

FAQ

Frequently-Asked-Questions about RUBRICATE PLUS

GENERAL QUESTIONS

What is the difference between Rubricate PLUS Junior and Rubricate PLUS Senior?

Rubricate PLUS Junior and **Rubricate PLUS Senior** are both software packages which allow the user to plan and design assessment strategies, create assessment tools and manage the assessment process. It is specifically designed for the South African learning environment. **Rubricate PLUS Junior** meets the needs of the primary school teacher (Grades R to 7) and the databases of criteria for creating assessment tools are organised into the individual Grades e.g. a Grade 1 teacher will require only the Grade 1 database to implement his or her assessment. **Rubricate PLUS Senior** meets the needs of the high school teacher (Grades 7 to 12) and the databases of criteria for creating assessment tools are organised into the individual Subjects e.g. a Mathematics teacher will require only the Mathematics database to implement his or her assessment. There is also a more fundamental difference in the way that the two software packages have been conceptualised. **Rubricate PLUS Junior** is content-free. It does not provide any specific criteria for content or contexts. Content and contexts are supplied through a Curriculum Support document in the on-screen Help facility. **Rubricate PLUS Senior** includes criteria to assess all aspects of the Subject. **Rubricate PLUS Senior** provides content- and context-specific criteria for assessment.

What is the difference between Rubricate + Design, + Create and + Record?

Rubricate PLUS is made up of three different but completely integrated computer programmes:

Rubricate + Design

... guides the teacher through the planning and design of their assessment strategy to create an Assessment Plan and corresponding Learner Task Guide. It facilitates important decision-making about timing, purpose, methods, techniques, tools and principles of assessment. It aligns assessment with learning targets, identifies criteria for assessment and integrates assessment in effective classroom practice.

Rubricate + Create

... assists the teacher to create a unique and customised Assessment Tool (like an anecdotal record, checklist, rating scale, performance list, holistic or analytic rubric) completely correlated to the curriculum and relevant to the specific grade and subject for any learning activity and to meet any learning target. It can be used at basic and advanced levels to develop skills in an inexperienced teacher and to save time and effort for an experienced teacher thereby promoting staff development and teacher load-sharing.

Rubricate + Record

... provides administrative support to the busy teacher, making Assessment Records by organising learner achievements in class lists to simplify accurate recording and reporting of continuous and summative assessment.

What is a Rubricate PLUS database?

A **Rubricate PLUS** database is a file that the **Rubricate PLUS** programme accesses and uses to design assessment plans and create assessment tools for the **Rubricate PLUS** user. This database file is comprised of thousands of assessment criteria. These criteria are organised into categories to facilitate easy access by the user. Each criterion has four described levels of performance corresponding to the required rating levels for that particular Grade or Phase.

Can I change any of the criteria in the Rubricate PLUS database?

Yes – you can edit and change any criteria or level descriptors. This only makes a change in the database entry in the assessment tool being created. Clicking on 'Edit Entry' in the bottom part of the screen opens a window that allows any details of the entry to be changed and saved (but just in that assessment tool). When the assessment tool is saved, that changed entry is saved in that tool. The **Rubricate PLUS** database does not change at all.

Can I add entries to a Rubricate PLUS database?

Yes – you can add your own entries to the database. New entries can be added to the database by clicking on 'Advanced' on the taskbar and selecting 'Own Entries'. A new entry can be added into the database and placed in the database structure. These new entries can also be exported to a flash drive and given to a colleague to import into their **Rubricate PLUS** database if they have the same version.

Can I use Rubricate PLUS if I do not have Microsoft Word or Excel?

Rubricate + Create, the assessment tool creation programme, is independent of MS Word and Excel. All assessment tools except anecdotal records can still be created without MS Word and Excel. Although there are less formatting options available, all entries can still be edited and added to, but visual details like the font – type, style, size, etc. column and row sizes and effects like shading and colour are not available. **Rubricate + Design** and **Rubricate + Record** require Microsoft Word or Excel to function fully.

Rubricate PLUS Junior QUESTIONS

What does a Rubricate PLUS Junior database cover?

Rubricate PLUS Junior databases are organised into the separate Grades. For example the Grade 1 database will include criteria for assessment in all Subjects as required for Grade 1 learners. A Grade 1 teacher will require only a Grade 1 database to meet all of the assessment requirements for a Grade 1 class of learners.

Why are some categories colour-coded in Foundation Phase databases?

In the Foundation Phase, some categories of criteria are applicable to all three Subjects: Languages; Mathematics and Life Skills. While these categories are displayed in the Life Skills Subject, they are indicated using a different colour to remind you of their integration. Users need to be aware that when a Category name is blue and yellow rather than black and blue, then the criteria in that category must be carefully considered as some of these could be used in more than one Subject.

