

ANALYTIC RUBRICS FOR RESEARCH PROPOSAL DEFENSE AND SCHOLARLY WRITING IN S2 PAI UNZAH

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Keywords:	Abstract
<i>Analytic Rubric, Research Proposal, Scholarly Writing, Oral Defense, Graduate Assessment</i>	<i>This article formulates an analytic rubric framework for assessing research proposal defense and scholarly writing in the S2 PAI Program at Universitas Islam Zainul Hasan Genggong. Graduate research assessment frequently involves complex judgments about problem significance, theoretical coherence, methodological rigor, ethical responsibility, argumentation, and oral defense, yet criteria may remain implicit or be applied inconsistently. Using qualitative descriptive library research, the study synthesizes literature on rubric design, constructive alignment, feedback, oral assessment, and research competence. The findings indicate that proposal and writing assessment should use separate but connected criteria for problem formulation, literature synthesis, conceptual framework, method alignment, evidence-based argument, academic integrity, feasibility, and response to questioning. Performance descriptors must distinguish levels of quality without turning research into a mechanical checklist. Assessor calibration, annotated exemplars, criterion-level feedback, student self-assessment, and revision are necessary for reliability and learning. The study concludes that analytic rubrics can improve transparency and defensibility while preserving expert judgment when descriptors focus on evidence and relationships among research components.</i>

INTRODUCTION

Research proposal assessment is a high-stakes moment in a master's program. Decisions made during proposal review influence data collection, supervision, thesis completion, and publication potential. Despite its importance, students may receive broad comments such as 'strengthen the theory' or 'improve the method' without knowing which evidence is missing or how quality will be judged (Reddy & Andrade, 2010).

Scholarly writing and oral defense involve related but distinct competencies. A written proposal demonstrates problem formulation, literature synthesis, conceptual coherence, method design, and academic communication. The defense demonstrates ownership, responsiveness, and the ability to justify decisions under questioning. Combining these dimensions into a single holistic impression can obscure strengths and weaknesses (Joughin, 1998).

Analytic rubrics divide complex performance into criteria and describe levels of quality. They can make expectations transparent, support consistent judgment, and guide feedback. However, poorly designed rubrics may reward compliance with format while

discouraging originality. The challenge is to express rigorous standards without reducing research to a checklist (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007).

This article aims to formulate an analytic rubric framework for research proposal defense and scholarly writing in S2 PAI UNZAH. The study is conceptual, not an audit of current assessment. It focuses on criterion design, descriptor quality, assessor calibration, feedback use, and the relationship between written and oral evidence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rubrics and transparent judgment

A rubric is a scoring guide that identifies criteria and describes performance levels. Analytic rubrics provide separate judgments for each criterion, allowing specific feedback and diagnostic interpretation. Their value depends on the clarity, relevance, and discriminating power of descriptors rather than the presence of a table alone (Reddy & Andrade, 2010).

Research suggests that rubrics can support reliability and learning, but effects vary according to design and implementation. Descriptors should refer to observable features, such as the integration of literature or alignment between questions and methods, rather than vague adjectives such as excellent or adequate (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007).

Constructive alignment in research assessment

Constructive alignment requires assessment criteria to reflect intended research competencies. If outcomes include producing original, ethical, and methodologically defensible research, the rubric must evaluate relationships among the problem, literature, theory, method, data plan, and expected contribution. Formatting accuracy cannot substitute for conceptual coherence (Biggs, 1996).

The oral defense also requires aligned prompts. Questions should test the reasoning represented in the proposal, not unrelated factual recall. Students may be asked to justify sampling, explain an alternative design, identify limitations, or respond to an ethical concern. The defense becomes additional evidence rather than a performance of confidence.

Feedback, calibration, and student use

Rubrics improve learning when students use them before submission, analyze exemplars, self-assess drafts, and revise after feedback. Criterion-level comments should identify the evidence supporting a judgment and indicate a realistic next step. Scores without explanation provide limited guidance (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Assessor calibration is necessary because reviewers may interpret descriptors differently. Calibration involves independently scoring sample work, comparing reasons, discussing borderline cases, and revising descriptors. The goal is not identical judgment but a shared understanding of standards and acceptable variation (Brookhart, 2013).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used qualitative descriptive library research and conceptual synthesis. Literature on rubric design, research assessment, constructive alignment, oral assessment, formative feedback, and academic integrity was reviewed. The analysis identified criteria, descriptor principles, assessor processes, feedback mechanisms, and implementation risks relevant to graduate research proposals.

