

# One module, four teachers: Using rubrics as an assignment teaching & learning tool in a multi-lecturer module 1

Faculty of Theology | Department of Old and New Testament Studies

**Modules:** Old and New Testament 144: Narrative Literature in the Bible

**Lecturers:** Prof Louis Jonker [lj@sun.ac.za](mailto:lj@sun.ac.za), Prof Elna Mouton [emouton@sun.ac.za](mailto:emouton@sun.ac.za), Ms Ydalene Coetsee [yc@sun.ac.za](mailto:yc@sun.ac.za) & Ms Heila Maré [heilam@sun.ac.za](mailto:heilam@sun.ac.za)

**Blended Learning Coordinator:** Ms Magriet de Villiers [mdev@sun.ac.za](mailto:mdev@sun.ac.za)

**Learning activity:**  
Writing assignments

**Learning technology:**  
Turnitin Grademark

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## Context

### Background

The Department of Old and New Testament Studies focuses on rigorous, responsible and accountable theological interpretation of the Bible. Rigorous theological exegesis of the Bible must always be responsible to the rest of the academic scholarly community and accountable to the communities of faith, both in Africa and abroad, within which the interpretation of Scripture takes place. The Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible must therefore be interpreted in close relationship with the world of the Biblical authors (then) and readers (now).

### Subject area

The module Old and New Testament 144: Narrative Literature in the Bible (ONT 114) is an introductory and orientating module about the study of Biblical narratives in the Old and New Testament within their socio-historical contexts. It is also about the study of the nature of the narrative genre and ancient historiography, together with appropriate methodologies. In the Old Testament section, focus is on the Deuteronomistic history, Ezra-Nehemia and Chronicles are highlighted and, in the New Testament section, focus is on Acts and aspects of the Synoptic Gospels.

### Intended learning outcomes

After completion of the module, students will be able to:

- identify the literary form of a text and explain the use of narrative genres in Biblical texts;
- demonstrate basic aspects of the use of appropriate methodologies in the reading and analysis of Biblical narratives;
- describe the socio-historical context of Biblical narratives and explain the importance of such context in the interpretation of the narratives;
- demonstrate basic skills in reading, translating and interpreting narrative texts in a theological context;
- display a basic understanding of how Biblical historiography communicates in narrative form;

- indicate the relevance of narrative Biblical texts to theology and ethics in the contemporary world; and
- demonstrate a basic ability to design practical programmes for implementation in the contexts of congregations, through which familiarity with the narrative and historiographical genres in the Bible can be facilitated among secondary school learners in particular.

The cultivation of research and academic writing skills is an integral learning outcome and forms a central part of the teaching and learning practice.

### Established practice and the challenge

The undergraduate theology curriculum is a writing-intensive programme, with many, if not most, important assessments consisting of assignment creation. Many students find this to be challenging, as their tertiary education does not teach them the necessary skills of academic writing and they are therefore not adept at effectively reading assignment missions and questions, structuring their arguments and/or writing coherently. Neither are they well versed in effective literature research and/or referencing techniques and they consequently step into the plagiarism trap quite easily.

In order to address this teaching and learning challenge, the Departments of Old and New Testament Studies, Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology, and Practical Theology and Missiology started a rotating academic literacy period. Modules consist of two lecture periods and one tutorial period and, each year, one of the modules (based on a three-year rotation) is given an extra tutorial period of 50 minutes to spend on academic literacy. In 2015, the Department of Old and New Testament Studies was responsible for incorporating this academic literacy period into its ONT 144 module. Over a period of 12 to 13 weeks, two lecturers, the Faculty librarian and a Language Centre representative – the assessors – worked together to assist the students with the research, content creation and academic writing of their ONT 144 academic literacy written assignment. This assignment served as a summative assessment that, together with class attendance and tutorial assessments, contributed to the students' final marks. It also equipped them, however, with a foundational understanding of what the academic writing process entails and provided transferable skills for use in their general theological training.



