



4.1.7 Writing Performance Criteria for Individuals and Teams

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In the effort to elevate the personal and professional performance of individuals and groups, it is critical that one defines the criteria that describe expectations. These criteria provide explicit, simple-to-understand, realistic, and measurable standards of excellence. These criteria also provide vision and focus for many individual or group activities, building ownership over individual and group performance. This module outlines a method for creating performance criteria. It also provides example criteria that apply to administrators, faculty, and students across all domains of higher education.

Contexts for Individual and Group Performance

Performance criteria can be written for almost any performance situation. However, they are most beneficial when they relate to major responsibilities that affect others (Larson & Lafasto, 1989). For individuals, these include annual performance reviews, leadership roles, and mentoring relationships (Rose, 2006). For groups, these include committee work, classroom projects, and research teams (DIY, 2005; Airasian, 1991). One of the major benefits of a well-written set of performance criteria is their utility in serving as a base upon which standards can be set and results can be measured (Arter & McTighe, 2001). In all of these situations, performance criteria also generate a motivating vision for performers and associated stakeholders. Furthermore, clear performance criteria help anchor a variety of value-added assessment activities (4.1.4 *Assessment Methodology*, 4.1.9 *SII Method for Assessment Reporting*, 4.1.10 *Assessing Assessments*, and 4.1.11 *Peer Coaching*).

Considerations in Developing Performance Criteria

The following precepts are helpful in 1.5.4 *Writing Performance Criteria for a Program* and 2.4.9 *Writing Performance Criteria for a Course*. However, these are particularly relevant for developing performance criteria for individuals and groups because they are embedded in day-to-day behavior:

- Performance criteria are meant to provide a mental image of what best practices look like in a specific role or group charter
- It is often difficult to separate future expectations from past performance levels (both positive and negative)
- Not all performance criteria are applicable to every situation, individual performer, or group of performers, and should be contextualized based on individual performances
- Performance criteria are works-in-progress and should be recognized as such. Although sufficient time should be allocated to creating the criteria, it is reasonable to expect these criteria to evolve through regular use.

- Performance criteria support an assessment philosophy (4.1.3 *Mindset for Assessment* and 4.1.8 *Issues in Choosing Performance Criteria*)

Method for Development

Table 1 outlines steps for developing performance criteria that are applicable to both individual performers and groups. Each step is then described in more detail.

Table 1 **Method for Developing Performance Criteria for Individuals and Groups**

1. Identify key stakeholders for the performance.
2. Describe the performance expected by all stakeholders, including the performer(s).
3. Brainstorm to get a list of areas of quality that can be observed within the expected performance.
4. Minimize redundancy and overlap among the areas of quality.
5. Select and describe critical areas of quality that most contribute to the desired performance.
6. Articulate connections among aspects within each area of quality in terms of how they work together to produce the desired outcomes.
7. Develop clear statements of performance by synthesizing the relationships among aspects within each area of quality.
8. Sequence the statements to form a logical set.

Step 1—Identify key stakeholders for the performance.

This step can be accomplished by reflecting on a few basic questions:

- Who is affected by the results or products produced during the performance?
- Who will be most impacted?
- To whom do the performers report?
- Who will observe the performance?
- Within the context of the performance, with whom do the performers interact?

Step 2—Describe the performance expected by all stakeholders, including the performer(s).

Each of the various stakeholders identified in Step 1 may have a different set of expectations for the performance. Consider each stakeholder and, in a few sentences or a short list, describe the expectations for the performance by each individual or group. Analyzing these different perspectives will produce a more complete picture of the performance and will make it easier to identify the most important components of the performance. Taking multiple points of view assures that the performance criteria reflect a holistic perspective.

Step 3—Brainstorm to get a list of areas of quality that can be observed within the expected performance.

One can define areas of quality in a performance by thinking of tasks, products, processes, skills, or behaviors that need to be created or utilized during the performance. Each area of quality should be connected with an observable feature of the performance. Each area of quality should be understood by all of the stakeholders, and each area of quality should be significant enough that inattention to any of the areas would significantly compromise the quality of the performance. Each area of quality should be given a short descriptive name. Ideally, the initial list should be validated by different stakeholders.

Step 4—Minimize redundancy and overlap among the areas of quality.

At this point in the performance criteria development process, it is important to ensure that the qualities listed are not duplicative, and that multiple descriptions of the same quality within the performance do not create confusion. To ensure that the list of qualities is orthogonal or non-overlapping, you may want to ask yourself these questions:

- Are any of the qualities really subcategories of another quality?
- Is each quality independently observable from the other qualities?
- Does each quality add significant value to the performance?
- Do all of the qualities fit within the scope or boundaries of the performance?

Once these questions have been answered the list can be revised by removing, combining and/or renaming qualities. A final check on the reduced list can be made by asking, “Are all of the qualities of the individual or group performance still represented?”

Step 5—Select and describe critical areas of quality that most contribute to the desired performance.

Once the performance has been parsed into its various areas of quality, it can then be analyzed to determine where to focus performance analysis for maximum benefit. In other words, those areas of quality that contribute the most towards the expected performance need to be identified. Two ways to move through this process are to place a relative value, on a scale of 1-5 on each quality area; or to estimate the percent contribution of each area of quality to the total performance. This analysis or valuation of the areas of quality can be facilitated by answering the following questions in short phrases, thereby creating a list of aspects within each area of quality that bring them to life:

- What is happening when you observe this area of quality in action?
- What makes each of your areas of quality unique?
- In what ways does each area of quality contribute to the success of the performance?
- How does this area of quality manifest itself?
- How is this area of quality meeting the needs of the stakeholders?

