

# Grading Rubric Revision for Effective Online Learning: A Practitioner-Based Case Study in Teacher Education

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## Abstract

*This article examines the process of revising asynchronous online discussion (AOD) grading rubrics in a teacher preparation program at a Southern California university. Drawing on a reflective practitioner case study design combined with a literature review; the study explores the intersection of theory and practice in online assessment. Guided by Bandura's social learning theory and the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, the research documents a collaborative revision process involving faculty colleagues, consultation with the original creator of the RISE feedback model, and the exploratory integration of artificial intelligence tools for rubric drafting. The analysis highlights deficiencies in the original rubric—such as ambiguous criteria, misalignment with course objectives, and inflexibility in scoring—and details the development of a simplified, transparent 3×3 rubric structure. Findings emphasize the importance of alignment with instructional objectives, clarity in performance expectations, and equitable assessment practices to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. The study offers a replicable framework for other educators seeking to refine online assessment tools, contributing to ongoing discourse on effective AOD implementation in higher education. Limitations and recommendations for future research in rubric validation, cross-institutional comparison, and AI-assisted instructional design are discussed.*

**Keywords:** Grading Rubrics, Asynchronous Online Discussion, Reflective Practitioner, Teacher Education, Instructional Design, Community of Inquiry, Social Learning Theory, AI in Education

## Introduction

This article is about creating grading rubrics and the revision process for improving these measurement instruments. Asynchronous online discussions (AOD) and grading rubrics is part of best practices in online learning [1]. This is part of an effective online learning battery that includes information about scholarly and academic efforts informing research and practice regarding this topic. The research also describes a teacher preparation program in California and the process of revising a discussion board grading rubric to better fit the needs of the program and adequately refined the assessment process with a streamlined evaluation tool. This article also implements the experiences of a team of faculty members involved in instructional design and revision. It investigates the collaborative process in grading rubric revision so that various aspects of the grading practices could be documented and improved. These elements targeted

clear instructions, fairness in the greeting process, and the impact on instruction. This study additionally places grading rubric design at the intersection of theory and practice, considering the context of online learning by using a combination of literature review and a case study approach. This research design allows for a connection between research, academic policies and procedures, and instructional practice.

This was a project that began in the academic school year of 2023-2024 as part of revision of a number of elements in teacher education programs at a university in Southern California. The author worked with the team of 2 other full-time faculty. One was the Teacher Preparation Program Director, and another was a faculty colleague also employed as faculty in teacher education. The overview for this topic is that the focus was on effective online instruction with adequate discussion board grading

rubrics. The characteristics and strategies for effective grading rubrics for online discussion boards was of interest. It was also important to bring in research and practical perspectives from the team to determine what makes for a great online learning experience.

This introductory part of this article first presents the topic and the problem being discussed, states the purpose of the research, and provides a rationale for the research design of combining literature review and case study. This first section then points to the significance of the research as well as its contribution to the literature by combining both personal experience with scholarly analysis. This part provides synthesis of this study's findings with previously reported results from relevant academic literature. There are constant difficulties assessing student activity and engagement with instructional practices in online education programs [2]. This is also the case with the asynchronous online discussion (AOD) concept in teacher education programs. The grading rubric serves as a critical assessment tool, yet many existing grading rubrics for online discussions are either overly broad or lack clear alignment with course objectives (references needed here). Nevertheless, online discussions and grading rubrics can be created and mismatched to the instructional context [3]. In other words, AOD grading rubrics may be overly broad or not align well with course objectives. Ultimately, grading rubrics serve as assessment tools that are crucial to measuring and monitoring student progress and learning.

### Literature Review

The priority of this section is to highlight relevant academic literature that diverges or converges with the design team's experiences. It focuses on publications located in previously reported research and is summarized in this section. Gaps in the previously reported academic literature are highlighted which influence the current case study and a close examination of the current state of affairs in assessing online discussion boards and student assessment. The revision process for grading rubrics in an online teacher preparation program are emphasized. Understanding the issue of creating high-quality online discussion board grading rubrics offers a hands-on approach for teachers that is suitable for a range of participants and contexts. By investigating AODs and grading rubrics as best practices in online learning informs the perspective of exploring the unique challenges with virtual learning environments [4]. In exploration of topics related to discussion board grading rubrics, it is favorable to emphasize the current state of research on this topic and these experiences. This provides educators with examples of actual or simulated scenarios which they analyze, propose solutions, and make decisions regarding relevant topics presented in the literature for online discussion board grading rubric development and analysis. This approach allows educators to explore and articulate the complexities of their online teaching practice related to assessment and measuring learning and how it affects the quality of their instruction. Furthermore, engaging in discussion board grading rubric analysis with other educators provides insights into the multiple perspectives held by others. For example, although there is widespread acceptance and use online discussion boards and corresponding rubrics, "there is very little consensus on best practices for AODs and almost no research into AOD alternatives" [5]. The objective of this article is to provide participants with the knowledge and ability to implement solutions for re-