Where can I find the specified content and contexts for each Subject?

Rubricate PLUS Junior does not provide specific content and contexts in the actual criteria for assessment. The specified content and contexts for a particular grade can be accessed by clicking on 'Help' on the taskbar and selecting 'Curriculum Support'. A Curriculum Support document for each grade identifies the core knowledge and concepts, content, focus, contexts and recommended texts as specified by current educational policy. This Curriculum Support is able to be updated from the Rubricating Works website www.rubricate.co.za through the period of curriculum change.

Why is Grade 7 included in Rubricate PLUS Junior and Rubricate PLUS Senior?

Grade 7, being in the Senior Phase of GET, should be, and is included with Grades 8 and 9 in **Rubricate PLUS Senior**. As most **Rubricate** users are either primary schools or high schools, this would then require a primary school to buy a **Rubricate PLUS Senior** licence and all the Subject databases for just one grade (Grade 7). Thus it was decided to include a Grade 7 database in the **Rubricate PLUS Junior** package too.

Rubricate PLUS SENIOR QUESTIONS

What does a Rubricate PLUS Senior database cover?

Rubricate PLUS Senior databases are organised into the separate Subjects. For example the *Social Sciences* database will include criteria for assessment in the Social Sciences Subject for learners from Grade 7 to Grade 9. A Social Sciences teacher will require only a *Social Sciences* database to meet all of the assessment requirements for this Subject in the Senior Phase of the GET band. A *Design* database will include criteria for assessment in the Design Subject for learners from Grade 10 to Grade 12. A Design teacher will require only a *Design* database to meet all of the assessment requirements for this Subject in the FET (Schools) band. Some databases, like Life Orientation, include criteria for both GET Life Orientation and FET Life Orientation. On entering the **Rubricate + Create** programme, the user chooses whether they want to create assessment tools for Grade 7 to 9 learners (GET) or whether they want to create assessment tools for Grade 10 to 12 learners (FET).

What are the Skill Types in the database?

Due to the fact that each Subject database is comprised of hundreds of entries (over a thousand, in most cases), it was necessary to devise a structure to facilitate easy access to these entries. In order for the **Rubricate PLUS** programme to perform the required functions, it needs to access databases with the same structure. This means that the same structure for very different Subjects had to be devised. It was decided to divide all databases into the following three Skill Types:

- **Conceptual Skills** – this refers to the ‘knowing’ of the subject – the concepts and content;
- **Practical Skills** – this refers to the ‘doing’ of the subject - the actual skills required and used by an expert in this subject when working in the field;
- **Work Skills** – this refers to the general classroom activities and behaviours that a teacher might like to assess which are independent of their Subject e.g. group work, completing tasks, producing posters, punctuality etc.

It is essential to remember that the division into Conceptual and Practical Skills is artificial, and while this division exists in all **Rubricate PLUS Senior** databases, it has been conceived differently in the different databases. In some databases, the Conceptual Skills and Practical Skills may include the same categories, although these will obviously include different assessment criteria. The division into Conceptual and Practical Skills is by no means prescriptive and is actually not significant – it simply serves the purpose of enabling easy access for the user to a large body of information.

Why are there criteria included that are not evident in the policy documents?

Each **Rubricate PLUS Senior** database has been prepared from the relevant policy documents. However, all **Rubricate PLUS Senior** databases also include a very wide range of assessment criteria to stimulate the teacher in designing creative learning activities. In this spirit, **Rubricate PLUS Senior** databases do not define syllabus or structure of content, nor do they indicate in any way how topics should be taught or learnt.

Why are the same categories of criteria available sometimes for both GET and FET?

In some databases (Languages, Mathematics and Life Orientation), users are offered the option of using the same database for GET Grades and FET Grades. The reason for this is that the authoring teams conceptualised the databases to encompass the Subject in its broadness. They tried to include ALL aspects of the creative human activity that can be defined as that Subject. Obviously specified content from the relevant Subject policy documents were included, but so were many other aspects of the Subject that a teacher might choose to use. All **Rubricate PLUS Senior** databases include this very wide range of assessment criteria to stimulate the teacher in designing creative learning activities.

MORE Rubricate PLUS GENERAL QUESTIONS

Why are the level descriptors not more specific or more detailed?