Regardless of the method used to rank the critical areas of quality, the important point is to perform the ranking without worrying too much about the “correctness” of the ranking itself. One can always come back to the list at a later date and reassess. Additionally, one may want to revisit Step 4 at this point. The number of identified areas of quality should, however, depend on the size and scope of the performance, as well as the number of participating performers. For example, a two-week student project team assignment may require as few as three areas of quality while a campus-wide task force with a one year mission may require seven to ten.

Step 6—Articulate connections among aspects within each area of quality in terms of how they work together to produce the desired outcomes.

Once an area of quality has been explored and described, the ways in which the components of that description interact to create quality in the performance need to be understood. The connections between the aspects within an area of quality can be made relatively quickly by drawing a simple concept map connecting the aspects to the area of quality. Possible schemas to organize such a map are sequential, hierarchical, or spoke and wheel. Another way to describe connections within an area of quality is to list short phrases linking the terms and ideas you have identified. In any case, one concept map or set of ideas connecting aspects within the area of quality should be developed for each area of quality.

Table 2 **Selected Performance Criteria for Individuals and Groups**

Associate Vice Provost (Individual)	Innovation—Constantly identifies opportunities that advance institutional strategic goals by collecting, integrating, synthesizing, and disseminating best practices, ideas, and internal efforts to advance the service and research of the land grant mission
	Follow-Through—For every activity and project, the scope of work is designed for the time given, and the important and significant aspects are addressed; thus the outcomes exceed expectations within the time period given.
	Respect—Consistently has the background knowledge about the issue under consideration by listening to others' perspectives, thoughtfully considering the contrasting points of view, using evidence in decision-making, and delivering decisions in a respective manner
Tenure Track Faculty (Individual)	Teaching—Actively engages with students by creating rich learning environments, and at the same time, delivers a variety of courses within one's area of expertise that employ best practices in teaching and learning, utilize appropriate resources and technology, and allow both instructor and student to grow skills across multiple contexts within the discipline
	Research—Works to continuously evolve a research program that involves colleagues and students, and which includes the pursuit of independently funded activities which generate and disseminate new knowledge related to one's area of expertise through respected venues
	Service—Provides valuable and timely input and expertise for the benefit of the department, the university, and national organizations by participating in committee work, by regularly reviewing the scholarly work of others, and by acting as a mentor and advisor for graduate and undergraduate students
Task Force – Technology Advisory Committee (Group)	Campus Resource—The committee serves as a point of contact regarding questions and concerns about campus computing and associated technology on campus because its members are knowledgeable, and because they are committed to open and honest communication across all levels of the institution, and to the direct impact of their high-quality work on issues of substance.
	Systems Thinkers—The TAC capitalizes on their diverse membership and expertise as they consider issues from a holistic approach that involves all stakeholders (students, faculty, staff, and administration) and all areas of technology as they apply to the teaching and learning environment at the institution.
	Responsive—The committee is efficient in accomplishing its tasks of collecting information, regularly meeting to deliberate and vote on relevant issues, soliciting proposals, reviewing submissions and dispersing funds for classroom infrastructure, and in anticipating and planning for future needs.
Student Project Team (Group)	Personal Capacity—Individuals accomplish challenging design-related goals by employing goal-driven initiative, competence in problem solving, integrity, and professionalism, and by the ongoing reflective development of their personal abilities.
	Team Processes—The team achieves challenging goals, both in productivity and team function, through their strategic use of team resources, synergistic collaboration, decisions that add real value, and by their assessment-driven refinement of processes.
	Solution Requirements—Specifications reflect an in-depth understanding of customer needs, business issues, state of the art technology, and societal concerns about the solution, and they provide clear targets for development of a valuable solution.

Step 7—Develop clear statements of performance expectation by synthesizing the relationships among aspects within each area of quality.

It is important during this step in the process to articulate a set of performance criteria that clearly defines the expected individual or group performance. Clear your mind and look at one set of relationships from Step 6 for a few moments to remember its contents. Then, using those relationships, close your eyes or turn to a blank sheet of paper and visualize (from the point of view of an observer) how those relationships combine to create a high level of quality within the context of the performance. Keeping this mental image, write a statement in the form of a single sentence that incorporates the relationships to clearly reflect what happens when that high-level performance occurs for this specific area of quality. Finally, briefly edit your performance criteria statement for clarity or completeness if needed and repeat for each area of quality.

Step 8—Sequence the statements to form a logical set.

As a practice exercise for this step, place yourself in the role of an external observer who is watching an individual or group perform and ask:

- Which areas of quality in the performance might you observe first?
- Which areas of quality would matter most in an evaluation of the performance?
- Which areas of quality are the most general or the most specific?

At this point you should now have developed a set of performance criteria which can be applied in assessing and improving the performance.

Examples of Performance Criteria for Individuals and Groups

Table 2 provides examples of performance criteria for two individual and two group situations. Intentionally, these examples span administrators, faculty, and students.

Concluding Thoughts

Whether we do it for ourselves or for our students, developing clear and meaningful performance criteria takes practice. The methods presented in this module are well-founded, but they are non-trivial. During their initial use, it is easy to become overwhelmed by one or more of the steps. It is important to avoid the temptation to strive for immediate perfection. It is more practical and effective to use the steps iteratively, revisiting and refining a set of performance criteria for individuals or groups over a period of time.

References

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