sponding to the need to revise discussion board grading rubrics within their own teaching and learning contexts. Readers have access to examples and useful resources to develop their tool kits for creating and implementing grading rubrics which they can use as templates for applying to their own educational context.

The specific theoretical frameworks and instructional models are Bandura's social learning theory (1969) and Boettcher and Conrad's Community of Inquiry [6]. In online educational contexts in which asynchronous communication is widely accepted, development and utilization of these types of grading rubrics align closely with a best practice [7]. These grading rubrics promote the idea that course instructors will provide clear expectations and will also measure and evaluate student learning in equitable manners, reflecting notions of transparency in the grading process. Furthermore, the AOD's are established as opportunities for reflecting learning on the part of students. It has been reported in the literature that AOD's also provide a complex interplay of student participation, authentic engagement, and instructor feedback due to their specific purpose [8].

Conflicting information regarding a uniform protocol for best practices in grading discussion for online discussion is relevant in the literature [9-11]. This is the current situation, even though there is a great deal of AOD use in online learning associated with grading rubrics. Additionally, the theoretical frameworks are also applied in education and online education that align well with highly engaged online interaction [12]. Theory of social learning presented by Bandura states that students learn through interaction with others in shared contexts. This is the case for the currently described online learning context for teacher preparation and supports the emphasis of collaborative engagement for developing AOD grading rubric criteria. Another theoretical lens with which to examine AOD grading rubric development is the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, which points the three interrelated elements of cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. This perspective also informs grading rubric development for online environments [12]. Boettcher and Conrad's (2021) Online Teaching Survival Guide provides a foundation for examining grading rubric development which prioritizes simple and clear grading structures such as a 3x3 format. Finally, the RISE Model which utilizes an acronym to represent various phases of engagement and learning (Reflect, Inquire, Suggest, Elevate), offers a structured approach to assessing peer engagement [13]. This model, originally introduced by Emily Wray, appears to be utilized by a number of institutions (according to its website), but it can also be misapplied. Together this group of theoretical and practical resources informed the design team's effort of this teacher education program to evaluate, rethink, revise, and realign the discussion grading rubric used in teacher preparation courses.

### Methodology

This section describes the research methods utilized in this research study. A reflective practice (RP) and narrative inquiry design is implemented to explain why the educators individual experience is relevant (reference needed here). There are also ethical considerations to be considered since these processes and discussions relate the grading of student assignments and a process connected to multiple colleagues involved in this critical educational endeavor. This reflective case study approach