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Due to the number of assessors and students involved in this assignment process, however, timeous assessment and thorough feedback posed a challenge: how could the assessors work on and mark the assignments simultaneously and speedily whilst still giving in-depth feedback that would help the students with their academic literacy?

### Advantages associated with the integration of technology

As all the students were submitting their assignments via Turnitin, the built-in GradeMark rubric provided a viable solution to the challenge:

- The GradeMark rubric is an electronic tool that was attached to each assignment and the students could therefore use it as a formative tool when writing their assignments.
- Once the assessors had marked the assignments, the marks and feedback were immediately accessible by the students without extra administrative communication required by the assessors.
- The assessors could mark simultaneously and therefore save time.
- The rubric structure and layout are pliable and could therefore incorporate all the necessary assessment criteria for the assignments.
- The rubric can be structured as a marking tool and could therefore assist in calculating the combined assessment marks.
- The rubric served a formative feedback function and supported the students' learning.

### Student overview

The class in question consisted of 105 first-year theology and youth work students, most of whom came to study at Stellenbosch University directly after matriculating. The ONT 144 module can be quite challenging, as the academic information is very new and foreign to the students.

### Other relevant role-players

Throughout the semester, the academic literacy classes assist the students

in acquiring reading, writing and referencing skills that they can use in their written assignments. They can continuously ask for input from the lecturers and tutors (regarding topic and content), the Faculty librarian (research strategy and referencing) and the Language Centre representative (reading, writing and structuring). The students are very fortunate that the theology library is housed within the Faculty and that the Language Centre representative is available by appointment at the Faculty, making both the librarian and Language Centre representative highly accessible.

### Learning and assessment activities

#### Educational approach

For the purpose of the ONT 144 module, the rubric served a multi-faceted role. Due to the written assignments being summative, end-of-semester assessments, the rubric served primarily as a summative grading tool and the students could therefore not correct their mistakes or improve their assignment marks. The rubric also, however, served as a formative feedback and learning tool that reflected the students' incorporation of the writing and referencing skills that they had learnt throughout the semester. Since feedback comment is automatically connected to an allocated mark, it is also more structured, nuanced and descriptive; all the students obtained the same amount of feedback and they could see why they had received that specific mark. Although the students could not improve their assignments, they could use the feedback to improve the academic literacy skills that they needed for the rest of their theological studies. The fact that the rubric was also available to view (by opening the assignment link) before the students submitted their assignments further embedded the rubric's formative learning capacity.

#### Learning and assessment activities

Students are asked to attend all theological and academic literacy classes and to complete certain SUNLearn and tutorial assignments to assist them in acquiring certain theological content and literacy skills. They are then required to present their acquired knowledge and skills in the form of a summative assignment that counts for 30% of their predicate mark. The rubric, attached to the SUNLearn assignment link, provided formative assistance in addressing the needed theological and literacy aspects as the students completed their assignments.



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### Feedback practices

All the students received complete feedback on their assignments through the Turnitin Grademark rubric. Grademark allowed the lecturers to provide comments, allocate levels in terms of the students' criteria and link comments to a set of criteria.

### Learning environment

#### Learning setting

In the first lecture period, the students received a paper-based module framework stating the module's content, learning activities and assessments, and the timetable. Each aspect, including the incorporation of the academic literacy class, was thoroughly explained and discussed and the students were introduced to the SUNLearn module page, which served as their parallel classroom. The students had continuous access to the theological and literacy resources via the SUNLearn module page, which they could view and use at their own convenience. The rubric was also attached to the assignment link SUNLearn module page and served as a writing tool while the students were creating their assignments.

### Support challenges

There was a slight learning curve for the lecturers as they were learning to use the new technology but they quickly grasped the concept. The lecturers commented on how easy the technology was to use as soon as they mastered it.

### General

#### Opportunities

Three rubric layouts are possible. This provides pliability in structuring a rubric according to need. For the ONT 144 module, the custom rubric was used, as it provided the possibility to nuance the grading.

