PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AT FARM SERVICE AGENCY

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Section 1: Introduction to Performance Management at FSA

BACKGROUND

The start of the 21st century is a vitally important time for the Federal government. Growing fiscal pressures, increased public scrutiny, rising public expectations for better, more responsive results, the impact of terrorism, and the requirements of a changing society place enormous pressure on Federal agencies to respond in ways different than they have used to date.

Creating a more effective Government depends on attracting, developing, and retaining quality employees from diverse backgrounds and ensuring that they perform at high levels. Congress recognized that a sound investment in human capital was essential to achieving an agency's mission when it passed the Chief Human Capital Officers Act of 2002. This act required the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to design a set of systems for assessing the management of human capital by Federal agencies and resulted in the development of the Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework (HCAAF).

A key implementing system of the HCAAF is the Results-Oriented Performance Culture. To meet the outcome standards for this system, Federal agencies must establish and maintain a performance management system that concentrates on employees achieving results that link to the agency's organizational goals. This includes holding managers accountable for their contributions to results, and recognizing and rewarding contributions of the workforce to organizational goals.

Results-based performance management provides a way of focusing on what an agency ***does*** instead of solely on what it ***spends*** and leads to agency and individual performance accountability through measurable and observable results.

AUDIENCES FOR THIS DESK GUIDE

This Desk Guide is a text version of the *Performance Management at FSA* computer-based training (CBT). These tools are designed to help supervisors and managers in FSA to better manage performance by focusing on developing sound measurable standards and evaluating employee performance within the overall context of performance management.

THE FIVE-LEVEL SYSTEM

The five-level system is meant to:

- Align performance plans with agency goals
- Focus work on those activities that are most important to mission accomplishment
- Hold all employees accountable for achieving their part of mission results to support agency goals
- Identify top performers
- Reward individuals and/or teams for contributions to agency goals.

This philosophy is reflected in the five-level system rating process. The following pages detail the following components of the performance appraisal process:

- Elements and measurable standards
- Element rating levels
- Summary rating levels
- Performance appraisal form and timeframes
- Responsibilities.

Elements and Measurable Standards

There are key requirements for elements and standards under the five-level system. Each of these concepts will be explained and defined in sections 2 through 4.

- Employees may select from a menu of 12 generic elements and standards. They also may create new elements.
- Generic element descriptions must be supplemented with measurable standards that help to define job-specific performance.

- Each employee must have a minimum of three job elements and a maximum of five elements.
- One critical job element must link to FSA and USDA mission, goals, and outcomes.
- Supervision and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)/Civil Rights are required elements for all supervisors. The Supervision element must contain a mandatory measurable standard as noted in Appendix B.
- As of Fall 2006, EEO/Civil Rights is no longer a required element for nonsupervisors.
- One element must be noncritical.
- Nonsupervisors must have language in their measurable standards relating to EEO/Civil Rights and Health and Safety under an appropriate element(s). The language is provided in Appendix B.

Note: The FSA has offices on the five-level system that require a minimum of three and a maximum of ten elements. This is the exception and not the rule as a result of negotiated agreements.

Element Rating Levels

Under the five-level system, there are three element rating levels:

- Exceeds Fully Successful
- Fully Successful
- Does Not Meet.

Summary Rating Levels

Under the five-level system, there are five summary rating levels:

- Outstanding
- Superior
- Fully Successful
- Marginal
- Unacceptable.

Under this system, critical elements are weighted 2:1.

Performance Appraisal Form and Timeframes

The five-level system uses Forms AD-435, AD-435A, and AD-435B. Forms AD-435A and AD-435B are used to record the employee's performance plan. The 435A form is the cover page and used to record the first element. Additional elements are recorded on the 435B form. For example, if an employee has three elements, the first one is recorded on 435A; the other two are each recorded on a 435B form. Form AD-435 is used to record the summary rating.

Note: Forms AD-435, 435A, and 435B apply only to FSA offices not using EmpowHR. Offices using EmpowHR will use screens and not the actual forms.

While there is only one mandatory progress review during the rating cycle, managers are strongly encouraged to give performance feedback throughout the year.

Responsibilities

Employees, rating officials, and reviewing officials all have key responsibilities in the performance management process.

Employees

Employees will continue to:

- Provide input into the development of their performance plans
- Check their understanding of expectations
- Communicate with their supervisor throughout the rating cycle
- Provide input on accomplishments
- Assist in identifying training needs to enhance their performance.

Rating Officials

Rating officials will continue to:

- Explain the link between the work unit outputs, employees' duties, and agency goals
- Ask employees to provide input into development of their performance plans
- Provide informal feedback throughout the rating year

- Conduct/document at least one formal progress review for every employee during the rating year
- Complete a year-end performance rating for every employee
- Be responsible for finalizing the performance plan.

Reviewing Officials

Reviewing officials will:

- Review employees' performance standards as submitted by supervisors to ensure consistency across the work unit
- Review and approve employees' performance plans

Note: Reviewing officials approve year-end ratings before supervisors (rating officials) communicate the ratings to employees.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer the following question. Refer to Appendix A for the correct answers.

Question 1

Each of the following statements explains the role of the reviewing official EXCEPT:

A. Reviewing officials review employee performance standards as submitted by supervisors to ensure consistency across the work unit

B. Reviewing officials review and approve employee performance ratings

C. Reviewing officials approve year-end ratings before they are communicated to employees

D. Reviewing officials are responsible for finalizing performance plans

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TRANSITION

This completes Section 1, Introduction. You are now ready to complete Section 2, Performance Management Overview.

Section 2: Performance Management Overview

INTRODUCTION

The agency is undergoing a significant transformation to rethink how it does business. The strategic plan sets the direction for the transformation. However, it takes the commitment of the workforce and the alignment of work unit products/services with agency goals to achieve results. This section discusses the:

- Performance-based, results-focused transformation
- Five phases of performance management
- Role of communication in performance management.

This section provides the foundation for Sections 3 and 4, which deal with the specific components of performance management, elements, and measurable standards.

TRANSFORMATION

The 21st century poses a significant number of challenges that require FSA to rethink how it does business, and increases the focus on performance and results. Meeting these challenges means developing outcome-focused measures that:

- Help supervisors and managers gauge progress more effectively and convincingly
- Hold every employee accountable for achieving his or her part of agency goals
- Require supervisors and managers be even more thoughtful about how resources are used.

Review your agency's strategic plan for information about the business plan and focus.

FIVE PHASES OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management is the systematic process by which FSA managers and supervisors involve their employees in improving organizational effectiveness and accomplishing their agency mission and goals.

The following image shows the five phases of performance management.

Image: Five Phases of Performance Management

- **Planning**. Plan work by setting and communicating performance expectations that align with work unit and organizational objectives. A significant part of the planning process that leads to effective performance management is the alignment of individual measurable standards with the strategic objectives of the Agency so that day-to-day activities are consistent with the Agency's strategy. Without that alignment, employees may be working hard and doing things right-but they are not doing the right things.

- **Monitoring**. Continually monitor performance by providing ongoing feedback and conducting progress reviews.

- **Developing**. Develop the capacity to perform by:

  – Addressing poor performance
  – Improving good performance
  – Training and delegating assignments that introduce new skills or higher levels of responsibilities.

- **Rating**. At the end of the rating cycle, rate performance in a summary fashion.

- **Rewarding**. Reward good performance.

Although the performance management system sets checkpoints and tasks throughout the year, it does not preclude your everyday role of managing the work and employees. By focusing on performance management as an ongoing, year-round system, your focus shifts from justifying a rating at the end of the year to continually improving performance throughout the year.

When the focus is on managing performance rather than primarily judging it, frequent feedback to performers allows for the correction of performance deficiencies before you make a summary appraisal.

ROLE OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is a critical tool in the performance management process. Supervisors and managers should communicate with employees during all five phases of the process to:

- Explain work requirements
- Provide expectations for performance
- Encourage continued desired performance
- Describe how to improve performance.

Open and continual communication leads to a more productive, motivated workforce and reduces waste and stress.

Having continuous communication with your employees about their tasks and performance will also allow you to identify when adjustments should be made to the performance plans. For example, changes in circumstances or actual work being performed by the employee may warrant revising performance elements and/or measures.

Since all employee performance plans have at least one element aligned with the agency's strategic goals, communicate how organizational goals are linked and cascaded to individual performance, and how the accomplishments support employees' organizational goals within their organizations.

Refer to Appendix B for the Q12 Impact Engagement Interview, which The Gallup Organization has generously permitted us to offer as part of our performance management training for supervisors. Those of you who work for the Deputy Administrator for Management will recognize it from the 2005 Q12 Managers' Training.

Q12 Impact Engagement Interview [© 2003, The Gallup Organization]

Most people recognize the Gallup name for The Gallup Poll, but the vast majority of their work is in the area of business and performance management consulting. As you can well imagine, their consulting is based on empirically proven solutions, of which this interview is a part.

The purpose of the interview is to provide a framework for meaningful and productive conversations with each of your employees on an individual basis.

The first two sets of questions are designed to gauge whether you've set and clearly communicated the right performance expectations. The third set of questions will give you feedback on whether the responsibilities you've assigned to a particular employee are a good "fit", or if you might need to make some adjustments. The final three sets of questions will provide you with a way to draw distinctions among your employees to discover how to effectively motivate and develop each of them as individuals - because not every employee will be driven by the same motivations, or has the same career goals.

It's important to note that this is an interview process, with a focus on listening and information-gathering, rather than commenting or responding. Ideally, you'll be doing a lot of listening and drawing out information for clarity and specifics, and then feeding back what you've heard as a check for understanding.

If you'd like any additional information on how to use the Engagement Interview, feel free to contact Joanna Barlow at 202.418.9001 or Chris Claussen at 816.926.1949. You will also find extensive background on the Q12 process, as well as invaluable wisdom from the world's best managers, in the book First, Break All the Rules by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman.

Communication - Agency Area for Improvement

The FSA Performance Management Task Force conducted an agency-wide survey in 2003 to assess the agency's performance culture. The results highlighted the following communication issues as needing improvement (a response of 70% or less indicates "needs improvement"):

- My performance plan clearly describes what is expected of me. (60%)

- Discussions with my supervisor are worthwhile. (57%)

- My supervisor reviews and evaluates our work unit's progress and shares that information with me. (49%)

- My supervisor promotes communication among different work units. (56%)

- Conversations with customers or peers provide me with meaningful feedback about how I am performing. (75%) Note: the implication is that employees receive more feedback from customers and peers than from supervisors and managers.

Because communication is such a useful tool in performance management, the last section in this document is devoted to methods for improving your communication skills.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer the following three questions. Refer to Appendix A for the correct answers.

Question 1

True or False? The focus of performance management is the year-end rating given to employees.

Question 2

The focus of performance management is:

A. Justifying a rating at the end of the year.
B. Continually improving performance throughout the year.
C. Discussing how employees should be providing feedback to each other.
D. Increasing communication ratings in future surveys.

Question 3

True or False? Effective communication allows the supervisor to make clear the basis for setting expectations for employee performance.

TRANSITION

Since you now have an understanding of performance management concepts. You are now ready to complete Section 3, Performance Elements.

Section 3: Performance Elements

INTRODUCTION

Employees must know what they need to do to perform their jobs successfully; those expectations for employee performance are established in employee performance plans.

Performance elements tell employees what they have to do and measurable standards tell them how well they have to do it.

Performance elements describe the actual work to be performed during the performance appraisal cycle. Each element describes a major and important requirement of the job upon which an employee is rated for success.

This section guides you in:

- Identifying the performance element requirements for the five-level summary rating system
- Selecting the appropriate mandatory performance elements for supervisors, managers, and nonsupervisors
- Identifying appropriate additional elements
- Determining which elements are critical and which are noncritical.

DEVELOPING / SELECTING PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS

During the planning phase of the performance management process, FSA supervisors and managers must select between three and five performance elements.

FSA - Mandatory Elements

All FSA employees are required to have three to five elements. Employees can either create the elements to meet the needs of the job, select them from the Menu of Recommended Elements (see Appendix B), or combine their own with examples from the menu. The elements must reflect the most important aspects of the work they perform.

The mandatory elements for supervisors are Supervision and EEO/Civil Rights. There are no required elements for nonsupervisors. However, nonsupervisors must have language related to EEO/Civil Rights included in their elements. The Nonsupervisory EEO/Civil Rights element may be selected or the descriptive language from that element may be combined with the descriptive language of another element. Refer to the Menu of Elements in Appendix for more information.

In addition, at least one element must reflect measurable results that align with the agency's mission, goals, and outcomes. Supervisors and employees are encouraged to link more than one element with the strategic plan, where possible.

- For example, supervisors may incorporate the link to agency mission, goals, and outcomes under Program Management and nonsupervisors may incorporate the link under Execution of Duties.

- Keep the total number of elements allowed in mind if you consider adding a new element.

Selecting Other Elements

Once the mandatory elements have been accounted for, the next step is to select other elements to complete the list of up to five total.

Apply the following questions to determine other important elements.

- What role does the employee play in meeting the mission and goals of the work unit? For example, if he or she performs customer service duties, then Customer Service is an appropriate element to include.

- What does the employee produce (i.e., what are his or her outputs - the quantifiable or measurable products or services produced in full or in part by an employee) as part of his or her work efforts? For example, if the person is responsible for planning and implementing a program, then Program Management may be appropriate.

- How much time does the employee spend in each area? Even though an employee may spend equal amounts of time in several areas, make sure you consider his or her area of primary responsibility.

FSA Scenario Example

The scenario presented for FSA will be continued throughout the remainder of the sections. The purpose of this scenario is to practice applying the methodology for developing measurable performance standards and evaluating performance against those standards.

Selecting Other Elements Example

Brenda Wade is a Program Technician (PT) in a small county office where she performs a variety of duties and responsibilities, which can be broken down into five key areas:

- **Customer service.** Greeting and responding to requests from producers who come to or call the county office (i.e., providing information about FSA programs, answering questions about specific programs and/or loans, referring more difficult questions to the appropriate person).

- **Payments.** Issuing payments to or collecting payments from producers on a recurring and nonrecurring basis (e.g., issuing farm program payments and collecting farm loan payments) and making administrative payments (e.g., for telephone service, rent, office space, and equipment).

- **Managing paper flow.** Downloading and/or distributing procedures for administering farm programs and farm loan programs (e.g., notices, handbook amendments) and filing them in the appropriate handbook or notice books.

- **Managing farm and producer records.** Creating new and/or updating person and land-based records that include:

  - A review of how farm businesses are structured
  - Farmland usage records
  - Acreage reports
  - Data to use in determining how many persons are eligible for payment for a farming enterprise
  - Changes to producer information, such as phone numbers.

  Brenda collects and prepares this information for the County Executive Director (CED) to present to the County Committee for review and decision making.

- **Administrative Support.** Maintaining time and attendance records for each employee and processing the payroll every 2 weeks

Possible performance elements to include in Brenda's performance plan are shown in the following table. In this example, several elements (i.e., customer service, communication, and execution of duties) are linked to mission results.

FSA Example – Selecting Other Elements		
Element	**Definition**	**Rationale**
Customer Service	Routinely displays courteous and tactful behavior. Projects a positive and professional image of USDA. Provides advice that is timely, responsive and accurate. Maintains appropriate rapport with internal and external customers. Develops and establishes working relations with external organizations as required. Keeps supervisor and/or team leader informed of difficult and/or controversial issues and unique problems. Takes actions to effectively solve problems before they have an adverse impact on the organization or other employees.	A key aspect of Brenda's position. She greets and responds to questions/ requests from producers.
Communications	Oral and written communications are clear, correct, timely, and presented in an understandable manner. Supervisor and coworkers are informed of issues and problems when necessary. Information and guidance provided is timely and correct.	Another key aspect of the position. Brenda must greet producers in a prompt and courteous manner, communicate well, and respond to their requests and/or convey them to others. She must also prepare written reports for the CED.
Execution of Duties	Completed work assignments are performed in a timely manner, assuring a quality of work that meets the needs of the organization. Appropriate work methods are selected for the development of work products. Work products do not require substantive revisions. Assignments are completed in accordance with applicable agency guidelines, including timeframes.	Another key aspect of the position. Brenda issues payments, manages paper flow, manages farm and producer records, and provides administrative support.