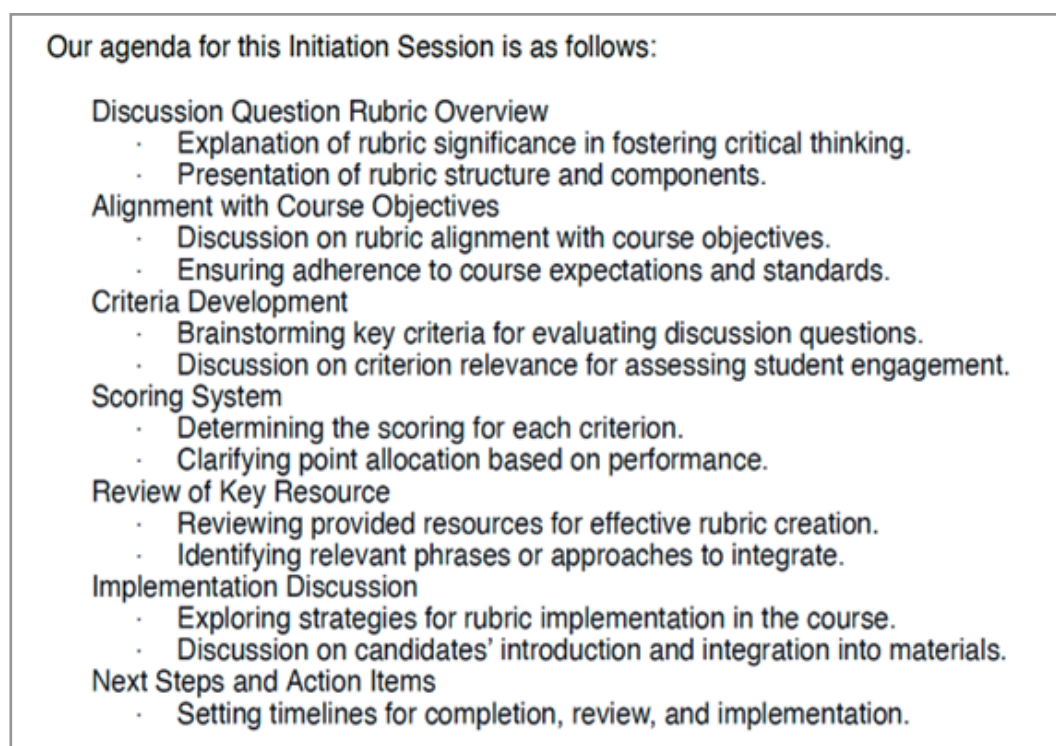
grounded in practitioner inquiry is a qualitative research method integrated by professionals who systematically examine and reflect on their own form of professional practice. As a method of research, it allows them to deepen their understanding, improve their work, and generate practical knowledge for topics such as education [14]. Scholars have described practitioner inquiry as “a form of systematic and intentional inquiry conducted by teachers using their classrooms as settings to study their own practice and students’ learning. As a main part of this process, the author collaborated with colleagues and fulfilled the role of lead instructor and program coordinator in an iterative design process that combined autoethnographic reflection, document analysis, and team-based consultation. The team began by critically reviewing the existing discussion board rubric by identifying a number of ambiguous and misaligned elements of the AOD discussion board grading rubric. They also actively consulted relevant academic research literature and open educational resources to frame their revision process.

The academic resources and research methods utilized by the design team pointed out earlier Boettcher and Conrad’s (2021) AOD grading rubric framework. This is a useful publication with 14 best practices for online education. Another very useful publication is the California State University Chico’s open-access rubrics for online instruction (California State University, Chico, n.d.). This resource has.... The author was also in direct consultation by email with Emily Wray, the creator of the RISE

Model. Several exchanges took place regarding the use of the model as part of a grading rubric and advice was given and accepted regarding revision. Additionally, revision accessed artificial intelligence guidance by inquiring within ChatGPT. These AI-generated grading rubric renditions were evaluated and compared against human-generated grading rubric drafts. One last component utilized was ethical considerations of the research centered on anonymous use of any student work and feedback that maintained transparency in the design and revision process. For that reason, no student graded homework assignments were included as examples in this research article.

### Case Study Analysis

This section presents the educator's experience in a structured chronological and thematically format showing challenges and solutions. Evidence is offered such as outcomes to support the analysis. This provides data from a reflective practitioner point of view that critically comments on successes, needs for revision, and the reasons why various elements needed to be restructured. Meetings with an agenda were scheduled. These meetings with agendas all involved the AOD grading rubric team, so the agendas included items such as discussion questions and rubric overviews in order to for the design team to explain the rubric significance and the objective of fostering critical thinking in the Teacher Education Program. The design team also wanted to examine and scrutinize AOD grading rubric structure and granular components to be a more detailed part of the basic overview.



**Figure 1: Design Team Agenda**

Another main area set forth by the design team was the alignment with course objectives. In order to do that, the discussion on rubric alignment with course objectives was intended to follow closely with the expectations and standards of a specific course or the entire program. Third, the design team was interested in the specific types of criteria development for discus-

sion boards. To accomplish this task, they needed to brainstorm key criteria for evaluating discussion questions that would also analyze the relevance of the criterion. This component would ensure that a process of assessing student engagement was integrated. A 4th component of the grading rubric team agenda was the scoring system, and that included determining the scoring for



each specific criterion. This process revolved around clarifying how many points would be allocated on the part of a teacher candidate performance in an assignment or activity regarding that criterion. The design team also looked at key resources and looked at submitted some specific academic content from a variety of perspectives that would help create effective rubrics. They looked at identifying language and relevant phrases or approaches to integrate into the process. Second to last is the implementation discussion: How would the design team implement the rubric into the course and make sure that candidates understood how to use it and how to integrate the rubric into the materials. Then, of course, finally, the design team would have the agenda end with what should be accomplished next. These

were established as action items that were based on timeliness for the completion, review, and implementation of the grading rubric revision project.

