

Socratic Seminar Rubric

Four criteria, four levels, no participation count. Copy it, cut it, change the language to match your school's scale. Built for grades 6–12.

These four measure the things a student controls, that leave evidence, and that you would still care about if the student were quiet. That test eliminates most of what standard seminar rubrics score.

Criterion	1 — Beginning	2 — Developing	3 — Proficient	4 — Advanced
Preparation	Text arrived unmarked. No written question.	Text lightly marked. Question is general or copied from a prompt.	Text marked in several places. One specific written question tied to a passage.	Text marked with a reading in mind. Question names a passage and asks something the student genuinely cannot answer.
Use of the text	Contributions are opinion or recall with no reference to the text.	Refers to the text generally — “the author says” without locating it.	Points to specific lines or passages when making a claim.	Uses the text precisely, including passages that complicate their own position.
Treatment of others' ideas	Spoke over a classmate, or offered statements unconnected to what came before.	Waits and contributes, but contributions do not respond to anyone.	Builds on, questions, or disagrees with a specific classmate's point.	Responds to the strongest version of a classmate's point, and invites people who have not spoken.
Reflection afterward	No written reflection, or one that restates a position with no evidence of listening.	Describes what the seminar was about rather than what changed.	Names something that changed or sharpened, with a reason.	Names what changed, whose comment did it, and what would still need to be settled.

Say this to students before you hand it over: the level-one column describes something that happened on one day, not a kind of person. If a descriptor reads to a fourteen-year-old like a verdict on their character, rewrite it. That costs nothing and it changes whether they look at the rubric again.

What is not on it, and why

On the rubric	Deliberately not on it
Preparation you can see before anyone speaks	How many times a student spoke
Whether a claim points at the text	Manner, poise, volume and eye contact
What the student did with somebody else's idea	Conduct and compliance
What changed in their thinking, in writing	Confidence

One caution a department should talk through before adopting any seminar rubric: norms about interrupting, turn length and how openly you disagree vary by family and by community. Keep the third criterion pointed at what the student did with the idea — responded to it, questioned it, built on it — and away from manner and poise. If a descriptor could be satisfied by a confident student who said nothing of substance, it is scoring style.

Scoring Thirty Students in One Period

Three of the four criteria produce writing. That is deliberate — a rubric whose evidence is mostly written is one you can actually apply after the period ends.

Who scores what

Preparation	Teacher, from paper	Marked text and the written question, collected at the door. Scored before the seminar starts.
Use of the text	Teacher, live	Only for the rotating group of six in the circle that day.
Treatment of others' ideas	Teacher, live	Same six. Outer-circle observers record behaviour only, not scores.
Reflection afterward	Teacher, from paper	Students self-score first, then you read the written reflection.

Scoring thirty live is not possible and pretending otherwise is how rubrics get abandoned. Score the two paper criteria for everybody and the two live criteria for the six students in the circle that day. Rotate the six.

Student self-score — cut along the line and hand out

Criterion	My score	The evidence I would point to
Preparation	1 2 3 4	
Use of the text	1 2 3 4	
Treatment of others' ideas	1 2 3 4	
Reflection afterward	1 2 3 4	

What changed or sharpened in my thinking, whose comment did it, and what is still unsettled

This is the fourth criterion. It is only answerable by a student who was listening.

Rubrics have real but modest effects, and most of what they do is make the target visible before the work rather than justify a number after it. Hand this out before the seminar, not with the grade.