FSA Example – Selecting Other Elements		
Element	**Definition**	**Rationale**
Individual Contributions to the Team	Ordinarily displays dependability and reliability. Promotes open communication. Contributes creative ideas and actively participates in team meetings resulting in added value to the team's products and services. When problems arise, explores causes and assists in resolving them. Works with team members to appropriately implement decisions. Is usually open minded to new ideas and approaches in implementing the team's goals. Willingly accepts and acts on constructive criticism.	She must be a dependable and reliable member of the county office team.

DETERMINING CRITICAL AND NONCRITICAL ELEMENTS

When selecting performance elements, FSA supervisors and managers must identify which elements will be critical and which will be noncritical.

- A critical element is an assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance in that element would result in a determination that the employee's overall performance is unacceptable. Critical elements:
  - Are the cornerstone of individual accountability in employee performance management. Since an employee may be demoted or removed for unacceptable performance in a critical element, these elements must describe work assignments and responsibilities that are within the employee's control.
  - Receive twice the weight of noncritical elements when the summary rating is being determined.
- Noncritical elements are those elements that are specific to the position but not necessarily critical to the goals of the work unit. At least one element must be noncritical.

Criteria for Selecting Critical Elements

There are several criteria that may indicate which additional elements might be critical, including the:

- Percentage of time spent performing the element. An element may be critical if a high percentage of time is spent working on it. However, a low percentage of time spent on an element is not a disqualifier if the importance or implications of not performing the element are serious.
- Impact on mission. An element may be critical if the success of the unit depends on the employee's performing the element at the Fully Successful level.
- Consequence of error. An element may be critical if unacceptable performance would result in a serious negative outcome for an individual, the unit, or the Government.
- Legislative or regulatory requirements. An element may be critical if unacceptable performance would mean violation of a law or regulation.

Selecting Critical/Noncritical Elements Example

This table shows the critical and noncritical elements for Brenda Wade, a Program Technician (PT).

Element	Critical/Noncritical	Rationale
Customer Service	Critical	A key aspect of Brenda's position. She greets and responds to questions/requests from producers.
Communications	Critical	Another key aspect of the position. Brenda must greet producers in a prompt and courteous manner, communicate well, and respond to their requests and/or convey them to others. She must also prepare written reports for the CED.
Execution of Duties	Critical	Another key aspect of the position. Brenda issues payments, manages paper flow, manages farm and producer records, and provides administrative support.

Element	Critical/Noncritical	Rationale
Individual Contributions to the Team	Noncritical	She must be a dependable and reliable member of the county office team. This element is important but does not impact the unit's mission, and the consequences of error are less critical than for the other elements.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer the following questions. Refer to Appendix A for the correct answers.

Question 1

In addition to Supervision, which of the following is mandatory for supervisors and managers?

A. Program Management
B. Customer Service
C. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)/Civil Rights
D. Individual Contributions to the Team

Question 2

True or False? Only supervisors and managers are required to have an element showing linkage to agency mission, goals, and outcomes.

Question 3

True or False? For supervisors and managers as well as nonsupervisors, at least one element must be deemed noncritical.

Question 4

Each of the following are characteristics of critical elements EXCEPT:

A. Not meeting a critical element warrants an Unacceptable rating.

B. An employee may be demoted or removed for unacceptable performance in a critical element.

C. Critical elements are weighted the same as noncritical elements when the summary rating is being determined.

KEY POINTS

- Performance elements describe the actual work to be performed during the performance appraisal cycle. Each element describes a major and important requirement of the job on which an employee is rated for success.
- Employees should be involved in the development of their performance plans. Supervisors have the ultimate responsibility for the development of performance plans, but employee input should be considered and incorporated to the maximum extent possible.
- Employees can either create the elements to meet the needs of the job, select them from the Menu of Recommended Elements (see Appendix B), or combine their own with examples from the menu.
- Employees in FSA should have between three and five elements on their performance plans.
- Critical elements:
  - Are an assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance in that element would result in a determination that the employee's overall performance is unacceptable
  - Describe work assignments and responsibilities that are within the employee's control
  - Receive twice the weight of noncritical elements when the summary rating is being determined.

TRANSITION

The next section, Measurable Standards, explains how to write measurable standards to quantify/qualify the existing performance standards.

Section 4: Measurable Standards

INTRODUCTION

Once the performance elements are selected, you, as the supervisor or manager must identify ways to measure whether they have been achieved. Performance elements tell employees what they have to do, and standards tell them how well they have to do it.

Under the five-level FSA performance management system, the generic element description must be supplemented with job-specific measurable standards.

This section teaches FSA supervisors and managers how to develop job-specific measurable standards to assess how well employees are performing in an element.

WHAT IS A MEASURABLE STANDARD?

A measurable standard is a statement that quantifies or qualifies the desired result or behavior. It describes a level of performance in terms of results or behaviors expected of the employee by the supervisor or manager.

Measurable standards:

- Are the yardsticks used to measure results
- Include appropriate measures (e.g., quality, quantity)
- Express the performance that employees must meet to be appraised at a particular level of performance
- Describe how well an employee is expected to perform
- Are clear expectations of what has to be done and how it has to be done.

MEASURABLE STANDARDS

Each performance element includes a generic description of the element, which typically refers to performance at the Fully Successful level. However, this description has no associated measurable standards that describe an employee's performance required for a specific level.

Measurable standards must be created and recorded for each element on Forms AD-435A and AD-435B to supplement this generic description.

Measurable standards are not generic. You, as the supervisor or manager, are responsible for developing job specific measurable standards at the Fully Successful level for each generic element. Developing measurable standards enables you to assess an employee's performance of duties and responsibilities based on observable, measurable, and attainable criteria that describe performance at the various levels.

Effective measurable standards:

- Include quality, quantity, timeliness, and cost measures.
- Are credible (i.e., clear, specific, and understandable; reasonable and attainable; measurable, observable, or verifiable; and results oriented).
- Are written so that an employee can exceed them.
- Are appropriate to the level of the responsibility of the employee.
- Use number ranges instead of single numbers or percentages whenever possible for numeric measures.
- Are written at the Fully Successful level. These standards should reflect the required level of performance and expected results for the job that a fully experienced and competent employee will consistently achieve. However, the supervisor or manager must be able to verbally describe the two other performance levels (i.e., Exceeds Fully Successful and Does Not Meet Fully Successful). This section guides you in how to make that distinction.

Measurable Standards - Examples

The standard description for Communications is:

> Oral and written communications are clear, correct, timely, and presented in an understandable manner. Supervisor and coworkers are informed of issues and problems when necessary. Information and guidance provided is timely and correct.

However, this description does not fully describe what an employee's performance would look like at the Fully Successful level.

Example 1. To properly assess performance, you would want to identify if communications need to be " clear, correct, timely, and presented in an understandable manner" 85 to 95 percent of the time or if 75 to 84 percent is an appropriate measure for Fully Successful.

Example 2. If Fully Successful performance includes processing 8 to 10 loan applications a month, should processing 11 to 12 applications be rated as Exceeds Fully Successful? The supervisor must be able to explain Fully Successful and Exceeds Fully Successful performance.

You would use these determinations to identify numeric ranges and create descriptive measures for Fully Successful performance.

Why Bother with Measurable Standards?

To demonstrate the value of having measurable standards, answer each of the following questions.

Question	Yes	No
Do your employees know exactly what it takes for them to succeed in their jobs?		
Did your employees believe their last performance appraisal was fair and objective?		
Do your employees know where they stand and what they need to do to reach the next level of performance?		
Can you discuss performance with your employees without getting into personality traits or clear conduct issues? **Note:** OPM defines poor performance as the failure of an employee to do the job at an acceptable level. The acceptable level is usually, but not always, documented in written performance standards. OPM defines misconduct as the employee's failure to follow a workplace rule, whether written or unwritten.		
Do you and your employees have the same view regarding the quantity, quality, and priority of the work to be performed?		
Do your employees know how you will judge them?		
Do your employees know the difference between exceptional, mediocre, and poor performance?		

If you answered yes to several of these questions, congratulations. You probably have a good foundation on which to develop measurable standards and/or you have already taken the time to establish measurable standards for your employees.

If you were not able to answer yes to these questions, then developing measurable standards will help you discuss performance expectations and assessment with your employees.

STEPS FOR DEVELOPING MEASURABLE STANDARDS

The steps that supervisors must take to develop job-specific measurable standards are:

1. Identify the performance tasks within the element
2. Determine the types of measures needed to assess completion of the task (i.e., quality, quantity, timeliness, or cost effectiveness)
3. Determine how to evaluate the measurable standards
4. Write the measurable standards
5. Discuss the measurable standards with the employee
6. Record the measurable standards.

Each of these steps is explained in this section.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY PERFORMANCE TASKS

The first step in writing measurable standards is to identify the performance tasks based on the element's description.

To identify performance tasks, look at the element and description and ask yourself, "What must an employee do to achieve the levels of performance?" Then write a short phrase beginning with an action (e.g., writing, analyzing, researching, communicating).

Additionally, make sure you break the tasks into specific parts so that tasks of varying importance can be assessed individually. For example, if an employee is responsible for writing weekly reports and preparing a yearly proposal, the yearly proposal may be more important. So instead of having a task "writes reports and proposal," you may want to have two tasks:

- Writing weekly status reports
- Developing yearly proposal.

Step 1: Identify Performance Tasks - Example

This step will be illustrated using the critical element Customer Service identified in the Program Technician example. For the Customer Service element, Brenda Wade has the following tasks:

- Greet producers in a courteous and prompt manner
- Provide timely and accurate information to producers seeking information about farm programs and/or farm loans
- Answer questions and satisfy requests from producers.

Step 1: Identify Performance Tasks – Practice Question

Using the Program Technician example again, answer the following question to identify the performance tasks for Brenda Wade's Communications element. Refer to Appendix A for feedback.

Which of the following is NOT an appropriate task for the Communications element?

A. Listens to and asks clarifying questions of producers who visit or call the office to clearly understand their requests and concerns

B. Answers producer questions clearly and with the appropriate level of detail

C. Downloads and distributes procedures for administering farm programs and farm loan programs

D. Prepares written information about farm and producer records for the CED to present to the County Committee

STEP 2: DETERMINE THE TYPES OF ADDITIONAL MEASURES

In the Fall of 2004 The Deputy Administrator for Field Operations (DAFO) established a Task Force consisting of a cross-cutting group of field office representatives. Its mission was to determine how to best align one element in the performance plans of the state and field workforce to the FSA strategic goals.

After the decision to move to five-level performance management system, DAFO reconstituted the Task Force to develop a menu of measurable standards that:

- Are written at the Fully Successful Level
- Are specific to field office positions
- Support each of the generic performance elements, which ensures consistency for similar positions across state and county offices.

Refer to Appendix B for the full menu of FSA field office measurable standards, including Supervision, which is a mandatory element for FSA supervisors and managers.

Criteria for Measurable Standards

Good measurable standards help structure clear expectations of how well something has to be done. This clarity makes managing performance problems much easier, and helps develop and build on employee strengths as well.

There are four types of measures used in measurable standards:

- Qualitative measures
- Quantitative measures
- Timeliness measures
- Cost-effectiveness measures.

Qualitative

Qualitative measures refer to the accuracy, appearance, or usefulness of the work effort. For example, typical quality measures may focus on the number of errors allowable on customer satisfaction surveys.

Do not describe performance in terms of "making progress toward." Ensure your descriptions provide a clear description of the expected level of performance.

The measure must allow room for both meeting and exceeding the description. For example, any amount of improvement would meet the measures for "making progress toward." However, there are no levels set. For example, an effective qualitative statement may read, Increase the collaboration between staff members, producers, customers, and other stakeholders.

Quantitative

Quantitative measures refer to the number of products produced or services provided or a general result. They are usually expressed in terms of numbers, percentages, frequencies, etc. Be careful when using percentages. You need to be able to collect the data to support your percentage. Do not establish a numeric measure unless you are able to track and/or collect the data to ensure the percentage or numeric amount is being met.

For example, an effective quantitative statement may read, Reduce the default rate by 5% within the fiscal year.

Timeliness

Timeliness measures refer to completion times and are usually expressed as how quickly, when, or by what date an employee produces the work.

Cost-effectiveness

Cost-effectiveness measures refer to dollar savings or cost control for the Government that can be documented and measured in agency annual fiscal year budgets. Cost-effectiveness measures may include such aspects of performance as maintaining or reducing unit costs, reducing the time it takes to produce or provide a product or service, or reducing waste.

Questions To Ask Yourself

To determine the type(s) of measure(s) that might be appropriate for each task, think about the following questions.

- Is quality important? Does the stakeholder or customer care how well the work is done?
- Is quantity important? Does the stakeholder or customer care how many items are produced?
- Is it important to accomplish the element by a certain time or date?

- Is it important to accomplish the element within certain cost limits?
- What measures are already available?

Determining the Types of Measurable Standards Example

The following table shows the types of measures that are appropriate for the Customer Service tasks that Brenda Wade performs.

	Quality	**Quantity**	**Timeliness**	**Cost-Effectiveness**
Customer Service = approach/timeliness				
Greet producers in a courteous and prompt manner	**X**		**X**	
Provide timely and accurate information to producers seeking information about farm programs and/or farm loans	**X**		**X**	
Answer questions and satisfy requests from producers	**X**		**X**	

The courteousness with which Brenda greets producers is a quality issue; the promptness of her greeting is a timeliness issue. Her ability to provide accurate information to producers seeking information about farm programs and/or farm loans is a quality issue, but the timeliness of her response should also be considered. Finally, the quality of her responses to producer's questions and requests should be considered.

Determining the Types of Measurable Standards Practice

Check the measures you think are appropriate for the tasks that Brenda Wade performs in the Communications element. Refer to Appendix A when you are finished.

Tasks	Quality	Quantity	Timeliness	Cost-Effectiveness
Listens to and asks clarifying questions of producers who visit or call the office to clearly understand their requests and concerns				
Answers producer questions clearly and with the appropriate level of detail				
Prepares written information about farm and producer records for the CED to present to the County Committee				

STEP 3: DETERMINE HOW TO EVALUATE THE MEASURABLE STANDARDS

The third step in developing measurable standards is to determine how to evaluate the quality, quantity, timeliness, and/or cost-effectiveness of the element based on factors that are within the employee's control.

The key to developing useful measures is verifiability - can we verify that a measurable standard has been met or exceeded? If so, the measurable standard will be useful.

- Numeric measures are easy to verify, but the accomplishments of some work cannot be meaningfully measured by numbers.

- Use number ranges instead of single numbers or percentages whenever possible for numeric measures.

- Verifiable descriptive measures have three components: a judge, what the judge looks for, and a verifiable description of what would represent meeting expectations.

A combination of descriptive and numeric measurements is usually desirable for individual tasks. Neither measurement is superior to the other; rather they are complementary. Each has its strengths and weaknesses, and the use of both helps counteract the weaknesses of each individual measurement.

Numeric Measures

Numeric measures provide a quantifiable objective tool for which no (or very little) interpretation is required. For example:

Draft copies of the Technical Loan Analysis are due to the manager 30 days before late payment fees are triggered.

Descriptive Measures

Descriptive standards communicate nuances of meaning that are difficult to measure or detect. They are nonspecific and subjective. However, they serve a purpose by communicating general expectations. For example:

The Technical Loan Analysis will be complete and accurate as verified by second party review.

Questions for Identifying Measures

Think about the following questions when determining how to appropriately evaluate the measures for each task:

- How could quality, quantity, timeliness, and/or cost-effectiveness be evaluated?
- Is there some number or percent that could be tracked?