The team's agenda evolved into several key actions: reviewing rubric significance, clarifying structure and scoring, aligning with course objectives, and ensuring applicability across instructional formats. We explored alternative models and conducted comparative analyses using rubrics from Boettcher and Conrad, as well as from the CSU Chico repository.

Our initial analysis of the existing rubric revealed several deficiencies. These are displayed in Figure 2.

Discussion Rubric						
You've already rated students with this rubric. Any major changes could affect their assessment results.						
Criteria	Ratings					Pts
The Discussion Post demonstrates command of key concepts, objectively reviewing, giving relevance, and evidence to demonstrate and apply the Learning Outcomes.	18 pts Posting thoroughly answers the discussion prompts and demonstrates an understanding of the material with well-developed ideas. Posting integrates assigned content and makes strong connections to practice. APA format, writing is free of grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.	15 pts Posting addresses most of the prompt(s) and demonstrates a mild understanding of the material with well-developed ideas. Posting references assigned content but may not make connections to practice. APA format, writing includes less than 5 grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.	12 pts Posting fails to address all components of the prompt. Makes short or irrelevant remarks. Posting lacks connection to practice. APA format, writing includes 4-5 grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.	9 pts Posting does not address components of the prompt. Makes superficial remarks without supporting citations and without connection to practice. APA format, writing contains more than 5 grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.	0 pts The post is not completed; no posting.	18 pts

Figure 2: Existing AOD Grading Rubric: Criterion 1/Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes criteria were overly general. They included a very broad statement about demonstrating command of key concepts but also included multiple other elements leading to confusion and overly complex creating a rubric criterion. Furthermore, the point was that all of that information relies to the learning outcomes. It was not clear what the learning outcome was, and this is an element that should actually be applied each week with different learning outcomes each week in the course. Having said that the starting point was our currently utilized rubric. And what you see in the screen is one of the two criteria, which is the discussion post demonstrates command of key concepts, objectively reviewing, giving relevance and evidence to demonstrate and apply the learning outcomes. When this was

examined closely looked at that. And we observed that this was a fairly expansive criterion that includes 4 or 5 conceptual elements. This aspect of the grading rubric was given 18 points with the proficiency ratings starting from the left at 18 points, thoroughly answers the discussion, prompts and demonstrates understanding of the material. A lot of information was being collected in this rating of 18 points: APA formatting, grammatical error-free writing, and no punctuation errors, or spelling errors. On the far right end you know the post is not complete, and there's no posting with 3 ratings in the in the middle. This was the lower part of the second Criterion, and this one was exclusively related to the use of the RISE Model (Figure 3).


 <p><b>RISE MODEL</b></p> <p>The RISE Model for Peer Feedback is a tool that structures and facilitates the giving and receiving of meaningful critiques.</p> <p>By addressing a series of stems aligned with Bloom's Taxonomy, students are prompted to use higher order thinking skills in the delivery of constructive feedback to their peers.</p> <p>Visit <a href="http://www.RISEModel.com">www.RISEModel.com</a> for licensing and implementation information.</p> <p>© 2019 Mike Sessé Muller / All Rights Reserved</p>	Meets Objective		Does NOT Meet Objective	
	<b>ELEVATE</b> Raise to a higher degree or purpose in FUTURE iterations	Proposes specific ideas for how to expand the project/discussion beyond its original scope <i>EX: Perhaps you can expand this in X capacity to further address Y. Perhaps you can re-purpose X as Y for Z.</i>	Proposes no ideas for expansion beyond the defined assignment criteria	
	<b>SUGGEST</b> Introduce ideas for improvement of CURRENT iteration	Offers specific suggestions for improvement of current project/discussion based on assignment criteria <i>EX: You might consider tweaking X for Y effect. You might want to include supporting information from X resource.</i>	Offers vague or no suggestions for improvement of current project/discussion	
	<b>INQUIRE</b> Seek information and/or provide ideas through questioning	Asks thought-provoking questions that might lead to a new perception or clarifying questions for a deeper understanding <i>EX: Have you considered looking at X from Y perspective? When you said X, am I understanding you to mean Y?</i>	Asks passive questions that require a one-word answer or provoke no response at all	
	<b>REFLECT</b> Recall, ponder, and articulate	References specific parts of the project/discussion and relates insight to course content <i>EX: I relate/concur/disagree with X because Y. I liked what you did with X because Y.</i>	Responds to the project/discussion in vague terms and does not expound upon what was referenced	

Figure 3: The RISE Model

You can see that this criterion states, ‘Contribution to the Learning Community.’ Additionally, the engagement criterion relied exclusively on the RISE model with a rigid scoring structure

with five progressive proficiency levels as in the first criterion (Figure 4).