In general, **Rubricate PLUS** databases balance the needs of the inexperienced teacher (to find the criteria they would like to use in their assessment tools) with the needs of the experienced teacher (to be able to create assessment tools for original and creative learning activities). It has been necessary that, in order to keep this balance, the databases take on a somewhat generic nature. Specific level descriptors, while providing the detail that an experienced teacher may want, may seriously limit the use of an entry. This means that many more of these specific entries then need to be added to the database which would result in potentially huge and unwieldy databases (they are already mostly over 1000 entries). Specific level descriptors can also cause some learners to 'fall through the gaps' resulting in completely ineffective assessment tools. This generic approach can be compensated for, by the ability to add the specifics required in a particular, unique learning activity via the use of the *Edit Entry* and *Own Entries* facilities.

Why are there no level descriptors for levels 2, 4 and 6 when I choose 7-levels?

Current assessment policy requires reporting achievement in Grades R to 12 to be on seven levels. For this reason, **Rubricate PLUS** databases were developed with the intention that most users would be creating assessment tools with seven levels (creation of assessment tools with between two to ten levels are possible using **Rubricate PLUS**). As many of the included criteria for assessment are very specific for use particularly in analytic rubrics, it was not always possible to write meaningful level descriptors to discriminate between performance on all seven levels. As the functioning of the programme is dependent on uniformity in the databases, it was decided to use the seven levels but to only create written level descriptors for four of these levels. (This is a common compromise evident in many of the U.S.A State Department of Education standardised rubrics used for assessment.) Thus, in each **Rubricate PLUS** database, the first level descriptor describes a level of performance that is Not Achieved (Level 1); the second level descriptor describes Moderate Achievement (Level 3); the third level descriptor describes Substantial Achievement (Level 5) and the fourth level descriptor describes Outstanding Achievement (Level 7).

What are the advantages of using Rubricate PLUS to design assessment tasks?

Rubricate PLUS guides the teacher through the vital decision-making required in the design of assessment strategies and tasks that strengthen teaching and learning – using assessment FOR learning. **Rubricate PLUS** translates effective assessment practice into effective classroom practice. In this process, **Rubricate PLUS** encourages and facilitates self-reflection and self-evaluation thereby enabling professional growth.

What are potential disadvantages of using Rubricate PLUS to design assessment tasks?

Rubricate PLUS makes the decision-making process required in assessment design so accessible, quick and easy that it is possible to mechanically make an assessment plan and bypass the important thinking that is needed behind it. It is very important for the teacher to pay attention to each step of the process and to clearly make these decisions in the context of the specific assessment task planned.

What are the advantages of using Rubricate PLUS to create assessment tools?

Rubricate PLUS is a massive time-saving device for the experienced teacher, providing the formatting structure and basic details of any assessment tool. Rather than create these tools from scratch, specific, detailed tools can be edited and written. For the less experienced teacher, **Rubricate PLUS** is a developmental tool for the creation of the assessment tools. As **Rubricate PLUS** is correlated with the policy documents, teachers can be sure that the assessment tools they are creating are relevant in the South African context. In moving from creating simple assessment tools like rating scales and performance lists to more complex tools like rubrics, teachers can develop an understanding of what constitutes achievement and quality at each of the specified levels.

What are the potential disadvantages of using Rubricate PLUS to create assessment tools?

Rubricate PLUS was not devised to be used as is – in any learning activity. Indeed, it is very easy simply to click on criteria to add them to an assessment tool, click on 'print', and then use without any modifications. This is not recommended. One of the key advantages of using detailed assessment tools is how they focus a teacher on all of the different components in a learning environment and **Rubricate PLUS** should not bypass this very important reflection. **Rubricate PLUS** does not provide a complete and prescriptive assessment tool without considered input from the teacher. It rather provides a comprehensive assessment *framework*. Once criteria have been selected and added to create the assessment tool, each criterion should be considered individually and using the edit facility (or new entry facility) should be tailored to the particular activity the teacher has designed and planned. Sometimes it may be necessary to write completely new level descriptors. In this case, add the entry to your 'Own Entries' so that you can use it again in another tool or share it with a colleague assessing a similar task.

What are the advantages of using Rubricate PLUS to compile assessment records?

Rubricate PLUS enables the teacher to compile assessment results into comprehensive assessment records for continuous and summative assessment. These assessment records can be generated for simple reporting, using either performance levels, percentages or both, at just a click of a button. **Rubricate PLUS** provides electronic assessment records in Microsoft Excel which can be shared with school administration software packages that are compatible with MS Excel.

What are potential disadvantages of using Rubricate PLUS to compile assessment records?

There are seemingly no disadvantages to managing the administrative part of the assessment process on a computer rather than on paper as the risks of loss of data exist no matter what method is used.