Usually the perceived "intangibles" become more tangible by brainstorming, remembering, or becoming consciously aware of the observable evidence you actually use from day to day to assess how things are going.

FSA field office personnel should use the Menu of Measurable Standards compiled by the DAFO Task Force. Refer to Appendix B for Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions.

Determining How To Evaluate Measurable Standards Example

So far, we have identified the key Customer Service tasks that Brenda completes and the most appropriate methods for measuring them (i.e., quality and timeliness). Following are methods of evaluating the measures:

Methods to evaluate quality include:

- Observations made by the CED/DD. These observations should be ongoing throughout the year and should be part of the normal duties of the supervisor or DDs visiting field offices. Areas of focus include the:

  - Quality of customer assistance provided
  - Manner in which customer assistance provided
  - Accuracy and quality of program information provided
  - Consistency of quality assistance (to all customers).

- Feedback from County Committee members regarding their experience with county office staff, including Brenda.

- Brenda's employee self-assessment. A self assessment is a good method to solicit input from the employee.

- Customer survey data specific to Brenda.

Methods to evaluate timeliness include:

- Observations made by the CED/DD regarding the promptness of Brenda's service to producers when greeting them at the counter

- Information contained in the customer service log, which identifies customer program information requests and the dates Brenda provided them in person or by mail or email.

- Data reflected on other customer service checklists developed by the office and used for evaluating the office staff, including Brenda.

Step 3: Determine How To Evaluate The Measurable Standard - Practice

Brenda is responsible for the following Communications tasks:

- Listens to and asks clarifying questions of producers who visit or call the office to clearly understand their requests and concerns
- Answers producer questions clearly and with the appropriate level of detail
- Prepares written information about farm and producer records for the CED to present to the County Committee.

You learned that each of these tasks is best evaluated using quality measures. The third task can also be measured using timeliness measures. Think about methods you would use to evaluate Brenda or an employee like Brenda on quality and timeliness (third task only).

When you are finished, refer to Appendix A for feedback.

STEP 4: WRITE THE MEASURABLE STANDARD

The next step is to draft the measurable standards based on your identification of the tasks, types of measures to use, and process for evaluating the measures. A good measurable standard is:

- **Specific and objective**. It should be clearly written, be free from ambiguities/bias/personal feelings or opinions, and contain finite measures that specify the line between satisfactory work and less-than-satisfactory work. A measure should also allow room for an employee to exceed the satisfactory level. Additionally, whenever possible, use ranges when setting numeric measures
- **Mission related**. The measure should directly link the required performance of the job.
- **Nondiscriminatory**. The measure should be able to be consistently applied to all personnel in the same or similar position or grade with the same authority. Although the standards may be the same for similar positions, the measures should reflect the grade level of the employee.

- **Observable.** You must be realistically able to observe and monitor the performance to ascertain whether the standard has been met. Those observations should be based on measurable outcomes in terms of quality, quantity, timeliness, and/or cost-effectiveness.

- **Written to the Fully Successful level***.* Measurable standards should reflect the required level of performance and expected results for the job. A fully experienced and competent employee will consistently achieve or meet the measurable standards for the job given circumstances within his or her control. Therefore, the measurable standards are written for the Fully Successful level. However, a supervisor must be able to verbally describe the Exceeds Fully Successful level if the employee asks.

In addition to writing effective measurable standards, you will need to ensure that required language is included as part of the measurable standards for the Supervision element, which is mandatory for all supervisors.

Nonsupervisors must also have mandatory measurable standards related to EEO/Civil Rights and Health and Safety placed under appropriate elements. There are no requirements for placing these measures under specific elements.

Required Measurable Standards Supervisors Only

As a minimum, the Supervision element must include the following measurable standard that holds supervisors accountable for the performance management of subordinates and for the alignment of subordinate performance plans to agency goals.

- Has an employee performance plan that focus on results achieved, contain at least one element that is aligned with organizational goals, and are in place within 30 calendar days of the beginning of the appraisal period. Mid year reviews are conducted timely and according to Agency guidelines. Ratings are accurate and issued within 30 calendar days of the end of the appraisal period.

Additionally, supervisors must have the following measurable standard related to health and safety included under the Supervision element.

- Also, adheres to Safety and Occupational Health practices and procedures in order to promote and maintain a safe and healthful work environment for all employees. Upon report of unsafe/unhealthful condition, notifies appropriate office within 48 hours, and follows up and/or takes appropriate action until condition is resolved.

Required Measurable Standards Language for Nonsupervisors

In addition to writing measurable standards for selected elements, you must also be sure to include mandatory language related to Health and Safety as part of measurable standards for nonsupervisors. You may include this language under any selected element.

- **Health and Safety.** Demonstrates a basic understanding of the Agency's Safety and Health Program. Complies with safety and health rules and regulations that apply to all employees. Ensures all reports of unsafe and unhealthful conditions are reported to supervisor or designated official within 48 hours.

Regardless if the Nonsupervisory EEO/Civil Rights element is selected or if the descriptive language has been combined with another element, measurable standards must still be developed to address performance related EEO/Civil Rights.

Step 4: Write the Measurable Standards - Example

Given that this example uses a PT position in a county office, the supervisor would select the appropriate measurable standards from the menu of measurable standards developed for FSA field offices. The Customer Service element description reads:

Routinely displays courteous and tactful behavior. Projects a positive and professional image of USDA. Provides advice that is timely, responsive, and accurate. Maintains appropriate rapport with internal and external customers. Develops and establishes working relations with external organizations as required. Keeps supervisor and/or team leader informed of difficult and/or controversial issues and unique problems. Takes actions to effectively solve problems before they have an adverse impact on the organization or other employees.

A review of the measures under Customer Service indicates that the following three measures are most appropriate for the customer service responsibilities of this position:

- Ensures external customers are acknowledged within 3 minutes of the time they enter the office with no more than 10 exceptions.

- Uses a customer transaction checklist to ensure that all required information is obtained and applications are completed and accurate with no more than 5 exceptions.

- Provides program benefits information to producers and other customers, (e.g., newsletters, counter information, producer meetings, producer organizations, newspaper articles, radio announcements) within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions.

Step 4: Write the Measurable Standards - Practice

Again, because Brenda is a PT in a county office, the supervisor would select the appropriate measurable standards from the menu of measurable standards developed for FSA field offices.

From the following measurable standards listed on the menu, select those that are most appropriate for the Brenda's responsibilities relating to the Communications element. Refer to Appendix A for feedback.

Communication: Oral and written communications are clear, correct, timely, and presented in an understandable manner. Supervisor and coworkers are informed of issues and problems when necessary. Information and guidance provided is timely and correct.

Measurable Standard	Appropriate for Brenda
Communicates clearly with producers and shares accurate information 90% of the time.	
Responds to general program questions within 24 hours with no more than 6 to 8 exceptions. Elevates more complex questions to the supervisor, team leader, or other responsible individual within 2 hours of inquiry.	
Schedules staff meetings on a regular basis (at least monthly and after major program conferences and meetings or more often if required by management).	
Prepares written documents that are clear, concise, and understandable and follows prescribed procedures within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions.	
Responds in writing (when appropriate) to customer inquiries within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions.	
Regularly shares program information for which he or she is responsible with coworkers to increase staff awareness of all program areas (cross-training, collaboration, reports at staff meetings, etc.) within timeframes established by management 90% of the time.	
Resolves disputes and problems with others through the use of problem solving, conflict resolution, and negotiation.	

Step 4: What to Avoid

There are two common errors you should be aware of and avoid when writing measurable standards:

- Using absolute standards
- Using backward standards.

Absolute Standards

Absolute standards allow for no errors. This type of standard should be used only when a single failure results in loss of life, injury, breach of national security, or great monetary loss.

Example: Reports are due every Friday.

To help determine whether you are writing an absolute standard, ask yourself the following questions:

- How many times may the employee fail this requirement and still be performing acceptably?
- Does the standard use words such as "all," "never," and "each"? (These words do not automatically create an absolute standard, but they often alert you to problems.)
- If the standard allows for no errors, would it be valid according to the criteria listed above (risk of death, injury, etc.)?
- How will the employee be able to exceed the standard? For example, 100% cannot be exceeded.

Backward Standards

Backward standards describe performance in negative terms instead of what must be done to meet a particular standard. This approach is ineffective because case law demonstrates that an employee must understand the level of performance needed for retention in the position.

Describing negative performance actually describes Unacceptable performance. Standards such as "fails to meet deadlines" or "performs work inaccurately" allow an employee to do virtually no work or to do it poorly and still meet the Fully Successful standard. For example:

- Requires assistance more than 50 percent of the time.
- Completes fewer than four reviews per year.

To help you determine whether you are writing a backward standard, ask yourself:

- Does the standard express the level of work the supervisor wants to see or does it describe negative performance? Example: Requires assistance more than 50 percent of the time.
- If the employee did nothing, would he or she meet the standard as written? Example: Completes fewer than four products per year.

STEP 5: DISCUSS MEASURABLE STANDARDS

After developing the measurable standards, it is a good idea to discuss them with the employee.

Remember that the individual rating for a performance element is based on measurable standards that describe the Fully Successful level. However, the supervisor must be able to verbally describe how the employee can exceed or fail to meet the Fully Successful level.

Communication with the employee is essential in all aspects of performance management. When developed with input from employees, measures are more likely to be:

- Appropriate to the requirements of the job
- Reflective of the work context and conditions
- Understood by the employee and supervisor
- Accepted by the employee.

Importance of Communication

While it is a legitimate option to develop the measurable standards without employee input, a collaborative approach is beneficial. Both the supervisor and the employee bring valuable information to the process, and the end result is more likely to be supported by both parties.

As the supervisor, however, you will make the final decision about the appropriateness of the measurable standards. Mutual agreement with the employee about standards is preferable but not always possible. Mutual understanding and recognition of the standards is necessary.

STEP 6: RECORD MEASURABLE STANDARDS

The final step is to record the measurable standards by identifying the link of at least one measurable standard to mission goals. Remember that you must have at least one element that reflects measurable results related to or in support of mission, goals, and outcomes.

Note: Performance plans of the field office workforce should link to the goals specified in the SEDs' performance plan.

You must document where this link occurs and the mission goal to which the measure relates.

- FSA headquarters employees may do this by adding a new element, Mission Results, or by incorporating the link to agency goals under existing elements. For example, supervisors may incorporate the link to agency goals under Program Management and nonsupervisors may incorporate the link under Execution of Duties. Performance plans can have no more than five elements. Keep this in mind if you consider adding a new element.

- FSA Field Office employees must have the link to agency goals under existing elements (i.e., Program Management or Execution of Duties).

Documenting the Measurable Standards

Once you've decided on the appropriate element under which to link measurable results relating to mission, goals, and outcomes, document this link under item #8 on AD-435A:

- Write/type, "Measurable results that relate to the accomplishment of or support of mission goals."

- List the specific measure(s) under this statement.

Under each measurable standard identify the specific agency goal to which it relates.

Note: The five-level system uses Forms AD-4355A and B. The 435A form is the cover page and used to record the first element. Additional elements are recorded on the 435B form. For example, if an employee has three elements, the first one is recorded on 435A; the other two are each recorded on a 435B form.

Note: Forms AD-435, 435A, and 435B apply only to FSA offices not using EmpowHR (a computer-based processing system used by FSA field supervisors and employees). Offices using EmpowHR will use screens and not the actual forms. More information about EmpowHR and the Word forms will be provided separately as systems are revised to support the changes to the five-level system.

KEY POINTS

- Under the five-level FSA performance management system, generic element descriptions must be supplemented with job-specific measurable standards.

- The generic description of the elements used by FSA are written at the Fully Successful level of performance. However, this description has no associated measurable standards that describe an employee's performance required for a specific level.

- There are six steps that supervisors must take to develop specific measurable standards for performance:

  1. Identify the performance tasks within the element
  2. Determine the types of measures needed to assess completion of the task
  3. Determine how to evaluate the measurable standards
  4. Write the measurable standard
  5. Discuss the measurable standards with the employee
  6. Record the measurable standards.

  There are four types of measures: qualitative, quantitative, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness.

Effective measurable standards:

- Include quality, quantity, timeliness, and cost measures.

- Are credible (i.e., clear, specific, and understandable; reasonable and attainable; measurable, observable, or verifiable; and results oriented).

- Are written so that an employee can exceed them.

- Are appropriate to the level of the responsibility of the employee.

- Use number ranges instead of single numbers or percentages whenever possible for numeric measures.

- Are written at the Fully Successful level. Measurable standards should reflect the required level of performance and expected results for the job that a fully experienced and competent employee will consistently achieve.

TRANSITION

In the next section, you will learn how to monitor and document performance.

Section 5: Monitor and Document

INTRODUCTION

Monitoring and documenting employees' work efforts are critical to managing and evaluating performance. Monitoring means consistently measuring performance and providing ongoing feedback to employees and workgroups on their progress toward reaching the standards described in the Performance Plan. It gives you the opportunity to make changes to unrealistic or problematic measurable standards and allows you to identify unacceptable performance at any time during the appraisal period rather than waiting until the end.

In this section, you will learn how to monitor and document performance. It discusses the following key topics:

- Overview of monitoring
- Selecting monitoring methods
- Types of monitoring methods and guidelines for their use.

It also discusses the three steps to document performance:

- Overview of documentation
- Two types of documentation
- Challenges.

WHAT IS PERFORMANCE MONITORING?

Monitoring performance is the process of observing an employee's task results and collecting data on those results during the appraisal period. Monitoring performance gives the supervisor the information needed to make an objective rating at the end of the appraisal period.

- A performance appraisal can be accurate and objective only if employee performance is monitored and data on performance are available.

- Monitoring performance provides the data that lead to a performance rating. The more data the supervisor gathers, the more support he or she has for choosing the final rating.

- Frequent monitoring of performance alerts the supervisor to performance problems early in the appraisal period, and allows the opportunity for employee improvement before undesirable or unacceptable work behaviors become habits.

SELECTING MONITORING METHODS

Select monitoring methods that:

- Apply to each element and measurable standard. Plan to monitor all, not just some, elements and measurable standards.

- Reflect the measures selected. For example, if you have created numeric measures, you will need to monitor quantitative data related to the employee's performance.

- Are realistic and practical, you feel comfortable with, and you will use.

  – Select monitoring methods that can be achieved. For example, if you cannot observe the employee frequently, then perhaps observation is not an appropriate method. Similarly, do not select numeric measures if numeric data are not available. For example, do not identify that you will monitor an employee's problem resolution time unless there is a formal process in place to help you do so.

  – Consider how you will monitor the performance of employees who work at remote sites. These methods may differ from those used to monitor employees whom you see daily. For example, it is not practical to use observation if the employee is working at a remote site.

  – Finally, your monitoring methods must allow you to monitor consistently.

After you have identified potential monitoring methods, communicate them to the employee and ask for input to ensure the process is understood and appropriate for the employee's job.

Monitoring Methods

Monitor your employees by:

- Reviewing sample work products.
- Reviewing supporting documents related to each employee's work (e.g., log sheets, critical incident reports, project tracking files). Develop a tracking system as a means for reviewing the productivity of your employees.
- Reviewing feedback from customers (e.g., customer surveys), coworkers, colleagues, or other managers.
- Observing the employee's performance, including evaluating the output and products of the employee's work and conducting routine spot checks. Use your calendar to jot down instances in which you notice an employee doing something particularly well or doing something that needs improvement. This provides a quick and easy reference to help you recall specific instances of performance.
- Collecting input from an employee regarding his or her own performance (e.g., from routine one-on-one meetings with an employee).
- Documenting feedback meetings with employees (e.g., a summary of performance expectations and how the employee is meeting them).

Refer to the Monitoring Performance job aid in Appendix B for more information.

DOCUMENTATION

An important aspect of monitoring performance is keeping records about employees' performance. This documentation helps you remember and fairly evaluate employees' work. Effective documentation can help you fairly evaluate your employees because it will:

- Support your memories and accurately reflect facts concerning performance during the year
- Provide a basis for any legal disputes.