Contribution to the Learning Community The discussion response demonstrates the candidate's ability to critically evaluate and apply the material to hypothetical case examples using the RISE Model: Reflect - on how to expand a peer(s)' topic response further. Inquire - informs and/or provides thoughtful feedback and ideas through questioning. Suggest - introduces ideas for improvement so peer(s) can reflect and consider more on their topic. Elevate - suggests that peer(s) possibly expands in a given capacity to address	7 pts Completed two (2) responses reflective of complete delivery of constructive feedback using All components of the RISE model levels, with no discernible deficiencies at the expected level of preparedness and understanding, delivering constructive feedback to peers.	5.5 pts Completed, two (2) responses reflect incomplete delivery of constructive feedback using three components of the RISE model levels, with few deficiencies at the expected level of preparedness and understanding, delivering constructive feedback to peers.	4 pts Completed, two (2) responses reflect incomplete delivery of constructive feedback using two components of the RISE model levels, demonstrating minor deficiencies at the expected level of preparedness or understanding and delivering constructive feedback to peers.	2.5 pts Completed, two (2) responses reflect incomplete delivery of constructive feedback using one component of the RISE model level, demonstrating major deficiencies of preparedness or understanding and delivering constructive feedback to peers.	0 pts Not completed or completed insufficiently; demonstrated no preparedness or no understanding	7 pts
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**Current DB Rubric: Contribution - Engagement**

**Figure 4:** Existing AOD Grading Rubric: Criterion 2/Learning Outcomes

For example, a student could be awarded a high score only if all four RISE elements were present. Based on related grading rubric literature, it was determined that this proficiency level configuration lacked flexibility and nuance. Moreover, it had been the team experiences that for a number of years students had reported confusion about expectations for this form of assessment as well as the experience that numerous instructors in the program found the rubric difficult to apply consistently.

At that stage, the team decided that in order for us to make progress, the target and future AOD grading rubric would need to be

class based. This was an agreed-upon concept based on theory that places emphasis on learning as interactive and social (Bandura, 1969). This the theoretical orientation was also influenced from a Community of Inquiry model for design and planning. In this model, students start, finish, and submit work on the same schedule although it can be flexible within the week of instruction. In essence, all students are working on the same assignment topics and tasks—often together in the same week. We were also drawn to the Boetcher and Conrad (2001) commentary regarding simple 3 x 3 grading rubrics (Figure 5).

<b>Draft Rubric for Discussion Forum Postings</b>			
<b>Desirable Characteristics</b>	<b>Poor: 1 point</b>	<b>Good: 2 points</b>	<b>Excellent: 3 points</b>
Timely and quantitative discussion contributions	One to two postings per discussion; somewhat distributed, with first posting later in the week.	Two to three postings per discussion; postings distributed throughout the week, with first posting occurring early in the week.	Three to four postings per discussion; well distributed throughout the week, with first posting midway through week.
Responsiveness to discussion; demonstration of knowledge; understanding gained from assigned reading	Postings had questionable relationship to reading material or topic under discussion, with little or no evidence of understanding.	Clear that readings were understood and that concepts and insights were incorporated into responses.	Very clear that readings were understood and ideas were incorporated well into responses; postings continued the comments and insights of other learners.
Followed online protocols for clear communications; correct grammar, spelling, and understandable statement flow	Two to three online protocols were not followed; organization unclear.	Most online protocols were followed; statements were mostly organized and clear.	All online protocols were followed; statements were well organized and clear.

**Figure 5:** Simple 3 by 3 Grading Rubric

In one of the early drafts, a revised structure with four proficiency levels was discussed and integrated: Exemplary (7), Proficient (5), Limited (3), and Unsatisfactory (0). The design team

also restructured the rubric so that “Exemplary” appeared on the left rather than the right, reversing the typical low-to-high order to visually emphasize student achievement (Figure 6).

