

# Performance Standards

Performance standards describe what has to be done and how it has to be done. Standards recognize requirements that may be prescribed in directives, technical orders, office instructions, etc., and can be expressed in terms of one or more of the following criteria:

- Qualitative
- Quantitative
- Timeliness
- Work Behaviors

These are the different ways a performance standard is expressed so it can be measured. The last example, work behavior, relates to

the manner of performance of an element. For example: courteously assists customers. **Remember:** work behaviors are those 9 Appraisal Factors on the Civilian Rating of Record or Appraisal (AF Form 860A). While supervisors are not required to incorporate any of the nine appraisal factors from the AF Form 860A into their standards, it may prove useful to think of them in development of standards. Often a work behavior such as "work effort" will appear within various standards for different elements of the job.

Some very helpful insights into developing qualitative and work behavior standards can be obtained by reading the position description, especially the section referred to as "Controls over Work", or the Core Document's section entitled, "supervisory controls".

Having a good standard is important, if you and the employee can agree to all the standards, then chances are you have a good standard. To verify if the standards are good, ask yourself the following six questions:

1. **"What has to be accomplished?"** will keep the focus on the critical results or end products the employee is trying to achieve. This is the test to apply against the standard to determine if it fits the element.
2. **"How will I know when I have accomplished?"** will focus the discussion on the types of performance standards: quantitative, qualitative, work behavior and timeliness.
3. **"How well must the work be done?"** is perhaps the most important. At least, it is one that is being asked more and more as we realize the problems of product quality in the market place. One of the most recent examples of a problem with product quality is Firestone tires that were placed on Ford Explorers.

CIVILIAN RATING OF RECORD (Please read Privacy Act Statement on reverse before completing this form.)							
EMPLOYEE (Last Name, First, Middle Initial)		SSN	ORGANIZATION	PAY PLAN	SERIES	GRADE/STEP	SALARY W/O LOCALITY PAY
APPRaisal PERIOD		FROM	TO:			EFFECTIVE DATE:	
- Part A normally contains one to seven critical elements. - Rate the critical element(s) in Part A by placing an "X" in the appropriate block(s). The overall performance rating is derived from the ratings of the critical elements. - A rating of "Does not meet" on any critical element results in a determination that overall performance is unacceptable. An Unacceptable rating is the basis for initiating a performance improvement plan and requires proper documentation. Contact the Civilian Personnel Flight for assistance. - Complete Part B, "Impact on Mission Accomplishment" for GS-14s and GS-15s (bullet format, limited to 9 lines). Optional to complete for others. - Complete Part C, "Award Justification" for those being recommended for an award (bullet format, limited to 9 lines).							
PART A. Position Requirements. (Was the employee's performance Unacceptable or Acceptable on the Performance Plan's critical elements?)							
		DOES NOT MEET		MEETS			
ELEMENT 1						ELEMENT 8	
ELEMENT 2						ELEMENT 9	
ELEMENT 3						ELEMENT 10	
ELEMENT 4						ELEMENT 11	
ELEMENT 5						ELEMENT 12	
ELEMENT 6						ELEMENT 13	
ELEMENT 7						ELEMENT 14	
OVERALL PERFORMANCE RATING: R - ACCEPTABLE: Rated "Meets Standards" on all critical elements. N - UNACCEPTABLE: Rated "Does Not Meet Standards" on one or more critical elements							
PART B. Impact on Mission Accomplishment. (Mandatory completion required for GS-14s/15s.)							

4. **"What work behaviors or processes are to be used?"** further refines the standard setting process by causing you to focus on the fourth kind of standard: work behaviors. Work behavior standards are especially useful for helping the employee improve performance, since they specifically state the critical behavior that will lead to fully successful performance.

5. **"Will the standards, achieve positive results?"** helps us to express performance requirements in terms of their overall or ultimate impact. It helps us answer questions like, "While the road may be completed by 16 June, how long will it last, and can a car safely drive on it?" Stating performance standards in a positive manner allows us to measure accomplishments rather than allowing for and counting errors.

6. **"Do they challenge the employee and are they appropriate for the employee's position level and responsibility?"** is the quality check on whether we are measuring the right elements and using the right types of performance standards for the position at hand.

Other common questions related to performance standards are:

1. <b>Can you have more than one standard per element?</b>	Most definitely. In fact, it's a good idea to consider a quality standard along with a quantity or timeliness standard. When there is more than one standard for an element, management must address the relative importance of each standard and whether a failure of one standard is considered unacceptable performance for the element as a whole.
2. <b>Can a performance work plan contain absolute performance standards?</b>	Yes, but it is best to avoid absolute standards whenever possible. However, certain types of situations may necessitate absolute standards. When a single failure to meet the standard could result in (a) death, (b) injury, (c) breach of national security, or (d) great monetary loss. Example – Parachute Packer.
3. <b>How would action for failure of an absolute performance standard be taken?</b>	Action would normally, if not always, be taken following the procedures for Disciplinary and Adverse Actions (Chapter 75). Certain requirements under Performance (Chapter 43) would not be acceptable such as a permitting a performance improvement period.

Performance standards may require further clarification throughout the appraisal period. This is especially true of professional and technical positions and those positions where performance problems develop.

Many supervisors will tell you they have a difficult time writing standards. Usually, the problem with standards rests in the approach rather than writing ability. Rather than approaching a standard from what a good employee would do, approach a standard from what is the least acceptable level of performance for a satisfactory employee.

A second point requires a supervisor to ask this question: "How am I going to observe this behavior and how am I going to measure it?" This point was just made above but bears repeating. If the answer is complicated, time consuming, or impossible, the standard should be written differently. A good example of this kind of standard, generally, is using a percentage. For instance, "90-97 percent of work is error-free." At first glance this seems like a good one, but what does it require of the supervisor? He/she must physically review ALL work in order to determine how much is error-free. Does your supervisor oversee 100 percent of what you do on the job? The point is that no standard should require an inordinate amount of the supervisor's work or attention. It should be written to ease the burden rather than increase it.

Sometimes, a supervisor will write a work plan that looks excellent on the surface--it meets all the criteria we've discussed to this point. But upon closer scrutiny, those "great" standards only measure the minor responsibilities of the job. Why? Because those are usually the easiest to express in words. A work plan that only ensures a number of tasks are accomplished in a certain period of time without ensuring they are done well is not a good work plan no matter how good the standards may sound. The best way to accomplish this last point is to look at a completed work plan and ask yourself, "Does this measure what I consider to be the important responsibilities of this job?" If the answer is no, it's time to start writing standards again.

Finally, this is the time to start documenting all performance conversations. Documentation is a supervisor's best friend. It is imperative that the EMR specialist remind the supervisor to document performance conversations at every opportunity. A simple note with the date and a brief summary of what was discussed is generally sufficient.