Additionally, in order to fairly evaluate an employee's total performance, you must balance positive and negative information.

Documentation refers to any written information concerning an employee's performance, including but not limited to:

- Official letters
- Personal notes
- Work samples
- Work logs
- Notes from observation
- Reminders marked on calendars (i.e., a form of memory jogger).

For performance management purposes, documentation refers to any written information concerning an employee's performance.

Types of Documentation

There are two types of documentation, official documentation and supervisor notes. The distinctions between the two are based on how the information is kept and what you are required to share with the employee.

Official Documentation

Official documentation is any information used for the employee's performance review or for formal performance-based actions. Official documentation:

- Must be shared with the employee. It is best to have the employee sign the official documentation to show that he or she has reviewed it.

- Is kept in a separate folder or file with the employee's name on it.

- May be used in legal or adverse action disputes.

Examples of the types of information to keep in an official documentation file include:

- Support for incentive awards

- Information concerning performance problems that are recurring or require formal constructive feedback

- Notes concerning performance discussions
- Employee logs or records of assignments
- Evaluative information collected from other supervisors
- Work products that reflect performance or behavior in both typical and atypical situations
- Employee input or information submitted by the employee
- Photocopies of work products, including drafts with comments and edits.

Supervisor Notes

Supervisor notes are memory joggers regarding employee performance. Supervisor notes:

- Must be maintained by you and for your personal use
- Must not be shown to anyone
- Are usually kept in a notebook or calendar that contains information on many topics
- Must not be kept under an official system of agency records.

Examples of the types of performance information to keep in your supervisor notes include:

- Notes about all your employees
- Notes describing observations, including:
  - Information related to performance (careful not to include judgments or inferences)
  - Brief statements that use adjectives and adverbs sparingly (e.g., Bob's report submitted on time, Brenda's presentation encouraged participation)
  - The time, date, and place

  - Typical and atypical performance indicators
  - Notes on informal positive and constructive feedback discussions
  - Isolated incidents that correspond to the performance criteria or job behaviors
  - Notes from informal discussions or meetings
  - Reminders.

Note: The Privacy Act allows you to keep personal notes, as long as the above conditions are met. Even supervisor notes, however, can be subpoenaed and are subject to disclosure in discovery before most administrative and judicial proceedings.

Refer to the Types of Documentation Job Aid in Appendix B for a summary of this information.

Documentation Challenges

As a supervisor, you face two major challenges when you document performance:

- You must collect similar types of documentation for all employees, whether you are keeping the information in your supervisor notes or official documentation files.
  - You must maintain an official documentation file for all employees; do not single out one employee. However, you can maintain performance documentation for an employee whose performance is below expectations. This documentation may be used to support implementation of a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) and/or to document an employee's performance related to a PIP.
  - Your official documentation files should contain the same types of performance-related information for all employees. For example, if you keep a copy of one employee's work product, keep sample work products for all employees.

- Some supervisors believe they should not document an employee's performance because the documentation may be used against them in a legal dispute.
  - A lack of documentation may lead to problems if a situation arises in which you believe an employee's performance has deteriorated, but you have no documentation to support your position.
  - Also, remember that documentation objectively maintained for all employees will generally benefit rather than hurt you.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Read the following scenario and answer the following questions to help your fellow supervisor Sandra document her employee's performance. Refer to Appendix A for the correct answers.

Ernesto works for Sandra. Ernesto's performance usually meets expectations, but occasionally it falls below or exceeds expectations.

On Friday, March 31, Ernesto was surfing the Internet for vacation packages to the Caribbean. Sandra saw the screen and joked about a spring holiday.

The next day, she again saw Ernesto on the Internet trying to book airline flights. That afternoon, Sandra talked to Ernesto about the status of his current project. Ernesto said that he might miss the deadline because of the volume of work she had given him. Sandra told Ernesto that he seemed to be spending a lot of work time planning his vacation. She also told him that missing the deadline would cause serious problems for his coworkers.

Throughout the following week, Sandra made it a point to look in on Ernesto frequently.

Question 1

Should Sandra document the first time she saw Ernesto on the Internet and joked about his vacation plans?

A. Yes, in her supervisor notes
B. Yes, in Ernesto's official documentation file
C. No

Question 2

Should Sandra document the conversation about the status of Ernesto's project?

A. Yes, in her supervisor notes
B. Yes, in Ernesto's official documentation file
C. No

Question 3

Should Sandra document her observations of Ernesto throughout the week?

A. Yes, in her supervisor notes
B. Yes, in Ernesto's official documentation file
C. No

DOCUMENTATION GUIDELINES

You are responsible for maintaining documentation related to your employees' performance. It is in an employee's best interest to make sure you remember his or her good performance as well as that which needs improvement.

Keep the following guidelines in mind when you are documenting an employee's performance.

- Include complete identification of the situation, circumstances, or results of the performance.
- Use brief, specific, and detailed statements that support the facts.
- Include information on the impact of the performance.
- Include information that illustrates performance in relation to expectations.
- Be objective. Do not include biases or judgments.
- Include only data that reflect performance and results.

- Keep the documentation confidential by keeping official documents locked in file cabinets and not leaving your notes in open view.

- Maintain the same documentation system for all employees. Establish folders to hold work samples and observation notes. Set up one folder for each employee. Keep a copy of the employee's performance elements and standards in the folder to remind yourself to collect information about all of them.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

The following statements are from an excerpt of documentation concerning Tyrone Krieder's report. Analyze each statement to determine if it is something you should or should not do when documenting performance. Classify each statement as Do or Don't. Refer to Appendix A for feedback when you are finished.

Statement	Do	Don't
1. Tyrone Krieder's report "Cost of Training," dated December 22, is well written and well researched.		
2. The report is organized into logical sections that flow together.		
3. His writing style is charming and smooth.		
4. He researched the costs of developing and conducting training, as well as transportation, lodging, and missed work time costs within the Agency and other government offices.		
5. The report is detailed enough to include all factors that should be considered when making training decisions.		
6. The report was completed on time with only a few minor typographical errors.		
7. This was a special assignment for Tyrone, outside his normal job duties.		

KEY POINTS

- The monitoring and documentation processes should illustrate what is happening on the job, where the employee stands, what changes need to be made, and what steps are necessary to improve performance.
- Monitoring means consistently measuring performance and providing ongoing feedback to employees and workgroups on their progress toward reaching their goals.
- Documentation refers to any written information concerning an employee's performance.
- There are two types of documentation:
  - Official, which is used to directly support the performance review
  - Supervisor notes, which are personal reminders often referred to as memory joggers.
- Maintain the same monitoring and documenting system for all employees, whether on-site or remote. Establish folders to hold work samples and observation notes. Set up one folder for each employee. Keep a copy of the employee's performance elements and standards in the folder to remind yourself to collect information about all of them.
- Communicate with your employees about how you plan to monitor and document their performance. Elicit their input, ask for their ideas, and share yours.
- Maintain confidentiality when both monitoring and documenting performance.

TRANSITION

The next section, Evaluate Performance, explains how to evaluate employees' performance and assign a rating.

Section 6: Evaluate Performance

INTRODUCTION

The following two formal evaluation periods are required for all FSA employees:

- A midyear progress review
- The year-end summary rating.

These are the times when you must evaluate employee performance against the elements and measurable standards in the Performance Plan. Although employee evaluation is mandatory during these two times, evaluation should be an ongoing process that takes place informally every day in the form of feedback.

By focusing on performance management as an ongoing, year-round process, your focus shifts from "justifying a rating" at the end of the year to continually improving performance. When the emphasis is on managing - rather than primarily judging - performance, frequent feedback to performers allows for correction of performance deficiencies before the summary appraisal is made.

STEPS FOR EVALUATING PERFORMANCE

To evaluate performance you must compare documented performance with the performance criteria set forth in the elements and measurable standards discussed with the employee.

Evaluation can be accomplished fairly and equitably if the measurable standards were written with realistic and specific measures and performance was monitored and documented throughout the rating period.

There are five steps for evaluating employees:

1. Review documentation to compare and evaluate performance against expectations
2. Identify if rater bias exists
3. Assign ratings for each element
4. Record accomplishments for elements rated Exceeds or Does Not Meet
5. Determine the summary rating level.

STEP 1: REVIEW DOCUMENTATION

The first step in fairly evaluating performance is to review the documentation you maintained during the rating period. Use information that is based on what the employee actually did and:

- Do not interpret, draw conclusions, or make assumptions. Use the observable facts, not your beliefs or understanding of the facts.
- Review the expectations for the employee's performance and identify concrete examples, both positive and negative that illustrate how well the employee has met those expectations.
- Use facts to avoid inferences.
- Understand the circumstances surrounding the facts.

If you realize that you have not documented all of the elements, or that you need additional information for a thorough and balanced review, consider gathering additional data.

Collect information from others, if appropriate (detail supervisors, team leaders, etc.). Consider asking the employee to volunteer additional work products or other documentation (e.g., assignment summaries, accomplishment reports, and quarterly reports).

When you are reviewing the information, consider factors outside the employee's control that may have impacted his or her performance. These may include unexpected changes in the workload, priorities, requirements, and/or dependence on others to meet a goal.

Review Documentation - Example

Monitor to assess how Brenda is doing for the Customer Service element and document samples of her work. For example:

- Review her sample work products (e.g., communications to customers). Place a sampling of her work in a folder you keep for Brenda.

- Review feedback from customers (e.g., quarterly customer survey data, letters of appreciation from producers), coworkers, colleagues, and other managers. File copies that will be useful in completing her performance evaluation.

- Observe her performance, including evaluating the output and products of her work and conducting routine spot checks. Keep notes on your calendar, including memory joggers of instances in which you observed Brenda doing an exceptional job of providing customer service.

- Collect input from Brenda regarding her performance (e.g., in routine one-on-one meetings). Keep notes from these meetings.

For the Communications element, you would monitor Brenda's performance and keep relevant documentation. For example:

- Review her work samples, including farm and producer information reports prepared for County Committee meetings, and keep copies. Place a sampling of her work in a folder you keep for Brenda.

- Make notes about agreed-upon timeframes for the preparation of reports and monitor when Brenda delivers the reports.

- Review and file letters of appreciation from producers.

- Observe her performance, including evaluating her work output and products and conducting routine spot checks. Keep notes on your calendar, including memory joggers of instances in which you observed Brenda doing an exceptional job of communicating with producers or staff.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY IF RATER BIAS EXISTS	For your evaluation of an employee's performance to be fair, it must be free from the common pitfalls created by bias. Rater bias is defined as errors made in judgment that inhibit impartiality, such as the use of subjective criteria. Think about the frequency of the documented performance. What rating did the majority of the demonstrated performance merit? Do not let one outstanding or poorly done job influence the overall evaluation. Keeping rater bias in check is an essential part of any performance appraisal process. By becoming more aware of the natural tendency toward subjective evaluations, you can ensure more fair and appropriate appraisals. Refer to the Recognizing Bias job aid in Appendix B.
STEP 3: ASSIGN RATINGS	After you have reviewed the documentation and ensured that your evaluation is as free from bias as possible, the third step in evaluating performance is to assign ratings to each element. Whether you are an FSA field supervisor using EmpowHR (a computer-based processing system used by FSA field supervisors and employees) or another supervisor using the MS Word version of the Forms AD-435, AD-435A and AD-435B, each element must be assigned a rating. Think about the frequency of the documented performance and ask yourself, "What rating did the majority of the demonstrated tasks merit?" Do not let one outstanding or poorly done job influence the numeric score. Assign an element rating (e.g., Exceeds, Fully Successful, or Does Not Meet) that accurately reflects the comparison of the actual performance with the criteria and expectations detailed on the Performance Plan.

Element Ratings

There are three element rating levels:

- Exceeds Fully Successful: The employee's performance was significantly better in terms of quantity, quality, timeliness, and/or cost-effectiveness than one would normally expect from an individual assigned to the position (i.e., the performance exceeds the Fully Successful standard for the element being evaluated).

- Fully Successful: The employee's performance was as good as, but not necessarily better than, one would normally expect from an individual occupying the position (i.e., the performance meets the Fully Successful standard for the element being evaluated). This level generally describes the performance of the "average" effective employee whose work meets normal expectations in terms of quantity, quality, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness.

- Does Not Meet Fully Successful: The employee's performance has failed to fulfill the basic expectations for the work (i.e., the performance does not meet the Fully Successful standard for the element being evaluated). The supervisor must prepare a written statement describing the employee's deficiencies for all elements rated at this level (the supervisor may record this statement on either the AD-435A and/or AD-435B or on a separate sheet of paper).

STEP 4: RECORD ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR ELEMENTS

For ***each*** element, the supervisor must prepare a written narrative outlining the employee's accomplishments. The narrative should:

- Include examples of performance where appropriate
- Be brief and specific
- Avoid adjectives and adverbs that are not objective.

Refer to the Tips for Writing Performance Narratives job aid for more information.

Record Accomplishments - Example

You would write a narrative for ***each*** element for Brenda. The following are examples of effective narratives for the two elements for which Brenda received an Exceeds rating—Customer Service and Execution of Duties.

Customer Service Narrative. Brenda provides excellent customer service to every producer who comes to our county office. As soon as customers enter our office, she immediately drops what she is doing to wait on them. She always smiles and greets them warmly. Brenda takes the time to work with producers to ensure that they understand how to complete applications and know what documents are required. As a result, applications never have to be returned for missing or confusing information. She always keeps the program benefit information current so that she can quickly and easily provide the information to producers and other customers. Eight producers throughout the year took the time to write a letter about Brenda's outstanding customer service. In addition, our customer feedback survey gave her the highest marks.

Communications Narrative. Brenda has excellent communication skills. When she greets producers, she takes the time to listen first to clearly understand their questions, concerns, and needs before responding. Her body language always conveys interest - she leans forward, focuses on the customer, nods her head, and asks questions to understand. As a result, she never fails to provide the right information that addresses the need, question, and/or concern. If she does not know something, she knows whom to ask to get the correct answer. Our customer feedback surveys always give her the highest marks for her communication skills. In addition, producers frequently take the time to write us letters about the quality of her customer service and communication skills.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

The following statements are part of narrative statements reflecting Greg Kasa's Exceeds Fully Successful rating. Analyze each statement to determine if it is something you should or should not do when writing accomplishment narratives. Classify each statement as Do or Don't. Refer to Appendix A for the correct answers.

Statement	Do	Don't
1. Greg does a great job in this element.		
2. The analyses Greg performed included new data sources that were well researched and gave managers valuable perspectives and insight.		
3. Greg conducted this research and analysis in a very short timeframe and partially without the use of a computer.		
4. I thought Greg handled working under pressure very well.		

STEP 5: DETERMINE THE SUMMARY RATING LEVEL

All performance elements are not necessarily created equal: some are critical; some are noncritical. To recognize the difference, the supervisor will assign points: two points (usually referred to as appraisal units) for critical elements and one point (i.e., one appraisal unit) for noncritical elements.

For FSA field supervisors using EmpowHR, the fields will automatically populate. For supervisors not using an automated system should:

- Calculate the number of appraisal units for each employee to arrive at a total score and final rating
- Transfer the individual element ratings from the AD-435A or AD-435B to the final rating document, Form AD-435, Performance Appraisal
- Record either one or two points in the appropriate blocks (i.e., block 15B, 15C, or 15D) and add up the points (i.e., appraisal units) awarded at each level
- Translate this total score into the summary rating level for the employee.

Summary Rating Level

The number of appraisal units earned at each element rating level will determine the summary rating level for the employee. As its name implies, the summary rating level is an adjective summarizing the employee's overall performance. The supervisor may use one of five rating levels, that are based on specific criteria:

- Outstanding: All appraisal units were earned at the Exceeds level. For each Outstanding rating, the supervisor must prepare a written narrative outlining the employee's accomplishments.

- Superior: More appraisal units were earned at the Exceeds level than at the Fully Successful level, and no appraisal units were earned at the Does Not Meet level.