	Exemplary 20 Points	Proficient 17 Points	Limited 13 Points	Unsatisfactory 10 Points
<b>Application to Instruction: toolbox of ideas from personal practice and relation to colleagues (7 POINTS)</b>	Relevant course topics are connected to teaching practice throughout the response. Strong mastery of the subject matter is demonstrated.  and / or  Discussion postings provide evidence of strong, reflective, thought pertaining to personal perspectives, and how the modules learning objectives relate to professional teaching development.	Some of the appropriate course topics are identified and are connected to teaching practice. A few misconceptions may be present.  and / or  Discussion postings provide moderate evidence of reflective thought pertaining to personal perspectives and professional teaching development.	Minimal effort made to incorporate course topics as connected to teaching practice. Frequent misconceptions or inaccuracies are present.  and / or  Discussion postings provide some evidence of reflective thought pertaining to personal perspectives and professional teaching development.	No effort made to incorporate course topics as connected to teaching practice. Frequent misconceptions or inaccuracies are present.  and / or  Discussion postings provide little or no evidence of reflective thought pertaining to personal perspectives and professional teaching development.
<b>Engagement (6 POINTS)</b>	Discussion postings, actively stimulate and sustain further discussion by building on peers' responses, including building a focused argument around a specific issue, or asking a new related question, or making an oppositional statement, supported by personal experience or related research.	Discussion, postings contribute to the classes, ongoing conversations as evidenced by affirming statements or references to relevant research or, asking related questions, making an oppositional statement, supported by any personal experience or related research.	Discussion postings, sometimes contribute to ongoing conversations as evidenced by affirming statements or references to relevant research or, asking related questions, or making an oppositional statement, supported by any personal experience or related research.	Discussion postings, do not contribute to ongoing conversations or respond to peers' postings. There's no evidence of replies to questions or comments or as new related questions or comments.
<b>Writing Quality and Clarity: APA, formatting quality, grammar, etiquette. (5 POINTS)</b>	Writing is extremely clear, engaging, and appropriate. Writing is free of grammar, mechanics, and spelling errors.	Writing is generally clear, though issues with organization, style, and/or tone may be present. Some minor grammar, mechanics, and spelling errors may be present.	Issues with organization, style, and/or tone make it difficult to understand the message. Frequent grammar, mechanics, and spelling errors are present.	Postings had questionable formatting quality presented in terms of multiple components such as coherence and clarity, grammar, mechanics, spelling, APA format.

Figure 6: Early Team Draft

This new rubric included revised criteria for Application to Instruction, Engagement, academic Writing Quality. One element not included was timeliness. After some discussion, the design

team included more development for a draft to present to the online learning team and department (Figure 7).

Criteria	Exemplary: 7	Proficient: 5	Limited: 3	Unsatisfactory: 0
<b>Relating Theory to Practice: Using Concepts and Terminology (Original Posting)</b>  (9 points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Original discussion posting displays an excellent understanding of the required readings by identifying <b>three</b> components of the reading and relates it to their own experience. <input type="checkbox"/> Grammar, punctuation and appropriate APA format for in-text citations and a reference list are accurate without error.	<input type="checkbox"/> Original discussion posting displays an excellent understanding of the required readings by identifying <b>two</b> components of the reading and relates it to their own experience. <input type="checkbox"/> Grammar, punctuation and appropriate APA format for in-text citations and a reference list are accurate without minimal error.	<input type="checkbox"/> Original discussion posting displays an introductory understanding of the required readings by identifying <b>one</b> component of the reading and relates it to their own experience. <input type="checkbox"/> Grammar, punctuation and appropriate APA format for in-text citations and a reference list are inaccurate with multiple errors.	<input type="checkbox"/> Original discussion posting shows little or no evidence that readings were completed or understood with <b>no link to the reading material</b> . <input type="checkbox"/> There are numerous grammar and punctuation errors.
<b>Application to Instruction: Connecting Concepts to Personal Practice</b>  (9 points)	<input type="checkbox"/> All responses support content derived from the reading with <b>abundant evidence</b> referenced that demonstrates the connection between course topics to teaching practice and personal perspective.	<input type="checkbox"/> Most responses support content derived from the reading with <b>some evidence</b> referenced that demonstrates the connection between course topics to teaching practice and personal perspective.	<input type="checkbox"/> Responses are not directly derived from assigned content nor personal practice. <input type="checkbox"/> There is <b>little evidence</b> that connects course topics to teaching practice and personal perspective.	<input type="checkbox"/> No connection to reading or personal practice is evident.
<b>Engagement: Connecting to Peers by Enhancing Collaborative Discussion (Response Postings)</b>  (7 points)	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate makes <b>more than one response</b> posting that <b>actively stimulates and enhances further discussion</b> by building on peers' responses, suggesting improved practices, and identifying additional resources to support the profession.	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate makes <b>more than one response</b> that <b>minimally contributes or sustains existing discussion</b> by confirming peers' responses or recognizing suggested improved practices. No additional resources are identified.	<input type="checkbox"/> Candidate makes <b>only one response</b> that either <b>minimally</b> contributes or sustains existing further discussion by building on peers' responses, confirming suggested improved practices and resources to support the profession. No additional resources are identified.	<input type="checkbox"/> No responses posted.