The rubric worked well as a marking tool, giving the multiple assessors not only the opportunity to mark simultaneously but also to calculate a combined mark automatically. This mark was reflected on the assignments but was also connected to and reflected on the SUNLearn gradebook – one of the great advantages of using the Turnitin GradeMark rubric. In addition, the assessors did not need to mark in one unbroken session but

could save their progress and return to it at their convenience; the marks were finalised and published only once the assessors had clicked on the "apply rubric percentage to grade" button.

Comments could be conveniently attached to each grade allocation and feedback could be automatically generated, which not only saved the assessors the time of individually writing feedback but also assured the students of feedback. Also integrated in Turnitin GradeMark is the capacity to combine the different grading methods of the rubric, voice notes, in-text comments and quickmarks. The assessors could therefore use the rubric and add extra voice notes, in-text comments and quickmarks to provide further and more detailed feedback where needed.

It was advantageous that the rubric was attached to the Turnitin assignment, as it enabled the students to view and use the rubric as a formative guideline before submitting their assignments. It also provided them with immediate access to their finalised feedback and combined mark, either by opening the Turnitin assignment itself or viewing the mark in the SUNLearn gradebook.

Rubrics are reusable in other modules and can be shared amongst colleagues.



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**Challenges**

There is a medium learning curve for first-time rubric creators, especially regarding choosing a rubric format and completing the scales, values and percentages sections. Also, the rubric launch manager does not automatically back up submitted information and this should therefore preferably be completed in one continuous session and changes saved continuously. Rubrics can furthermore not always simply be changed once they have been created and a new rubric might have to be created to incorporate the necessary changes. This can initially be quite a frustrating process of trial and error. Lastly, each scale can have only one attributed mark (such as 1 or 3) and a grade can therefore not be allocated on a scale (such as 1–3). The rubric’s size can become quite cumbersome when the scales are too detailed and the creators must inevitably make choices as to how many details they can justifiable add or omit.

**Advice**

It is helpful to create a complete rubric outline as a framework for the online rubric.

Ou en Nuwe Testament 144			
CRITERIA	SCALES		
	Swak / Poor	Gemiddeld / Average	Baie Goed / Very Good
<b>2 Criterion 1</b> Taal / Language	1.00 0 (0%) - 1(1%) Poor formulation of argument; Poor syntax and tense; Poor spelling and punctuation; Language use impedes understanding	3.00 2 (2%) - 3 (3%) Average formulation of argument; Some syntax and tense errors; Some spelling and punctuation errors; Language	5.00 4 (4%) - 5 (5%) Clear formulation of argument; Correct syntax and tense; Correct spelling and punctuation; Language use
<b>Criterion 2</b> Styl & Register Style & Tone	1.00 0 (0%) - 1(1%) Inappropriate use of language for topic; Inappropriate style and tone for topic; Inconsistent use of chosen style and register	3.00 2 (2%) - 3 (3%) Average use of language for topic; Average style and tone for topic; Some inconsistency in use of chosen style and register	5.00 4 (4%) - 5 (5%) Appropriate use of language for topic; Appropriate style and tone for topic; Consistent use of chosen style and register
<b>Criterion 3</b> Struktuur & Ontwikkeling Structure & Development	1.00 0 (0%) - 1(1%) Incoherent and poorly-integrated construction of introduction, body and conclusion; Ineffective paragraphing	3.00 2 (2%) - 3 (3%) Acceptable construction of introduction, body and conclusion; Acceptable paragraphing	5.00 4 (4%) - 5 (5%) Coherent and integrated construction of introduction, body and conclusion; Effective paragraphing
<b>1 Criterion 4</b> Aanbieding Presentation	1.00 0 (0%) - 1 (1%) Poorly-edited; Improper format (i.e. spacing, alignment, headings); Does not adhere to	3.00 2 (2%) - 3 (3%) Average editing; Acceptable format (i.e. spacing, alignment, headings); Mostly adheres to	5.00 4 (4%) - 5 (5%) Well-edited; Proper format (i.e. spacing, alignment, headings); Adheres to given requirements

RUBRIC SCORE: 85 / 100 RUBRIC PERCENTAGE: 85% Apply rubric percentage to grade Close

Figure 1: Screenshot of the Turnitin layout