- Fully Successful: Appraisal units earned at the Fully Successful level equal or surpass the number of appraisal units earned at the Exceeds level, and no critical element was rated Does Not Meet; if one or more noncritical elements were rated at the Does Not Meet level, the appraisal units earned at that level must have been offset by appraisal units at the Exceeds level.

- Marginal: More appraisal units were earned at the Does Not Meet level than at the Exceeds level, and no critical element was rated Does Not Meet.

- Unacceptable: One or more critical elements were rated at the Does Not Meet level. Should this occur, the supervisor must contact an employee relations specialist for guidance on how to proceed.

The supervisor will identify the summary rating level for each employee by checking the appropriate block on the AD-435.

FSA Practice - Determine the Summary Rating Level

The following table reflects Brenda's performance in the elements:

- Assign two points for critical elements and one point for noncritical elements. In this example, Individual Contributions to the Team is the noncritical element.

- Calculate the number of appraisal units to arrive at a total score and final rating.

Refer to Appendix A for feedback.

Element	Rating
Customer Service	Exceeds
Communications	Exceeds
Execution of Duties	Exceeds
Individual Contributions to the Team	Fully Successful

Based on these results, what would be the summary rating?

A. Outstanding
B. Superior
C. Fully Successful
D. Marginal
E. Unacceptable

KEY POINTS

- To evaluate performance you must compare documented performance with performance criteria and job behaviors set forth in the elements and standards discussed with the employee.

- Evaluation can be accomplished fairly and equitably:

  – The measurable standards were written with realistic and specific measures

  – Performance was monitored and documented throughout the rating period.

- There are five steps for evaluating employees:

  – Review documentation to compare and evaluate performance against expectations

  – Identify if rater bias exists and address it

  – Assign ratings for each element

  – Determine the summary rating level

  – Record accomplishments if necessary

- When you are reviewing the documentation, make sure you consider factors outside the employee's control that may have impacted his or her performance.

- For your evaluation of an employee's performance to be fair, it must be free from the common pitfalls created by bias.

TRANSITION

This completes the section on evaluation. You are now ready to complete section 7, Give, Get, Merge Model.

Section 7: Give, Get, Merge Model

INTRODUCTION

Communicating performance expectations is the foundation for effective performance management. Feedback on performance should be an ongoing process that communicates expectations and what the employee should continue doing, stop doing, do less of, or start doing.

In this section, you will learn how to apply the Give, Get, Merge Communication Model to your feedback interactions with employees.

WHY COMMUNICATE?

Communication is the key to getting the results for which you are held accountable. Effective communication enables you to effectively manage and influence both individual and workgroup performance.

- Poor performance is costly in terms of lost productivity, the impact on other employees who must pick up the workload of the nonperformer, lower morale, and the time requirements of the supervisor.

- If supervisors handle performance issues early through performance planning, good communication, and feedback, they can avoid the time-intensive effort to correct, document, and take a performance-based action when the performance becomes a real problem.

- Frequent feedback to employees gives them the opportunity to correct performance deficiencies before they receive their summary appraisal.

When you focus on the entire performance management process and communication, your focus shifts from justifying a rating to improving performance.

SECTION TOPICS

This section provides you with a foundation for effective communication by addressing the following topics:

- The communication process
- Filters in the communication process
- The Give, Get, Merge Communication Model.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION: PROCESS

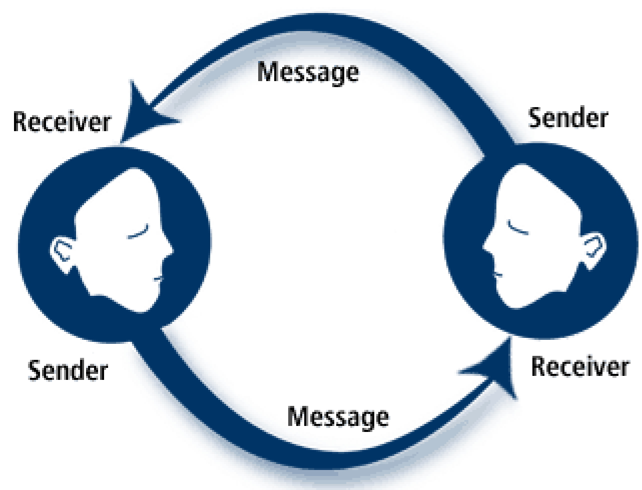
In order to successfully apply a communication model, you will first need to understand some basic principles of interpersonal communication.

You may not think of communication as a process, but there are specific steps that occur during any communication between people.

This process involves a:

- Sender, who communicates information, thoughts, feelings, and needs to a receiver
- Receiver, who gets the message from the sender and must interpret its meaning.

In most conversations, each person alternates between being a sender and a receiver. Usually, managers and supervisors communicate with employees to create specific outcomes, share information, and/or provide feedback.



INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION: FILTERS

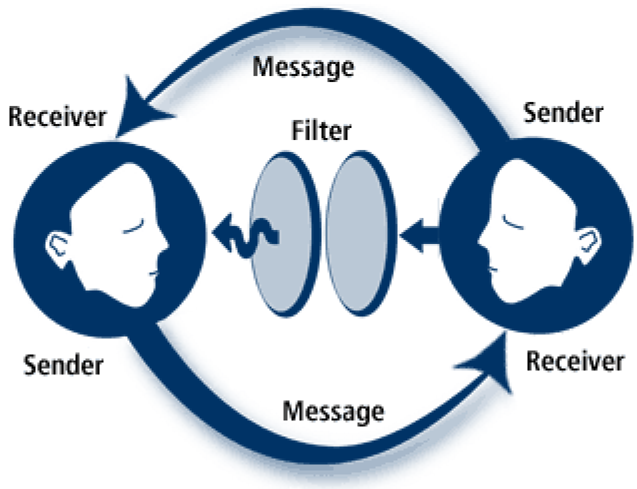
Receivers may not always grasp the meaning intended by the sender due to our individual filters. Filters are those things that get in the way of sending and receiving messages; they can complicate the communication process. Types of filters include:

- Life and work experiences, beliefs, and background (culture, heritage, and upbringing).
- Assumptions: the act of taking something for granted or supposing something without proof; an unwarrantable claim.
- Individual thinking styles, or how we take in and process information. For example, some people process visual images while others filter out the visual and process primarily auditory information.

The three parts of graphic on the next page show an example of a communication between a sender and receiver and the filters that impacted the interpretation.

Once you become aware of your filters, you can take steps to suspend your assumptions or revisit your understanding of the meaning of the communication. To help validate that your interpretation of the meaning is accurate:

- Identify the assumptions underlying your conclusions and actions. Are they the correct assumptions? Where did these assumptions come from?
- Revisit perceptions by being open to another meaning or interpretation of the data you have observed and alter your views as appropriate.
- Reexamine the original data. Recognize that you might be wrong about some data or that you may have drawn an incorrect conclusion.
- Communicate with the sender to get more data, verify your understanding and perceptions, and confirm whether your assumptions are valid.



Sender Example

The speaker is a supervisor who is giving feedback to one of her employees. The supervisor is concerned because she received her employee's draft of a time-sensitive report 2 days late. She is also concerned because English is a second language for the employee and his grammar has been a problem. She also knows that he has been spending a lot of time working to improve his writing skills.

The supervisor says, "I know you've been working really hard lately. I've noticed the effort you've put into sharpening your writing skills. Most of your work is right on target, but in light of the difficulties you had meeting our last deadline, I'd like for us to take time today to talk about time management. . ."

Receiver Example

The receiver is foreign born, with English being a second language. He is very proud that he has learned English so quickly. Also, in his native country, time is not an absolute, and does not have the same importance as it does in the United States.

The employee heard and thought the following during the conversation:

The supervisor is blaming me for missing the deadline when she edited it so much and had me spend so much time rewriting nit-picking details. Handing in my draft a few days later doesn't make that much difference. Also, nice way to butter me up by saying my writing has improved.

Filters Example

In this script, filters could include:

- Difficulty with grammar when English is the second language.
- Assuming that the priority was to focus on improving writing, not making the deadline.
- The supervisor focusing on her discomfort with giving negative feedback, rather than on the employee.

GIVE, GET, MERGE COMMUNICATION MODEL

Now that you understand the communication process and the filters that may impact your ability to understand meaning, you are ready to apply the Give, Get, Merge Communication Model.

The tools and skills in this model are particularly critical to your being able to eliminate filters as you communicate performance expectations and provide feedback to your employees throughout the year.

Many of us intuitively use the Give, Get, Merge Communication Model, particularly when we are discussing differing information, opinions, or experiences. It is an effective model for communicating not only with employees, coworkers, and managers but in our personal relationships as well.

Give

Give Your Perspective. Communicate a concise, specific, and objective message whether you are giving an assignment, explaining a decision, expressing positive feedback, or describing a performance or behavior problem. Consider the needs of the individual when giving any message.

Get

Get the Other Person's Perspective. Involve the other person in the discussion and listen to what he or she has to say. Ask for the person's opinions, ideas, and perspectives using open-ended questions. Listen carefully while suspending your judgment.

Merge

Merge Perspectives. Reach a mutually acceptable agreement, taking into account the other person's perspective and needs. To merge perspectives, try to find common ground, identify specific differences, and explore alternatives.

GIVE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

You typically give your perspective in a variety of situations (e.g., when you give an assignment, explain a decision, describe performance, discuss an issue, or share information). In each of these situations, you provide the employee with detailed information so that he or she can fully understand the context.

Examples of discussions for these situations may include:

- Discuss the goals of the work unit and the employee's role in achieving them.
- Discuss what the employee should produce (outputs) to achieve the goals and how these outputs relate to criteria/expectations in his or her performance plan.
- Discuss the specific realistic outputs you want for each of the elements and measurable standards in the performance plan.
- Explain the employee's performance and how it does or does not meet expectations.
- Discuss the requirements for completing a project, including reviewing the process the employee should follow, timeframes, and the specific format of the final product.
- Explain why an employee was or was not selected for a promotion, including a review of his or qualifications and those required for promotion, the process followed to make promotion decisions, etc.

When you give your perspective, be concise, specific, and objective. For example, when describing performance that includes completing work assignments in a timely manner" what do you mean by "timely"? Do you mean by the end of the week, the end of the day, within the hour, or immediately?

Give: Framing Your Perspective

A key element of giving your perspective is framing the message from the point of view of the person hearing the message. Recognize that each person has different needs, interests, concerns, perceptions, and styles and, therefore, will react very differently to the message.

It is also important to consider the way you deliver your message. How you give information plays a significant role in your employee's ability to hear you and impacts all of your interactions with the employee.

Your nonverbal behavior (e.g., body language, facial expressions, and gestures) and tone of voice are significant parts of giving your perspective. process.

Nonverbal behavior

Your nonverbal behavior can greatly influence the communication process. To ensure that your nonverbal cues are accurately communicating your perspective:

- Keep your arms open. Crossed arms are often interpreted as a defensive posture or a closed mind.
- Maintain eye contact to show sincerity and truth.
- Lean toward the person to demonstrate that you are focusing on him or her.
- Keep your body still. Fidgeting often signals impatience or boredom.

Research

A researcher named Albert Mehrabian conducted research on just how important nonverbal behaviors are in the communication process. He found that:

- 55% of the message is conveyed and interpreted through nonverbal cues
- 38% of the message is communicated through how it is said or tone of voice
- Only 7% of the message is conveyed through the actual spoken words.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Read the following statements and classify each as effective or ineffective. Refer to Appendix A for feedback.

Statement	Effective	Ineffective
Your report was well written, accurate, and on time.		
Your performance on the audit was great, Hector.		
You didn't respond to the email I sent, so I assume you didn't have any questions and we can move on.		
Florence, let's take some time to go through the new requirements together so you can start this assignment without any confusion about what needs to happen.		
Your group's summary gives the general information I wanted, but it doesn't pinpoint the ideas I was looking for. You are getting the hang of the style I like to read though.		
I noticed that you weren't able to draw everyone into the discussion during the meeting.		

GET THE OTHER PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE

The Get portion of the Give, Get, Merge Communication Model focuses on getting the other person's perspective. This means involving the person by getting information about his or her issues, positions, interests, and concerns around the performance or behavior, a proposed assignment, or a promotion decision.

As a supervisor, you are responsible for providing information, assignments, direction, and feedback. For this reason, you will most likely use the Give part of the model more often than the Get. However, there are times when it is beneficial to get an employee's perspective and information first, before giving your perspective. Possible circumstances include:

- When you do not have all the information or do not understand the situation well enough to make a decision or suggestion
- When you have been told about a situation by a third party but have not observed the situation or problem yourself

- When the employee brings a problem to you and you want him or her to work toward a solution, rather than just giving him or her an answer.

Getting an employee's perspective allows you to make sure the employee understands expectations or to find out if he or she understands the situation differently or has new information of which you are unaware. Examples of areas in which you should get the other person's perspective are:

- Get information from the employee about how he or she might be able to improve his or her current performance and ways to develop.

- Get information from the employee about what he or she thinks about his or her role in achieving the office goals.

- Get the employee's perspective on the effort required to attain the Fully Successful level of performance.

It is important at the beginning of the rating period to get the employee's perspective on what he or she wants to accomplish and what barriers he or she foresees. It is equally important at the end of the year to get the employee's perspective of what he or she has accomplished.

Use the Q12 Impact Engagement Interview in Appendix B as a tool.

Skills for Getting Another's Perspective

Specific skills involved in getting another's perspective include:

- **Attending**, which demonstrates to the speaker that you are paying attention and listening to what he or she is saying. Attending represents a personal commitment to the communication and interaction. It is usually conveyed through nonverbal behavior; that is, it is represented by body language (e.g., eye contact, posture, and facial expressions).

- **Observing**, which includes the ability to observe and detect cues in the speaker's behavior and/or appearance and interpret these unspoken messages to fully understand what he or she is saying-and how he or she might be feeling.

- **Encouraging** the speaker by letting him or her know that you are paying attention. Doing so gives the speaker confidence and can stimulate reactions.

- **Listening for content**, which means accurately expressing and confirming your understanding of what the speaker is saying. The key skills in listening for content include asking questions and paraphrasing (briefly restating in your own words the gist of what the speaker is saying).

Barriers to Getting Another's Perspective

As discussed earlier in the section, filters and barriers are things that get in the way of sending and receiving messages; they can complicate the communication process. There are several barriers that everyone must guard against in order to actively solicit and listen to another person's perspective.

The information below is also summarized in the Barriers to Getting Another's Perspective job aid.

Barrier	Method to Remove Barrier
Prematurely passing judgment on what is being said	Suspend your judgment until you have recognized and removed any filters you may have.
Lacking energy to listen and focus on the speaker	Reschedule the conversation until you are able to be fully attentive.
Focusing on distractions (e.g., noises, diverted attention, activity surrounding you)	Turn off the computer screen or telephone, close the door.
Lacking motivation to listen (e.g., because the information is repetitive, the excuses are the same, it's the same old "spiel")	Stay focused on why and what the speaker wants you to hear. Ask questions; be curious.
Focusing on details and not understanding the overall meaning	Remind yourself of the speaker's purpose and/or restate the primary objective.

Barrier	Method to Remove Barrier
Letting your own thoughts get in the way of listening (i.e., your personal "to do" list)	Become an active listener (i.e., question, paraphrase, comment) and stop your internal monologue.
Being preoccupied by the use of the language (e.g., accents, rate of speech, grammar)	Listen attentively, paraphrase, and ask questions.

Identify Barriers to Getting Another's Perspective - Practice

Read the following transcripts from a performance review meeting and identify the barriers to getting the employee's perspective. Refer to Appendix A for feedback.

Question 1

Supervisor**:** Hey, I'll be right with you; let me just finish this email. [*pause*] Okay, thanks for coming in. I wanted to discuss last week's meeting with you, especially, . . . [phone rings] Just a sec. Yeah . . . Mike . . . Right . . . No, I wouldn't do that . . . Sure . . . I'll call you later. Now, where were we . . . oh, yeah, last week's meeting. One thing I wanted to make sure is . . . [knock on door] Hi, Eileen, listen, Joann won't be ready at 3 o'clock. Can you do 4? Great, see you then . . . What was I saying . . . ?