Figure 7: Final Team Draft Grading Rubric

Next, for comparison's sake the design team incorporated suggestions from AI-generated rubrics that aligned with best practices. ChatGPT's rubric included categories such as writing

mechanics, peer interaction, timeliness, and evidence-based responses.

Figure 8: Artificial Intelligence-Generated Grading Rubric for Comparison

Criteria	Proficient (6 Points)	Developing (4–5 Points)	Needs Improvement (2–3 Points)	Not Evident (0–1 Point)
Clarity of Expression (Clearly and effectively communicates ideas)	Exceptionally clear, well-structured, and articulate. Writing enhances comprehension and engagement.	Generally clear and organized, with minor issues that do not hinder understanding.	Understandable but lacks polish or clarity; difficult to follow.	Incomprehensible or not submitted.
Depth of Analysis (Demonstrates critical thinking and understanding)	Insightful, critical analysis with strong supporting evidence and multiple perspectives.	Sound analysis with relevant examples or evidence.	Minimal analysis or simple restatements; lacks depth.	No analysis or completely off-topic.



Engagement with Peers (Fosters meaningful interaction and dialogue)	Thoughtfully responds to peers, encourages dialogue, and deepens the discussion.	Responds to peers meaningfully, though may not extend dialogue.	Rarely engages with peers or responses are vague.	No peer engagement.
Timeliness (Meets participation deadlines)	All posts submitted on time or early; supports timely discussion.	Most posts submitted on time; minor delays may occur.	Frequently late; affects the flow of discussion.	Posts are consistently late or not submitted.
Respect & Professionalism (Demonstrates inclusive and professional tone)	Consistently respectful, inclusive, and professional in tone and language.	Generally respectful and appropriate; minor lapses in tone.	Tone may be dismissive, too informal, or show limited inclusivity.	Disrespectful or unprofessional conduct.
Mechanics & Clarity (Grammar, spelling, and readability)	Virtually error-free writing. Sentences are clear and well-structured.	Minor grammar/spelling issues that do not interfere with understanding.	Several errors that distract from meaning.	Major errors that significantly hinder understanding.

Its structured scoring—ranging from “Proficient” to “Not Evident”—offered a comparative benchmark. The AI-generated framework informed language clarity and performance indicators in our draft grading rubric.

The revised rubric emphasized class pacing, alignment with instructional objectives, and clearer expectations for both peer interaction and professional communication. For example, an “Exemplary” post under the engagement category required more than one response to peers that stimulated further discussion and suggested improved practices. By contrast, “Unsatisfactory” denoted no peer response, a common but previously unaddressed issue.

## Discussion

In this section, a connection is made between the case study experience and the literature. It highlights how the case aligns with or contradicts previously reported academic research. The discussion also investigates several implications for practice, policy, or further research. The rubric revision process highlighted several critical intersections between theory and practice in both Bandura’s social learning theory and the Community of Inquiry model which supported our emphasis on interaction. Moreover, the literature hinted at an urgency for clear, simple, and aligned elements in a grading rubric for an AOD. The reflective design process allowed for not only scholarly grounding but also for practical application and adaptation. Additionally, consulting the original RISE Model author facilitated to care clarification of misapplication it’s intentional use. This led to more appropriate integration. Meanwhile, AI-generated drafts provided unanticipated language options and structural inspiration that greatly enhanced the Team’s final product. These tools proved especially useful during early brainstorming phases, suggesting that AI can support (not replace) human judgment in pedagogical design. This is especially relevant since humans are currently teaching the courses and must make a number of decisions based on assessment and evaluation processes.

There are multiple implications for teacher preparation programs in online delivery options that use AOD’s and structured grading rubrics. A well-aligned rubric supports fair and intentional grading based on equity and pedagogical and administrative rationale. It also helps future educators determine ways for designing assessments and communicate their expectations for learning

and evaluation as they apply theory to their own instructional planning and implementation. The grading rubric the Team created reinforces the legitimate academic expectation that on-line students in teacher preparation programs are obligated to apply learning to practice, use APA formatting, and engage substantively with peers. Both Bandura’s social learning theory and the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework mentioned earlier allow for suitable connections between theory and practice with the AOD grading rubric revision process. Bandura (1969) points out that learning occurs in social contexts and with behaviors that are modeled. This connects directly with the team’s emphasis on interaction and collaborative engagement through the grading rubric design revision. The three-part structure of different types of presence in the CoI framework also matches the grading rubric, revision criteria, linked with instructional alignment, parent engagement, and clear expectations.