The proposed framework was checked through theoretical triangulation across assessment reliability, learning-oriented assessment, and research-method competence. No proposal scores or examiner interviews were collected. Consequently, the model requires expert validation, pilot scoring, inter-rater analysis, and student usability testing before institutional adoption.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Defining connected research criteria

The first finding is that criteria should represent the logic of research rather than separate document sections. A significant problem must be supported by a clear gap; the literature review must synthesize rather than list sources; the conceptual framework must guide the questions; and the method must generate evidence capable of answering those questions.

Recommended written criteria include problem significance, originality, literature synthesis, conceptual coherence, question-method alignment, sampling or data-source justification, analysis plan, research ethics, feasibility, scholarly argument, and citation integrity. The relative weight of each criterion may vary by qualitative, quantitative, mixed-method, or development research.

Designing defensible performance descriptors

Each descriptor should explain how evidence changes across levels. For example, low-level method alignment may show a named method without connection to the questions; middle performance may show partial alignment with unresolved procedural gaps; high performance demonstrates coherent justification, feasible procedures, and awareness of limitations.

Descriptors should avoid counting features when quality depends on relationships. A long bibliography is not equivalent to a synthesized review, and the number of theories does not indicate conceptual strength. Language should permit disciplinary variation while maintaining minimum standards of evidence, ethics, and logical coherence.

Integrating written proposal and oral defense

The written rubric and defense rubric should be related but not identical. Oral criteria include ownership of the study, clarity of explanation, responsiveness to questions, justification of choices, recognition of limitations, and ability to revise. Communication style should be distinguished from substantive understanding to reduce bias against less fluent speakers.

Examiners should record brief evidence for each oral judgment. Standard prompt domains can improve comparability while allowing follow-up questions. A post-defense revision matrix, showing each recommendation and response, converts the examination into a learning process rather than a one-time gatekeeping event.

Calibration and the risk of rubric rigidity

Rubrics do not eliminate professional judgment. Overly detailed descriptors may create false objectivity, encourage formulaic proposals, and make assessors focus on boxes rather than the research as a whole. Holistic judgment remains necessary to consider integration, originality, and overall feasibility.

A balanced procedure combines analytic scores, a holistic recommendation, written reasons, and moderation for divergent decisions. Annual calibration can use anonymized proposals and defense recordings. Students should also be informed that meeting rubric descriptors is necessary but does not guarantee a strong contribution without intellectual coherence and academic honesty (Ramadani & Sofa, 2025).

Synthesis of discussion

The proposed framework treats the rubric as a shared language for research quality. Criteria map the logic of inquiry, descriptors identify evidence at progressive levels, the oral defense verifies ownership and adaptability, and revision documents learning. Calibration and moderation protect consistency, while holistic judgment preserves the complexity and originality of graduate research.

Table 1. Research proposal and defense rubric structure

Assessment Criterion	Primary Evidence	Competence Demonstrated
Research coherence	Problem-theory-method alignment	Logical inquiry design
Methodological rigor	Justified procedures	Defensible evidence plan
Scholarly writing	Synthesis and argument	Academic communication
Oral defense	Response and revision	Ownership and adaptability

The novelty of this article lies in designing a connected dual-evidence rubric in which the written proposal and oral defense examine complementary aspects of the same research reasoning. The framework emphasizes relationships among research components, explicit evidence for assessor judgments, and a mandatory revision matrix, thereby linking reliability with formative development.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that analytic rubrics can improve the transparency, consistency, and educational value of research proposal defense and scholarly writing assessment in S2 PAI UNZAH. Strong rubrics evaluate the coherence of inquiry, methodological justification, scholarly argument, ethics, and ownership rather than merely document completeness.

Implementation should include annotated exemplars, student self-assessment, assessor calibration, criterion-level evidence, moderation, and post-defense revision. The model remains conceptual. Future research should test descriptor clarity, inter-rater reliability, student perceptions, predictive relationships with thesis completion, and differences across research approaches.

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