Select the most appropriate barrier displayed in this transcript.

A. Overattention to detail
B. Distractions/lack of focus
C. Bias/prejudgment
D. Closed mind

Question 2

Supervisor: All right, say that again. Why weren't the other people aware of the meeting?

Employee: The managers indicated that they didn't get the memo.

Supervisor: Who have you talked to?

Employee: I just told you, I talked to the managers.

Supervisor: Oh, yeah, sorry, I've got a presentation to make in ten minutes and I'm a little nervous.

Select the most appropriate barrier displayed in this transcript.

A. Overattention to detail
B. Lack of energy and focus
C. Bias/prejudgment
D. Closed mind

MERGING PERSPECTIVES

Merging perspectives involves reaching a mutual understanding on issues, interests, or concerns surrounding performance, behavior, assignment, and promotion and on actions to prevent a recurrence of the problem or actions that might be taken in the future.

Merging perspectives means coming to a mutual understanding after giving your perspective and getting the employee's perspective.

There might be situations in which mutual agreement is not feasible (e.g., the employee might not agree with a performance element rating or overall appraisal rating). But, whenever possible, you want to reach an understanding that contains both points of view. Doing so increases the likelihood of high performance and success.

Steps for Merging Perspectives

There are four steps for merging perspectives.

1. Identify goals:

    - Keep in mind the desired outcome of the discussion with the employee. What behaviors would you like the employee to change? What agreements would you like to reach?

    - Also keep in mind whether it is important to secure a high level of employee buy-in.

2. Look for areas of agreement. Look for and build on similarities in interests, summarizing areas of agreement.

3. Determine specific differences. Identify where you and your employee's viewpoints differ.

4. Explore alternatives. Keep your goals and constraints in mind as you explore solutions.

Throughout these steps, you may need to apply a variety of merge strategies to keep the conversation moving and/or reach agreement.

Merge Strategies

There are several merge strategies that you can use. You might:

- **Impose** your decision or point of view onto the employee (e.g., "This is what has to happen . . . ")

- **Accommodate** the wishes of the employee (e.g., "OK, we'll try it your way . . . ")

- **Compromise** with the employee, so that both of you get some of what you want to achieve (e.g., "I'm willing to do. . . if you are willing to do . . . ")

- **Avoid** the issue by postponing any decisions around it (for example, "I'll think about the problem some more")

- **Collaborate**, working with the employee to find the best possible solutions by using all available ideas and resources to satisfy the interests of both parties. When possible, collaboration is often the most valuable approach to reaching agreement and merging perspectives in a feedback session, especially when the stakes are high for the individual and the Agency.

Most of us probably rely on one or two of these strategies over others, and it is important to know that those we rely on may not fit all situations.

Close the Discussion

Close the discussion after any conversation, but especially when using Give, Get, Merge techniques, by:

- Summarizing what has been discussed/agreed to
- Giving the other person the chance to provide additional input
- Confirming any followup actions
- Expressing your commitment to the other's growth and success
- Checking that all of the other person's concerns have been addressed.

Merge Strategies-Practice

Review the following scenarios and answer the questions that follow. Refer to Appendix A for feedback.

Question 1

Alfonso Garcia has worked for you for just about 1 year. His work is always well done and ready on time. You want to keep your work unit as productive as possible and have asked Alfonso to meet with you regarding his work habits. While there is no doubt he does great work, you are concerned because he never takes notes during meetings or keeps a written calendar of due dates/deadlines. Isn't this lack of written support material a disaster waiting to happen? Alfonso insists that he's always worked this way and has never missed a deadline. Keeping track of notes would probably confuse him!

Which merge strategy would be the best approach for resolving this performance issue?

A. Integrate
B. Accommodate
C. Avoid
D. Impose

Question 2

You have concerns about your employee Bobby Skowronek. Until recently, all his work has been of good quality and completed on time. However, Bobby has barely made any progress on the spreadsheet you asked him to create more than a week ago. Your group needs that completed spreadsheet no later than 2 weeks from today. You are concerned about Bobby's lack of progress on this task. His other work has been completed on time. Why can't he work as efficiently on this assignment?

Bobby has been proud of his work. This spreadsheet assignment is very difficult for him because of his lack of experience with the Excel program. Which merge strategy would be the best approach for resolving this performance problem?

A. Integrate
B. Accommodate
C. Avoid
D. Impose

KEY POINTS

- Communicating performance expectations is the foundation for effective performance management. Communication includes formal discussions and informal feedback.

- One model for effective communication is the Give, Get, Merge model.

  – Give your perspective. Communicate a concise, specific, and objective message whether giving an assignment, explaining a decision, expressing positive feedback, or describing a performance or behavior problem. Consider the needs of the individual in giving any message.

– Get the other person's perspective. Involve the other person in the discussion and listen to what he or she has to say. Ask for the person's opinions, ideas, and perspectives while suspending your judgment.

– Merge perspectives. Reach a mutual understanding, taking into account the other person's perspective and needs. To merge perspectives, try to find common ground, identify specific differences, and explore alternatives.

Everyone must guard against barriers that inhibit effective listening in order to actively solicit and hear another person's perspective

TRANSITION

Communication must be used in both formal discussions and informal feedback. The next section describes the different types of feedback and how to effectively use them.

Section 8: Feedback

INTRODUCTION

Communication through feedback must be used in both formal and informal settings if it is to become an essential element in the performance management process. Feedback is:

- An ongoing process between an employee and a supervisor or manager in which information is exchanged concerning the performance expected and the performance exhibited

- A means of focusing on performance rather than on the person

- Away to identify what to continue doing and what to stop doing, do less of, or start doing

- A gift; it is a reward for a job well done or an offer to help an employee improve

Section Topics

There are many benefits of providing ongoing feedback in the performance management process. Feedback:

- Guides employee development
- Rewards good performance
- Addresses poor performance
- Establishes and maintains communication
- Communicates the organization's values
- Increases employees' job satisfaction, motivation, and confidence.

This section focuses on helping you provide effective feedback to your employees by addressing the following topics:

- Characteristics of feedback
- Types of feedback
- Positive feedback
- Constructive feedback
- Tips for dealing with difficult feedback situations.

Feedback Self-Assessment

Before we start discussing the characteristics and types of feedback, take a moment to assess your own experiences and abilities regarding feedback.

Check whether each statement represents a strength or an area for improvement for you. There are no right or wrong answers.

Statement	Strength	Area for Improvement
1. I feel comfortable giving constructive feedback.		
2. I often give positive feedback to good performers.		
3. I make sure that I give feedback on performance and conduct issues as close to the occurrence as possible.		
4. I plan what I am going to say when I am giving constructive feedback.		
5. I believe that continual feedback can improve the performance and conduct of my employees.		
6. I "praise in public and criticize in private."		
7. When giving constructive feedback, I focus on the "here and now" and future actions, not on the past.		
8. I avoid giving employees feedback based on third-party information unless I have verified the facts of the occurrence.		
9. In feedback sessions, I spend a lot of time discussing what the employee can do in the future to improve performance.		
10. In constructive feedback sessions, I make sure that I separate the person from the problem and avoid judging him or her.		
11. In constructive feedback sessions, I make sure I give the employee some positive feedback along with constructive feedback.		
12. I believe that the "how" of delivering feedback (tone of voice, nonverbal behaviors) is at least as important as the content of the feedback.		
13. I feel comfortable handling employees' strong emotional reactions to feedback (e.g., crying, anger, etc.).		
14. I document all feedback sessions with employees.		
15. I take time to celebrate individual and group successes.		

We all bring different strengths to the feedback process and feel more comfortable with some parts of the process than others. This informal assessment can be a good gauge for determining what you might want to work on when giving feedback to your employees.

Characteristics of Effective Feedback

Effective feedback meets four characteristics

- Descriptive
- Objective
- Timely
- Professionally delivered.

Descriptive

Your feedback should be specific, not general, and provide measurable and observable details.

When giving constructive feedback, you should be explicit that your goal is to see a change in the situation or behavior and that you are not just making an observation. For example, "That report does not follow the standard" is just an observation as opposed to, "I noticed that your draft does not contain the required executive summary sections. I'd like to review the criteria for the report format with you so that you can fix it."

Objective

Feedback should be based on facts, not your beliefs, assumptions, or hearsay. It should be provided in accordance with a known standard, criterion, or performance expectation.

Focus on describing the behavior, not the individual, and avoid inferences and opinions. For example, do not say, "You're always late." Do say, "When you were late, I missed my Monday morning deadline."

Timely

Give the feedback as close to the performance as possible so that it is meaningful to the person and can be integrated into future performance as soon as possible. Use your judgment to determine if you should give feedback to an employee immediately or if you should take a little time to think about and plan what you need to say.

Determining the right time involves thinking about both the nature of the situation (e.g., a serious performance problem requires planning ahead) and appropriate timing for the employee to be receptive (e.g., Friday at 2 p.m. is probably not a good time for a feedback session on a serious problem).

Professionally Delivered

It is your responsibility to make sure that both the words you say and the way you say them (tone of voice, body language) are professional. For example, if you look and sound annoyed when you say, "When you were late, I missed my Monday morning deadline," the words won't matter-your actions will speak more loudly than the words.

Your demeanor and bearing will make all the difference in the world in achieving a win-win outcome.

TYPES OF FEEDBACK

You have two options for delivering performance feedback to your employees.

- Positive feedback is the acknowledgement of performance that meets or exceeds expectations. Giving positive feedback increases the likelihood that the performance will continue and boosts the employee's confidence and motivation.

- Constructive feedback is an explanation of how performance did not meet expectations and provides steps that can be taken to correct or improve performance. If given effectively, constructive feedback maintains the employee's self-esteem while helping him or her become more competent and confident.

When you ignore either desirable or undesirable performance and give no feedback, you cannot guarantee that the employee knows that he or she is performing well and will continue to do so or that the employee will correct undesirable performance on his or her own.

No feedback

When no feedback is given, employees will determine their own measures of success that may have little to do with your expectations. They will continue working in an unacceptable manner or toward goals that do not match yours.

Typical reasons that feedback is not regularly given include:

- There is not enough time.
- Feedback is difficult to give.
- Constant travel to different offices makes it difficult.
- Good feedback skills often come about through training and practice, which take time and commitment.

BENEFITS OF POSITIVE FEEDBACK

There are many benefits of positive feedback. It:

- Provides a method of guiding an employee by providing positive consequences when the performance is desirable
- Gives useful information about valued behavior or activities and helps provide a balanced evaluation
- Provides recognition to the valued parts of the performance and to people whose behavior achieves desired performance
- Provides specific, timely information to help employees maintain or strive to improve good performance
- Provides recognition of the valued aspects of performance
- Helps build trust, enhance self-esteem, and reinforce desired performance
- Empowers employees to continue to performing well.

Despite the benefits of positive feedback, supervisors and managers still avoid giving it. A common barrier is the belief that employees should not be praised for just doing their jobs.

Steps for Giving Positive Feedback

Positive feedback is most effective when given frequently; try to catch employees when they are doing something right. Give positive feedback:

- On small steps or subtasks, not just the total task
- When you see the employee doing something well
- For effort and risk-taking, even when the desired results are not achieved.

When giving positive feedback:

- Tell the employee what performance you liked. Acknowledge the good performance; be descriptive and objective. Clearly identify that you know about the good performance.
- Tell why you liked the performance and why it is important. Whenever possible, tie the performance to the organizational goals.

Give positive feedback only when you are sincere in your praise. Avoid following positive feedback with a "but" statement (for example., "You did a good job on that report"). The employee is likely to tune out what has come before the "but" and hear only the criticism.

Positive Feedback - Practice

Classify the following two statements as effective or ineffective. Refer to Appendix A for feedback.

Question 1

You are such a good presenter. I would like you to show others in our group how to do it.

A. Effective
B. Ineffective

Question 2

I really like the way you handled that producer complaint today.

A. Effective
B. Ineffective

Benefits of Constructive Feedback

Constructive feedback benefits you and your employees. It ultimately contributes to increased performance and strengthens employee morale because it:

- Tells employees what they did wrong
- Tells employees what they need to do to improve
- Gives you the opportunity to stop avoiding or ignoring an issue
- Provides you with a process so that you do not overreact to the problem
- Helps minimize employee defensiveness.

Constructive feedback is most effective when given shortly after the poor performance is observed. Give constructive feedback:

- On small, specific steps or subtasks
- To reinforce performance or behavior that has already been discussed
- When you see the employee doing something incorrectly
- To help the employee continue to improve in an area.

Constructive Feedback Strategies

Feedback is ineffective when managers avoid confrontation, overreact, lecture, complain to others, or assign blame. Effective strategies emphasize the use of tact, diplomacy, and facts to avoid defensiveness.

A simple method for giving feedback effectively is Situation, Behavior, Impact, or SBI. This easy-to-remember format, combined with Give, Get, Merge, helps you structure effective constructive feedback. It is also a useful tool for providing positive feedback.

To use the SBI method, describe the:

- **Situation** in which the performance or behavior occurred.
- **Performance or Behavio**r you heard or observed.
- **Impact** the behavior had on you, others, and/or the Agency.

Situation

Describe the situation in which the performance occurred. To do this, give your perspective on where and when the performance occurred. For example, say, "This morning at the meeting when we were discussing the new project . . . "

Behavior

Describe the performance you heard or observed:

- Concentrate on the employee's actions, not what you think about his or her personality or motives. If you focus on actions, the employee is less likely to think you are judging or personally attacking him or her.
- When you describe performance, tone down the use of the word "you" by saying something like ". . . you may not have realized this but . . . "

For example, say, "This morning at the meeting when we were discussing the new project, you may not have realized it, but you interrupted me several times . . . "

Impact

Describe the impact the performance had on you, others, and/or the Agency.

- Be specific and objective about the impact by providing your actual observations.
- Link the impact of the person's performance to expected standards.

Example: "You solved that database migration problem very quickly this morning. That really got us out of a terrible bind."

Situation: Implied (the database problem this morning)

Behavior: Solved the database problem

Impact: Got us out of a terrible bind

Get The Other Person's Perspective

During the constructive feedback discussion, it is important to get the employee's perspective. Getting the employee's perspective allows you to make sure the employee understands expectations or to find out if he or she understands the situation differently or has new information of which you are unaware.

After you have explained the situation, and the behavior and its impact, you may want to get the employee's perspective to ensure that he or she understands.

Sometimes, it might be better to get the employee's perspective first, before giving your perspective, for example when:

- You do not have all the information or do not understand the situation well enough to make a decision or suggestion
- You have been told about a situation by a third party and have not observed the situation or problem first hand
- The employee brings a problem to you and you want him or her to work toward a solution, rather than just giving him or her the answer.

Constructive Feedback - Practice

Classify the following two statements as effective or ineffective. Refer to Appendix A for feedback.

Question 1

I noticed that in the last staff meeting, you didn't have the information organized that you needed to present to us. You spent much of the time looking through your papers.

A. Effective
B. Ineffective

Question 2

You don't ever hear what people say to you; you're a poor listener.

A. Effective
B. Ineffective

HANDLING DIFFICULT FEEDBACK SITUATIONS

It is a lot easier to give feedback to employees when the situation is not particularly challenging and you do not expect an emotional reaction. It becomes a great deal harder to have a feedback conversation when you know the situation is going to be emotionally charged.

Feedback conversations have a high potential for being emotionally charged. When you are faced with emotional responses from employees in feedback situations, it is important to label the behavior and not the employee as difficult.

It is also critical to use good communication skills to keep emotional reactions from getting out of hand. The next few screens overview information for handling difficult feedback situations, including tips for:

- Identifying and listening to feelings
- Controlling emotional reactions
- Applying appropriate assertiveness techniques to gain control of the situation.