Simple, transparent grading structures are highly recommended in the literature which aligns with the findings from this current article. By using a streamlined 3 x 3 rubric rather than a complicated multi element criterion for each category, also coordinates with best practices for online teaching, pedagogy and guidance. Previous research that has examined topics concerning grading rubric ambiguity and misalignment are alleviated through the design team’s process of simplification. This accounts for clarity on the part of instructors, and also to enhance student understandings of teacher expectations.

Furthermore, this current reflective practitioner study challenges Fehrman and Watson’s (2021) observation regarding lack of consensus on best practices for AODs. Through integration of theoretical models, practitioner insights, and AI-generated suggestions, this case study offers a replicable research framework for grading rubric revision that contributes to the discourse in the academic literature on AOD assessment. Consultation with Emily Wray, the creator of the RISE Model, also added clarification to appropriate use of this measurement tool by addressing its misapplications noted in earlier implementations. This strengthened the importance of fidelity to original AOD assessment frameworks.

One unique component for grading development was the use of AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT). AI offered the design team with the brainstorming and drafting phases by offering alternative lan-

guage and structural ideas for enhancement of the final grading rubric product. In this case, human judgment was not replaced by AI use. Nevertheless, this finding coordinates with current AI-assisted instructional design research which implies that generative tools can augment educator expertise while not completely replacing it.

All of these findings point to meaningful implications for teacher education programs. Stronger connections between theory and practice shine through as key points, partly in tandem with demonstrating that well-aligned grading rubrics promote equitable grading and clear communication of academic performance expectations on the part of teacher candidates. One example from the literature indicated that grading rubrics can positively impact academic performance, self-regulated learning, and self-efficacy. This study provides evidence of these benefits through the promotion of transparency with the grading process, instructional relevance, and student engagement centered on revising an AOD grading rubric.

## Conclusion

This section summarizes the key insights from the study, reflects on its limitations, and suggests next steps or broader applications. It reinforces the value of combining literature review with personal case study analysis in educational research. Through the demonstration of how a reflective practitioner-led grading rubric revision process can provide links between scholarly frameworks and real-world classroom needs, this research contributes purposely to educational theory and instructional practice. The revised grading rubric reinforces the three critical elements of effective online learning environments: collaborative engagement, cognitive presence, and instructional clarity by connection to both Bandura's social learning theory and the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework. This case study also demonstrates the value of Boettcher and Conrad's (2021) suggestions for simple, transparent grading rubric structures allows for demonstrating operationalization of the radical principles and teacher education programs.

The case study also offers a replicable model from a position of practicality for grading rubric revision by highlighting team-based collaboration, consultation with original model creators, and the experimentation of AI-assisted drafting. Together these three elements increased grading rubric, clarity, instructional alignment, and engagement for students. The final revised AOD grading rubric can be used as a template for other programs that are interested in improving the assessment practices in asynchronous online learning.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. There are several limitations regarding the current case study research. First of all, this case study only involved one individual teacher preparation program with a small faculty team. Thus, generalizability is rather limited. Additionally, there was no formal process of longitudinal, testing or validation across any number of courses nor additional institutions. Finally, even though there were AI tools that were utilized during the process, the purpose was exploratory and experimental at best without any official systematic evaluation.

Research that could be conducted in the future can provide op-

portunities for elaboration on some of these limitations. One type of study could be a comparison of different institutions in order to assess grading rubric effectiveness across different educational context. Another opportunity would be to implement a variety of student feedback mechanisms, which would serve as an evaluation of grading rubric clarity, and how students perceive the fairness process in the assessment of on my discussions. Another possibility is to explore grading rubric revision with long-term possibilities. Elements that could be explored would be student performance, student engagement in the AOD, and other topics presented in literature, such as self-regulated learning. A final concept that could be included in future studies is examination of ethical and pedagogical, implications for the utilization of AI tools into instructional design, such as with grading rubrics and other aspects of AOD's. The study has shown that there are favorable outcomes for the process of combining literature. Review with a practitioner based reflective case study. An analysis such as this can produce actionable insights for educational research. In this case for the teacher preparation program in question can foster educators to interpret grading rubric, design and revision as an ongoing continuous and dynamic process that can be informed by theoretical frameworks, collaboration with colleagues, and innovation with new technologies, such as artificial intelligence.

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