Rubrics can be useful in a number of ways, for instructors and students. However, they can also be difficult for students to understand and use to advantage. What follow are some ideas for ways of introducing students to rubric evaluation, and for helping students to become capable and creative rubric users.

Integrating Rubrics

Consistent Criteria
Make sure that the criteria for the rubric are the same as those listed in the assignment for a given exercise. In 101 and 102 the goals and criteria change from assignment to assignment, so it is important to let students know what the criteria for a given assignment are and to keep the wording as close as possible. Assignment sheets allow for a lot of expansion and explication, for tying evaluation criteria to course goals for example, but there should be, somewhere in the assignment text, a statement that uses the same wording the rubric will use.

Familiarity and Comfort
Before using a rubric to evaluate student work for the first time, it can be helpful to have students work with rubric in a variety of exercises. It doesn’t take very long for most students to become accustomed to reading and making use of rubrics, but giving them some “hands on” opportunities seem to work better than descriptions and explanations alone. Following are a number of things that I’ve thought of and used that may provide a starting place for thinking and planning.

• Provide the class with copies of a student paper and the assignment that paper was written for. Have them fill out an appropriate rubric. Then have them discuss the results in small groups for a few minutes so that they can compare responses. Finally, give them a copy of your completed rubric for the paper they’ve read. This provides another comparison and can lead to discussion of differences of interpretation with regard to evaluation criteria (a good place for tying criteria and course goals together).

• Give students copies of the rubric you plan to use for evaluating an assignment that they can use for a peer response workshop. Ask them not to make any other marks or comments on the paper or to discuss it until they are asked specific questions about the comments they used to fill out the rubric. This can make students more comfortable with interrogating an evaluative rubric, which they should do, whether they are able to answer their own questions or need to seek them from others.
• Have students fill out a rubric to turn in along with an assignment. This can give you some insight into their self-evaluative skill and it will allow them to see, after you return their work, if, where, and how your evaluation differs from theirs. This is a good subject to take up in conference.