Listening for Feeling

The Give, Get, Merge Communication Model provides a format for conducting feedback discussions. However, the skills for getting an employee's perspective become even more important when emotions are running high. Refer to the Give, Get, Merge Communication Model job aid for a reminder.

In addition to using attending and encouraging behaviors and listening for content, you also need to listen for feelings and emotions that are not verbally communicated by the employee. Listening for feelings, or empathetic listening, is the highest level of listening.

- In addition to listening for content, the listener makes an inference about how the other person is feeling and checks that inference with the speaker.

- Emotions do not have to be extreme to be noticed. The better you know your employees and their unique characteristics, the easier it will be for you to discern emotions.

- Empathetic listening does not imply that you agree with the other person's feelings or perceptions, nor does it mean that you play "therapist." Rather, it means that you have heard the person in full, both the content and the feelings behind the content.

Skills for Getting

Specific skills involved in getting another's perspective include:

- **Attending**, which demonstrates to the speaker that you are paying attention and listening to what he or she is saying. Attending represents a personal commitment to the communication and interaction. It is usually conveyed through nonverbal behavior; that is, it is represented by your body language (e.g., eye contact, posture, and facial expressions).

- **Observing** includes the ability to observe and detect cues in the speaker's behavior and/or appearance and interpret these unspoken messages to fully understand what he or she is saying-and how he or she might be feeling.

- **Encouraging** the speaker by letting him or her know that you are paying attention. Doing so gives the speaker confidence and can stimulate reactions.

- **Listening for content** means accurately expressing and confirming your understanding of what the speaker is saying. The key skills in listening for content include asking questions and paraphrasing (briefly restating in your own words the gist of what the speaker is saying).

Identifying Feelings

The first step in listening for feelings is to use attending behaviors:

- Observe the employee's nonverbal behavior (e.g., body language and facial expressions, and his or her tone of voice, pace of speech, and volume). Ask yourself what the employee's behavior might tell you about what he or she is feeling.

- Reflect back what you observe with an objective, nonjudgmental statement; for example, "You look as if you have something on your mind" or "You seem a little uncomfortable."

- Listen to the employee's response. As needed, use encouragers, ask open-ended questions, or probe with a nonthreatening statement to get more information about the situation and insight into how the employee might be feeling; for example, "I see . . . " or "Help me understand . . . "

- Reflect back what the employee is feeling in a nonthreatening way; for example, "You sound pretty frustrated with the situation" or "I think you're saying you're a little confused about what to do next."

Refer to Appendix B for the Words to Communicate Emotions job aid.

Example - Identify Feelings

Employee (walks into office, drops a report on your desk, says loudly): "I just got a call from Roger about the report. It has a major error in the data analysis!"

Supervisor: "You seem pretty bothered. Tell me what happened."

Employee: "Everyone on the team reviewed the drafts and the final copy. We spent weeks looking over this."

Supervisor: "Hmmm . . . "

Employee: "I just don't understand why none of us caught that error. It was so obvious. We look foolish."

Supervisor: "You sound frustrated that the team overlooked an obvious mistake in the analysis."

Controlling Emotional Reactions

During difficult feedback situations, you may encounter the following common emotional reactions from an employee:

- Anger
- Bullying
- Complaining/finding fault /blaming others
- Avoiding/withdrawing
- Crying.

Refer to Appendix B for the Handling Emotional Reactions Job Aid

Applying Assertiveness Techniques

When strong emotions come into play, it is hard not to react strongly to them. Sometimes, however, you may run into an especially difficult situation in which the employee continues to respond emotionally despite your best efforts. In situations where difficult behaviors continue and it becomes necessary for you to take measures that allow you to control the interaction, consider applying assertiveness techniques.

Refer to Appendix B the Assertiveness Techniques for Handling Difficult Behaviors job aid, which describes comment techniques you may use.

Use these techniques sparingly and only when employee behavior continues to be out of hand and the situation calls for assertive action.

Sometimes, employees might "cross the line," and their behavior becomes so out of control that feedback is no longer an option. When this happens, do not react and get involved in a situation that you cannot handle (e.g., abusive or threatening behavior and language, serious personal problems). Consult with more experienced supervisors about the problem or seek help from the many resources available within the Agency.

Control Your Emotions

Keep your own emotions in check by:

- Being aware of and recognizing your signs of anger, annoyance, and frustration. Know your own "hot buttons" and recognize when employee behaviors are likely to trigger them.

- Learning how to take time out from a discussion if you need to cool off and get your emotions under control. Develop some techniques for skillfully ending a conversation if you feel yourself getting emotional.

- Reminding yourself why it is important to solve the problem, what your goal is, and what the consequences of not solving it might be.

- Not taking the employee's behavior personally. The behavior likely is not meant as an attack on or an affront to you.

- Reframing what you are experiencing. If you cannot change the way someone is reacting to feedback, then you might need to alter your perception of the experience. Reframing might mean changing a negative assumption about an employee's behavior and transforming the interpretation into a positive one.

- Letting it go. Talk to a trusted ally and then drop the subject. Minimize the effects that challenging behaviors have on you.

- Reflecting about the situation. Spend structured time reflecting about what you did in a difficult situation, why you did it, and what you could do in a similar situation in the future.

This information is also summarized in the Handling Emotional Reactions job aid in Appendix B.

KEY POINTS

- There are four characteristics of effective feedback - descriptive, objective, timely, and professionally delivered.
- Feedback increases employees' job satisfaction, motivation, and confidence.
- Positive feedback is most effective when given frequently on small steps or subtasks, not just the total task.
- Constructive feedback explains how performance did not meet expectations and provides steps that can be taken to correct or improve performance. It ultimately contributes to increased performance and strengthens employee morale.
- SBI is a simple method for giving effective positive and constructive feedback, especially when combined with Give, Get, Merge.
- In addition to using attending and encouraging behaviors and listening for content, you also need to listen for feelings and emotions not verbally communicated by the employee.
- Prepare to address any emotional reactions from employees and apply assertiveness techniques only when necessary.

TRANSITION

Congratulations! This is the last section in this document. Use this document as reference as needed and refer to the job aids for a summary of key information presented.

Appendix A: Exercise Feedback

Section 1: Introduction to Performance Management at FSA

Page 1-5, Question 1

Each of the following statements explains the role of the reviewing official EXCEPT:

A. Reviewing officials review employee performance standards as submitted by supervisors to ensure consistency across the work unit

B. Reviewing officials review and approve employee performance ratings

C. Reviewing officials approve year-end ratings before they are communicated to employees

D. Reviewing officials are responsible for finalizing performance plans

The correct answer is D. Rating officials are ultimately responsible for finalizing employees' performance plans.

Section 2: Performance Management Overview

Page 2-5, Question 1

True or False? The focus of performance management is the year-end rating given to employees.

False. Although the performance management system sets checkpoints and tasks throughout the year, it does not preclude your everyday role of managing the work and your employees. Performance management is an ongoing, year-round process.

Page 2-5, Question 2

The focus of performance management is:

A. Justifying a rating at the end of the year.
B. Continually improving performance throughout the year.
C. Discussing how employees should be providing feedback to each other.
D. Increasing communication ratings in future surveys.

The correct answer is B. By focusing on performance management as an ongoing, year-round process, your focus shifts from justifying a rating at the end of the year to continually improving performance throughout the year.

Page 2-6, Question 3

True or False? Effective communication allows the supervisor to make clear the basis for setting expectations for employee performance.

True. Open and continual communication leads to a more productive, motivated workforce and reduces waste and stress because employees are aware of supervisors' and managers' expectations and work requirements.

Section 3: Performance Elements

Page 3-8, Question 1

In addition to Supervision, which of the following is mandatory for supervisors and managers?

A. Program Management
B. Customer Service
C. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)/Civil Rights
D. Individual Contributions to the Team

The correct answer is C. FSA supervisors and managers must have the element for Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)/Civil Rights.

Page 3-8, Question 2

True or False? Only supervisors and managers are required to have an element showing linkage to agency mission and goals. False. All employees (supervisors and nonsupervisors) are required to have an element showing linkage to agency mission and goals.

Page 3-8, Question 3

True or False? For supervisors and managers as well as nonsupervisors, at least one element must be deemed noncritical. True. All employees (supervisors and nonsupervisors) must have at least one element classified as noncritical.

Page 3-8, Question 4

Each of the following are characteristics of critical elements EXCEPT:

A. Not meeting a critical element warrants an Unacceptable rating.
B. An employee may be demoted or removed for unacceptable performance in a critical element.
C. Critical elements are weighted the same as noncritical elements when the summary rating is being determined.

The correct answer is C. Critical elements are the key duties and responsibilities of the position and form the primary reasons for the position's existence. If employee does not meet a critical element, he or she will receive an unacceptable rating. An employee may be demoted or removed for unacceptable performance in a critical element. Critical elements receive twice the weight of noncritical elements when the summary rating is being determined.

Section 4: Measurable Standards

Page 4-6, Step 1: Identify Performance Tasks - Practice

Which of the following is NOT an appropriate task for the Communications element?

A. Listens to and asks clarifying questions of producers who visit or call the office to clearly understand their requests and concerns
B. Answers producer questions clearly and with the appropriate level of detail
C. Downloads and distributes procedures for administering farm programs and farm loan programs
D. Prepares written information about farm and producer records for the CED to present to the County Committee

The correct answer is C. Although Brenda may need to communicate with people while distributing procedures, this task is more appropriate for the Execution of Duties element because it does not focus on a form of oral or written communication.

Page 4-10, Step 2: Determining the Types of Measures – Practice

Tasks	Quality	Quantity	Timeliness	Cost-Effectiveness
Listens to and asks clarifying questions of producers who visit or call the office to clearly understand their requests and concerns	X			
Answers producer questions clearly and with the appropriate level of detail	X			
Prepares written information about farm and producer records for the CED to present to the County Committee	X		X	

Feedback: The quality of Brenda's listening and questioning skills is critical to the successful completion of the first task. Her ability to answer producer questions clearly and with the appropriate level of detail is also a quality issue. The written information for the CED must be accurate and well prepared, which are quality considerations. Finally, because the information needs to be prepared within an agreed-upon timeframe so that the CED can present it to the County Committee, there are timeliness considerations with this task.

Page 4-13, Step 3: Determining How To Evaluate The Measures - Practice

Brenda is responsible for the following Communications tasks:

- Listens to and asks clarifying questions of producers who visit or call the office to clearly understand their requests and concerns
- Answers producer questions clearly and with the appropriate level of detail
- Prepares written information about farm and producer records for the CED to present to the County Committee.

You learned that each of these tasks is best evaluated using quality measures. The third task can also be measured using timeliness measures.

Think about methods you would use to evaluate Brenda or an employee like Brenda on quality and timeliness (third task only).

<u>Feedback:</u>

Methods to evaluate quality include:

- Observations made by the CED/DD. These observations should be ongoing throughout the year and should be part of the normal duties of the supervisor or DDs visiting field offices. Areas of focus include:

  - Quality of skills used
  - Clarity of expression
  - Appropriate use of tone and language.

- Feedback from County Committee members regarding their experience with county office staff, including Brenda.

- Brenda's employee self-assessment.

- Customer survey data specific to Brenda.

- A review of the accuracy, appearance, and appropriateness of Brenda's written materials (e.g., her reports).

A method to evaluate timeliness would be to compare the timeliness of Brenda's delivery of information with the agreed-upon timeframes.

Page 4-16, Step 4: Write the Measurable Standards - Practice

Again, because Brenda is a PT in a county office, the supervisor would select the appropriate measurable standards from the menu of measurable standards developed for FSA field offices.

From the following measurable standards listed on the menu, select those that are most appropriate for the Brenda's responsibilities relating to the Communications element, which reads: Oral and written communications are clear, correct, timely, and presented in an understandable manner. Supervisor and coworkers are informed of issues and problems when necessary. Information and guidance provided is timely and correct.

Measurable Standards	Appropriate for Brenda
Communicates clearly with producers and shares accurate information 90% of the time.	**X**
Responds to general program questions within 24 hours with no more than 6 to 8 exceptions. Elevates more complex questions to the supervisor, team leader, or other responsible individual within 2 hours of inquiry.	**X**
Schedules staff meetings on a regular basis (at least monthly and after major program conferences and meetings or more often if required by management).	
Prepares written documents that are clear, concise, and understandable and follows prescribed procedures within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions.	**X**
Responds in writing (when appropriate) to customer inquiries within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions.	
Regularly shares program information for which he or she is responsible with coworkers to increase staff awareness of all program areas (cross-training, collaboration, reports at staff meetings, etc.) within timeframes established by management 90% of the time.	
Resolves disputes and problems with others through the use of problem solving, conflict resolution, and negotiation.	

Feedback:

The following measurable standards are most likely **not** appropriate for Brenda:

- Schedules staff meetings on a regular basis (at least monthly and after major program conferences and meetings or more often if required by management). Supervisors usually schedule these meetings, not PTs.

- Responds in writing (when appropriate) to customer inquiries within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions. PTs do not normally respond in writing; that is a task completed by specialists.

- Regularly shares program information for which one is responsible with coworkers to increase staff awareness of all program areas (cross-training, collaboration, reports at staff meetings, etc.) within timeframes established by management 90% of the time. At this point, there are no references to communication between Brenda and her coworkers. Therefore, this measure is probably not appropriate.

- Resolves disputes and problems with others through the use of problem solving, conflict resolution, and negotiation. This measure is typically used for supervisors.

Remember that the supervisor would still need to account for measurable standards related to EEO/Civil Rights and Health and Safety under an appropriate element.

Section 5: Monitor and Document

Page 5-8, Question 1

Should Sandra document the first time she saw Ernesto on the Internet and joked about his vacation plans?

A. Yes, in her supervisor notes
B. Yes, in Ernesto's official documentation file
C. No

The correct answer is C. There is no indication of a need to document Ernesto's performance at this time.

Page 5-8, Question 2

Should Sandra document the conversation about the status of Ernesto's project?

A. Yes, in her supervisor notes
B. Yes, in Ernesto's official documentation file
C. No

The correct answer is B. All discussions and conversations about an employee's performance should be documented. Since there may be a problem, it is best to record the discussion in the official documentation file.

Page 5-8, Question 3

Should Sandra document her observations of Ernesto throughout the week?

A. Yes, in her supervisor notes
B. Yes, in Ernesto's official documentation file
C. No

The correct answer is A. It is a good idea to keep records of observations in your supervisor notes to help you remember specific details. If you record observations about Ernesto in your official documentation file, you should maintain similar records for all your employees.

Page 5-9, Documenting Performance Exercise

Statement	Do	Don't	Feedback
1. Tyrone Krieder's report "Cost of Training," dated December 22, is well written and well researched.	X		Do. The documentation includes complete identification of the situation, circumstances, or results of the performance.
2. The report is organized into logical sections that flow together.	X		Do. This is a good example of a brief statement that is specific and detailed.
3. His writing style is charming and smooth.		X	Don't. Do not include biases or judgments. You have colored the facts with your personal preferences.
4. He researched the costs of developing and conducting training, as well as transportation, lodging, and missed work time costs within the Agency and other government offices.	X		Do. This is a good statement supporting the fact that the report was well researched.
5. The report is detailed enough to include all factors that should be considered when making training decisions.	X		Do. The documentation includes information on the impact of the performance.
6. The report was completed on time with only a few minor typographical errors.	X		Do. Again, specific facts are included in the documentation.
7. This was a special assignment for Tyrone, outside his normal job duties.	X		Do. The documentation includes information that illustrates performance in relation to expectations.

Section 6: Evaluate Performance

Page 6-7, Recording Accomplishment Narratives

Statement	Do	Don't	Feedback
1. Greg does a great job in this element.		X	Don't. The narrative should Include specific examples of performance. It is too vague.
2. The analyses Greg performed included new data sources that were well researched and gave managers valuable perspectives and insight.	X		Do. This statement includes the impact of Greg's achievement.
3. Greg conducted this research and analysis in a very short timeframe and partially without the use of a computer.	X		Do. Include descriptions of flexibility, adaptability, and/or resourcefulness that support the rationale for the rating.
4. I thought Greg handled working under pressure very well.		X	Don't. This statement is judgmental and reflects personal beliefs.

