the impact of English writing rubrics

In the process of English writing, the rubrics for English writing have an undeniable impact in various aspects. Researchers in China have mainly analysed and explored the impact of rubrics on English writing exams, learning, teaching, peer evaluation, and students' thinking abilities.

(a) Studies on the impact of rubrics on English writing exams, learning, and teaching

Yu Ruixue (2011) explored and analysed the problems and reasons that exist in CET-4, and made detailed research and exploration from the perspective of writing rubrics in CET-4, providing corresponding suggestions and countermeasures.

(b) Studies on the impact of English writing rubrics on peer assessment

Yin Yuan (2011) designed a writing rubric for peer assessment in writing classrooms. Through the application of this writing rubric in peer assessment, two conclusions were drawn. One is the writing rubrics in peer assessment can provide rich and accurate information for teachers and students. Another is with writing rubrics as a basis, students' understanding and operational abilities become more comprehensive; Bai Liru (2012) developed a set of reliable, scientific, and easy-to-understand measurement tools based on the implementation of peer assessment activities for basic English teaching in universities. Through experiments, the feedback mode of peer assessment in college English writing courses was analysed and a rubric was developed. Before conducting peer assessments, students will carefully analyze the rubrics, which will help them efficiently and accurately evaluate their peer works. In the process of peer assessment, students can learn from their strengths and weaknesses and combine their writing knowledge with the works of other classmates, which will generate new writing knowledge and promote common progress in writing among peers (Ren, 2021). Writing rubrics can improve the accuracy and reliability of peer assessment (Fan, et al., 2018). The research of Zhang and Luo (2022) showed that peer assessment based on rubrics improves the effectiveness of assessment, promotes learner learning, increases learner engagement, and enhances student abilities, including analytical and evaluative abilities, learning abilities, and self-reflection abilities. Liang's (2018) research shows that rubric-based peer assessment has a significant positive impact on students' cognitive engagement, and learners feel happy during the peer assessment process, which helps improve learning outcomes. A refined and concrete assessment rubric that can evaluate or grade students' learning ability development or learning behaviour from multiple dimensions. Students can use this to measure their level of self-expression and clarify their learning direction (Qu & Wang, 2011).

(c) Studies on the impact of writing rubrics on students' thinking ability

Han Shouyu (2011) found that the rubrics for writing in China's college entrance examination were insufficient in assessing the thinking, creativity, and imagination of candidates by comparing them with the SAT writing rubric in the United States. In response to the differences in the two exam writing rubrics, corresponding improvement suggestions were proposed for the writing rubrics in China's college entrance examination; Han Jingfeng (2014), in the research process of TEM4 writing rubric in China, started with students' writing abilities and combined different elements of required abilities, elaborated on the importance of students' language critical thinking ability in writing. Based on the writing rubric, he proposed suggestions for writing teaching, such as strengthening the application of students' critical thinking ability in English writing and improving students' language cognitive ability level.

In recent years, researchers have conducted research on English writing rubrics in addition to the above four aspects. Luo Juan and Xiao Yunnan (2008) adopted the theory of multiple generalizations and proposed the establishment of an objective, systematic, and reliable writing scoring system based on how to establish a unified understanding of the writing rubrics; Xie Changxiang and Zeng Yongqiang (2009) adopted embedded writing rubrics to enhance students' understanding of the author's intentions and write articles that meet writing

requirements, making the writing part of English exams more humane and having a certain impact on students' writing behaviour; Feng Lei et al. (2013) researched and analysed on the use, development, and principles of English diagnostic writing test rubrics for college students based on the analysis of the current situation of English writing rubrics. Liu et al (2020) sorted out the discussion on the definition of validity and the different viewpoints of the four schools, introduced the reform-oriented test validity theory from the perspectives of validity theory based on argument and evidence, fairness validity theory and action theory, and put forward some suggestions on the validity verification of Language Test in China.

The rubrics in writing can make students' requirements for the quality of writing clear and clear; Enable students to understand the shortcomings in their writing; Continuously improve and correct the shortcomings in one's writing through writing rubrics; Utilize the role of writing rubrics to improve one's English writing proficiency. The role of rubrics in English writing cannot be replaced. It is one of the prerequisites for students to write in English and also the main basis for teachers to evaluate students' writing results. The existence of writing rubrics has improved students' enthusiasm for English writing, made them better at autonomous learning and writing, and promoted the improvement of students' writing abilities. From the perspective of teachers, the existence of writing rubrics provides convenience for teachers to score students' articles, make it easier to understand students' writing abilities and provide favourable conditions for how to improve individual differences in students' writing abilities and how to promote students' writing abilities.

4. Conclusion

By reviewing the relevant research on English writing rubrics, it can deepen the understanding of English writing rubrics, which is conducive to better conducting subsequent research.

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