Heidi Goodrich, a rubrics expert, defines a rubric as "a scoring tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work or 'what counts.'" So a rubric for a multimedia project will list the things the student must have included to receive a certain score or rating. Rubrics help the student figure out how their project will be evaluated. Goodrich quotes a student who said he didn't much care for rubrics because "if you get something wrong, your teacher can prove you knew what you were supposed to do."

Generally rubrics specify the level of performance expected for several levels of quality. These levels of quality may be written as different ratings (e.g., Excellent, Good, Needs Improvement) or as numerical scores (e.g., 4, 3, 2, 1) which are then added up to form a total score which then is associated with a grade (e.g., A, B, C, etc).

Many rubrics also specify the level of assistance (e.g., Independently, With Minimal Adult Help; With Extensive Adult Help) for each quality rating.

Rubrics can help students and teachers define "quality". Rubrics can also help students judge and revise their own work before handing in their assignments.