

How to Make Learning Outcomes Useful: Write Performance Criteria

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Performance Criteria Support the Production of Learning Outcomes

The outcome of a performance should not be confounded with the *processes or means* used within the performance to produce the outcome. If our goal is to develop performance, it is those processes or means that are of primary importance. Indeed, Process Education is founded on performance-based theory where performance can be enhanced through performance development to support growth and self-growth (Apple et al, 2016, Leasure et al, 2020). Thus, we improve capacity to produce high quality learning outcomes in any context. Central to this development is the use of performance criteria applied to those processes or means.

Purpose of Performance Criteria (Apple, 2019)

- 1) Set future expectations of quality that you are striving to elevate
- 2) Inspire the growth and development of the performers
- 3) Produce self-growth goals for development
- 4) Guide the measurement of what really matters
- 5) Use for assessment and self-assessment

Performance criteria are developmental tools — they are *not* simply criteria, *nor* are they outcomes (Utschig & Apple, in progress)

Current colloquial usage of the term performance criteria tends to confound them with criteria or intended outcomes. While Deming (1950, 1993) shifted the focus from quality achieved at the end of a process to quality of the means or processes used to get to that end-point, even today, performance criteria as described in industry are often presented as a list of expectations that happen to occur during a performance (i.e. a form of outcome). The use of term performance criteria has also been adopted into language for accreditation. There, performance criteria are often written as desired outcomes within an almost strictly evaluation system. In both of these cases, operationalizing performance criteria in this way inadvertently places the emphasis on a checklist-like approach where thresholds for “success” become an evaluation metric.

Instead, we argue that performance criteria should be written to function as tools to guide performance development, where they set expectations for the characteristics of quality desired within the performance itself, rather than focusing on the outcomes of a performance.

Performance Description for Writing Performance Criteria (Utschig and Apple, in progress)

Writers of performance criteria are very experienced in the performance and have developed this expertise by analyzing the performances of a variety of top performers across many difficult contexts. They use theory of performance to see strengths and why they matter, gaps in quality and ways in which the quality can be improved, and even gaps in working expertise that hold back their performance. They visualize in their head the key qualities that make a performance elite, and on the other hand see the risk factors in a performer that limit performance. With this experience, they pull apart the dimensions of quality and produce the dimensional mapping of quality. For each dimension of quality, they know the aspects that contribute to the quality. For each dimension of quality, they can synthesize an inspiring expectation of quality desired by all stakeholders of the performance. They can package a comprehensive set of expectations that illuminate the representative performance that explicit labels and describes the performance. These statements become the basis to determine what really matters to measure and what the assessor can use to improve the quality of the performer’s next performance.

Performance Criteria for Writing Performance Criteria (Utschig and Apple, in progress)

Writers of performance criteria have the following characteristics. They are or have a:

1. *Performers mindset*: Writers envision themselves in the role of the performer, the challenging contexts of this type of performance, and the joys, disappointments, and opportunities for growth and development.
2. *Visualizer*: Writers place a camera on multiple stakeholders observing multiple performers in multiple performances, and leverage this vast experience to determine which processes, identities, tools, techniques, methods, practices, dynamics, and nuances should be included in the performance description that can contribute to improving quality.
3. *Dimension Parser*: Writers extract key characteristics from the performance description that most influence or impact quality, and deconstruct each characteristic into a list of unique, detailed attributes.
4. *Synthesizer*: Writers holistically synergize the attributes within each characteristic of the performance by strengthening flow and integration between these attributes.
5. *Challenger*: Writers edit these statements for word usage to produce illuminating, inspiring, challenging, and descriptive statements that set shared high expectations useful for all stakeholders.

Methodology for Writing Performance Criteria (Updated from Utschig, 2007)

Step	Name	Short Description
1	Identify key stakeholders	Consider performer(s), sponsor(s), coach(es), audience, assessors and evaluators, and other stakeholders of the performance
2	Describe stakeholder expectations	Performers aspire to the highest levels possible. Coaches want to encourage, guide, and challenge the performer(s). Sponsor(s) want to highlight quality. The audience wants to experience a quality performance. Assessors and evaluators want clarity for what to measure.
3	Write performance description	The performance description is a comprehensive, concise paragraph explaining the performers' identity, working expertise, attitudes, and skills along with the general performance process, actions, and characteristics used to produce quality.
4	Inventory characteristics of quality	A comprehensive list of 3-8 characteristics of quality is pulled from the performance description, with each characteristic being a significant, valuable component of the performance.
5	Rank importance of each characteristic	Prioritize the list of characteristics from most important to least important in contributing to overall quality in the performance.
6	Create attributes table	Produce a list of mutually exclusive attributes for each characteristic. Use a table format with each column representing one characteristic of quality. Each attribute must be unique within the table.
7	Draft performance criteria statements	Scan the attributes for a column, thinking of them collectively. Then, let go of those words by closing your eyes. Visualize what happens in a variety performance contexts and write a draft sentence capturing a generalized visualization of that characteristic. Do not worry about using the attribute words.

Step	Name	Short Description
8	Produce labels	For each characteristic, in one or two words, identify a label that pinpoints the essence of that dimension. This may differ slightly from the title of the original characteristic.
9	Sequence statements	Sequencing the statements is a function of need of the stakeholder(s) using the performance criteria such that they can most easily be utilized by that stakeholder. You can sequence by importance, match the flow of the performance, or use clusters targeting certain aspects of the performance to develop in the performer.
10	Review and edit	Analyze the previous attributes to determine whether the draft statements fit their labels. Then, edit to (1) align each statement to the label (2) tighten each statement such that its expectations become crystal clear to any performer who reads it.

References

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