Page 6-9, Determining Summary Rating Level

Element	Rating
Customer Service	Exceeds
Communications	Exceeds
Execution of Duties	Exceeds
Individual Contributions to the Team	Fully Successful

Based on these results, what would be the summary rating?

A. Outstanding
B. Superior
C. Fully Successful
D. Marginal
E. Unacceptable

The correct answer is B. Brenda's summary rating would be Superior because she earned more appraisal units at the Exceeds level than at the Fully Successful level and no appraisal units at the Does Not Meet level.

Section 7: Give, Get, Merge Model

Page 7-8, Give Statements

Statement	Effective	Ineffective	Feedback
Your report was well written, accurate, and on time.	X		This statement is effective because it cites specifics to support the overall positive feedback.
Your performance on the audit was great, Hector.		X	This remark is ineffective because it gives no precise information to the employee, leaving him unsure of what to do next time to successfully complete an audit.
You didn't respond to the email I sent, so I assume you didn't have any questions and we can move on.		X	This comment is ineffective because it is not objective. The supervisor is making an assumption without getting information from the employee.
Florence, let's take some time to go through the new requirements together so you can start this assignment without any confusion about what needs to happen.	X		This statement is effective because it is clear and unbiased. The supervisor is avoiding making incorrect assumptions about the employee's knowledge.
Your group's summary gives the general information I wanted, but it doesn't pinpoint the ideas I was looking for. You are getting the hang of the style I like to read though.		X	This comment is ineffective because it doesn't convey any helpful and precise information to the employee. It would be difficult for the employee to know what to do to revise the summary based on the supervisor's remarks.
I noticed that you weren't able to draw everyone into the discussion during the meeting.	X		This statement is effective because it is both objective and specific. The supervisor pinpoints the area of concern without making judgments as to why the employee had difficulties.

Pages 7-11 and 7-12, Identify Barriers to Getting Another's Perspective - Practice

Question 1

Supervisor: Hey, I'll be right with you; let me just finish this email. [*pause*] Okay, thanks for coming in. I wanted to discuss last week's meeting with you, especially, . . . [phone rings] Just a sec. Yeah . . . Mike . . . Right . . . No, I wouldn't do that . . . Sure . . . I'll call you later. Now, where were we . . . oh, yeah, last week's meeting. One thing I wanted to make sure is . . . [knock on door] Hi, Eileen, listen, Joann won't be ready at 3 o'clock. Can you do 4? Great, see you then . . . What was I saying . . . ?

Select the most appropriate barrier displayed in this transcript.

A. Overattention to detail
B. Distractions/lack of focus
C. Bias/prejudgment
D. Closed mind

The correct answer is B. The supervisor is obviously paying attention to everything but the employee. You should turn off the computer screen or telephone, and close the door. To get the other person's perspective, focus your attention and listening skills solely on him or her. Otherwise, the employee will most likely feel that the supervisor really doesn't care what he or she has to say and, therefore, will not try to communicate whatever is on his or her mind.

Question 2

Supervisor: All right, say that again. Why weren't the other people aware of the meeting?
Employee: The managers indicated that they didn't get the memo.
Supervisor: Who have you talked to?
Employee: I just told you, I talked to the managers.
Supervisor: Oh, yeah, sorry, I've got a presentation to make in ten minutes and I'm a little nervous.

Select the most appropriate barrier displayed in this transcript.

A. Overattention to detail
B. Lack of energy and focus
C. Bias/prejudgment
D. Closed mind

The correct answer is B. The supervisor's concentration has been compromised by his focus being on his presentation, not the current discussion. With this barrier, the listener cannot hear or get the other person's perspective. If the supervisor continues to be inattentive, the employee is likely to give up on having a fruitful discussion and quit the conversation.

Pages 7-14 and 7-15, Merge Strategies - Practice

Question 1

Alfonso Garcia has worked for you for just about 1 year. His work is always well done and ready on time. You want to keep your work unit as productive as possible and have asked Alfonso to meet with you regarding his work habits. While there is no doubt he does great work, you are concerned because he never takes notes during meetings or keeps a written calendar of due dates/deadlines. Isn't this lack of written support material a disaster waiting to happen? Alfonso insists that he's always worked this way and has never missed a deadline. Keeping track of notes would probably confuse him!

Which merge strategy would be the best approach for resolving this performance issue?

E. Integrate
F. Accommodate
G. Avoid
H. Impose

The correct answer is C. This issue is not critical so it is most appropriate to avoid it. Although his work style is not the same as yours, Alfonso has proven that it works for him, so there isn't a pressing need to change.

Question 2

You have concerns about your employee Bobby Skowronek. Until recently, all his work has been of good quality and completed on time. However, Bobby has barely made any progress on the spreadsheet you asked him to create more than a week ago. Your group needs that completed spreadsheet no later than 2 weeks from today. You are concerned about Bobby's lack of progress on this task. His other work has been completed on time. Why can't he work as efficiently on this assignment?

Bobby has been proud of his work. This spreadsheet assignment is very difficult for him because of his lack of experience with the Excel program.

Which merge strategy would be the best approach for resolving this performance problem?

A. Integrate
A. Accommodate
B. Avoid
C. Impose

The correct answer is A. Both parties have the same goal: completing the spreadsheet assignment. By employing Give, Get, Merge, you will discover that Bobby's problem is not lack of commitment, but a skill deficit. One possible option is sending him to a course in Excel, which will give him the knowledge for this project as well as future spreadsheet-related assignments.

Section 8: Feedback

Page 8-6, Positive Feedback - Practice

Question 1

You are such a good presenter. I would like you to show others in our group how to do it.

A. Effective
B. Ineffective

The correct answer is B. Although positive, this feedback does not tell the employee what he or she specifically did to make a good presentation. A more effective statement might be, 'You did an excellent job of presenting the results of our study in the briefing on Tuesday. Your presentation made it easy to understand the issues and make decisions. I would like you to show our staff how to organize their data for presentations.'

Question 2

I really like the way you handled that producer complaint today.

A. Effective
B. Ineffective

The correct answer is B. This statement is vague/nonspecific. A more effective statement might be, "I was really impressed with the way you were able to calmly respond to Mr. Margolis' anger about the delay in his paperwork. You resolved his problem and reassured him."

Pages 8-9 and 8-10, Constructive Feedback - Practice

Question 1

I noticed that in the last staff meeting, you didn't have the information organized that you needed to present to us. You spent much of the time looking through your papers.

A. Effective
B. Ineffective

The correct answer is A. This statement includes specifics about when and what you observed that was not acceptable performance.

Question 2

You don't ever hear what people say to you; you're a poor listener.

A. Effective
B. Ineffective

The correct answer is B. This statement contains a judgment and a negative generalization. It would be more effective for the supervisor to describe the specific behavior he or she actually observed. For example, "This morning when Jane was giving us information about the new regulation, you kept interrupting with negative comments about how much work it is going to be. And then you kept asking her to repeat herself. That was disruptive to the rest of us who were trying to understand the changes and their implications for our work."

Appendix B: Job Aids

Q12 Impact Engagement Interview

$Q^{12®}$ IMPACT
ENGAGEMENT INTERVIEW

GALLUP UNIVERSITY

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ENGAGEMENT INTERVIEW:
Q01. KNOW WHAT'S EXPECTED

QUESTIONS TO ASK	NOTES
1 What have been your main successes at work over the last 6 months?	
2 What do you think will be your successes over the next 6 months?	
3 How will these successes contribute to the overall organization?	
4 How can I help you achieve these successes?	

THINGS TO REFLECT UPON

How clear is this person about what has been achieved and what is going to be achieved?

Are his or her expectations realistic?

Are his or her expectations in line with what you expect as the manager?

Is this person clear about the difference his or her work makes to the organization?

1

ENGAGEMENT INTERVIEW:
Q02. HAVE MATERIALS & EQUIPMENT

QUESTIONS TO ASK — NOTES

1 Thinking about the work you do, is there anything you need that would help you do your work better?

2 How would this help?

3 How much difference would it make?

4 How could we measure this difference?

THINGS TO REFLECT UPON

Are there obvious issues that seem to get in the way of this person doing their work better?

Is he or she clear about how improvements in materials and equipment will drive outcomes?

ENGAGEMENT INTERVIEW:
Q03. OPPORTUNITY TO DO BEST

QUESTIONS TO ASK	NOTES
1 What do you really like about your work?	
2 What aspects of your work do you think you do really well?	
3 Are there things you are expected to do at work that you don't like or find difficult?	
4 How can I help you with these?	

THINGS TO REFLECT UPON

How close a fit is this person for this role?

Does he or she excel in critical areas where you need him or her to make a difference?

What "blind spots" does this person have?

How can you help adjust this person's role to better suit him or her?

3

Engagement Interview:

Q04. Recognition

Questions to Ask	Notes
1 When you achieve success at work, how do you like to be recognized?	
2 Whom do you want to know about your achievements?	
3 As you look ahead to the next 12 months, what recognition would you like to achieve?	
4 How can I help you achieve that recognition?	

Things to Reflect Upon

What kinds of recognition might work best for this person?

How could you plan to ensure this person is recognized for what he or she does?

ENGAGEMENT INTERVIEW:
Q05. CARES ABOUT ME

QUESTIONS TO ASK	NOTES
1 Do you have any strong partnerships at work?	
2 Are there some people who seem to bring out the best in you?	
3 Are there some people whom you tutor or mentor?	
4 How do you like to be supported in your work?	
5 Will I need to ask or will you always tell?	

THINGS TO REFLECT UPON

Does this person need others in order to be successful?

How close will this person get to others at work?

What active mentoring relationships is this person engaged in?

How can you extend the opportunities for this person to connect better with others?

How closely and how regularly should you connect with this person?

5

ENGAGEMENT INTERVIEW:

Q06. DEVELOPMENT

QUESTIONS TO ASK	NOTES
1 How often should you and I meet to discuss your progress?	
2 What areas of your work would you like to improve?	
3 What's the best way for you to learn these things?	
4 In what areas of work do you think you could make the greatest contribution?	

THINGS TO REFLECT UPON

What are this person's learning needs?

How realistically do these needs align with the needs of the organization?

How could you help this person satisfy these needs?

What opportunities exist to give this person more responsibility?

$Q^{12®}$ Impact
Engagement Interview

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Tips for Writing Performance Elements and Measurable Standards

A performance element is defined by government-wide regulations in terms of job components, i.e., **what work** an employee must perform. A performance element consists of **job tasks** rather than the degree of proficiency of an employee's performance.

Step 1: Look At the Overall Picture
The most critical aspect of developing sound performance elements is to focus on what work an employee's pay is based upon. Therefore, review measures already available to help you determine appropriate elements: they should include the position description of the employee, the mission and function statement of the organization, possibly the organization's budget, strategic plans and associated action plans. These should be supplemented by authorizing legislation and appropriations legislation, findings and reports by agencies such as the General Accounting Office, the Office of Management and Budget, the Department of Agriculture, etc. Determine which goals and measures the employee's work unit can affect.

Step 2: Determine Work Unit Accomplishments
There are three methods for determining the work unit accomplishments. Use any or all of the following three methods to begin writing performance elements: **Method A: Goal Cascading Method** Cascade the Agency and/or Program goals to the work unit level. Determine the work unit's accomplishments that directly affect the organization's goals. The "goal cascading method" works best for Agencies and Programs that have clear organizational goals and objectives, such as strategic plans and annual performance plans prepared under the Government Performance and Results Act. Many programs also have their own more detailed work plans that are aligned with the Agency's Strategic Plan. This method requires answers to each of the following questions: • What are the agency's (or program's) specific goals and objectives? These can be found in the Agency or Program Strategic Plan, annual performance plan and customer service standards. (Note that this question repeats Step 1 of the process.) • Which agency or program goals can the work unit affect? A work unit may affect only one Agency or Program goal, but in some situations, goals are written so broadly that the work unit may affect more than one. • What product or service does the work unit produce or provide to help the agency or program reach its goals? Clearly tying work unit products and services to organizational goals is key to this process. If a work unit finds it generates a product or service that does not affect organizational goals, the work unit needs to analyze the situation.

Tips for Writing Performance Elements and Measurable Standards (continued)

Step 2: Determine Work Unit Accomplishments (continued)
Method B: Customer-Focused Method Determine the products or services that the work unit provides to its customers. The "customer-focused method" works well when there are no clear agency goals and when the work unit knows who its customers are and what they expect. Often this method is easier to apply to administrative work units that provide support functions, such as a human resources unit, an acquisitions unit, or a facilities maintenance unit. This method focuses on achieving customer satisfaction and requires answers to each of the following questions: • Who are the customers of the work unit? If the work unit provides a support function, most of its customers may be internal to the agency. • What products and/ or services do the customers expect? Remember to describe accomplishments, not activities.
Method C: Work Flow Charting Method The "work flow charting method" works well for work units that are responsible for a complete work process, such as the processing of a case, the writing of a report, or the production of a customer information package. This method asks work units to develop work flow charts. A work flow chart is a picture of the major steps in a work process or project. It begins with the first step of the work process, maps out each successive step, and ends with the final product or service. To help you build your work flow chart, answer these questions: • How does the work unit produce its products or services? List the most basic steps in the process. For this purpose, you do not need to list all the activities required. (If you were analyzing the work to find ways of improving the process, you would need to list every activity.) • Which are the most important steps in the process? By determining these steps, you highlight areas for performance measurement. As you map out the process, you may find yourself describing activities. Try to group the activities into key steps by describing the results of those activities as one step in the process.

Tips for Writing Performance Elements and Measurable Standards (continued)

Step 3: Determine Individual Accomplishments That Support Work Unit Goals

Use the following questions to help you determine individual accomplishments that can be turned into performance elements.

- What does the employee do? Use an action verb to introduce the statement. (Types and edits Letters and Memoranda for division chief.)
- Why does the employee do it? State why the task is done. (When editing memoranda, consults style manual to ensure documents are presented in appropriate formats.)
- What is produced? Describe what will result from the task. (Final reports, letters and memoranda.)
- What are the materials, tools, procedures, or equipment used? (Operates a computer using a variety of software programs for word processing.)

Use the following factors when considering which tasks should be written as performance elements.

- Frequency of the responsibility execution. A job that is not performed frequently is not as likely to be a strong candidate for becoming a performance element.
- Length of time it takes to complete the responsibility. Ask yourself how much time of the day, week, month, etc., it would ordinarily take an employee to complete a specific responsibility; if it does not require a substantial part of the employee's time, it might not be worth measuring.
- Whether the employee controls the outcomes of the responsibility. It is not fair to hold the employee accountable if the outcome of the job is beyond the employee's control, and should not normally be included as a performance element.
- Level of difficulty. The most difficult responsibilities are normally the ones you will be most likely to include as performance elements. In most cases, this will overlap with other considerations listed above, such as the amount of time spent by the employee.
- Potential adverse consequences. Normally, those portions of the job that have the largest potential adverse impact on the organization will be identified as a performance element.
- Impact on the organization. A performance element that will have an impact on the organizations' ability to accomplish its mission or meet its goals should be included as a performance element than one that is unrelated to the goals of the organization.

Tips for Writing Performance Elements and Measurable Standards (continued)

Step 4: Convert Expected Accomplishments Into Performance Elements

Once the performance elements have been identified for a position, the next step Is writing them. The initial structure of a written performance element is straight-forward: It should consist of an action verb and an object. For example:

Action Verb	**Object**
Types	letters and memoranda
Submits	weekly reports
Trains	subordinates
Audits	travel vouchers

While there is no one right way to do this, however the following examples will be helpful. Examples 1 through 3 below reflect properly stated performance elements. Examples 4 and 5, however, are poorly stated elements. They contain language that describes standards, a mixture of element and standard, or statements identifying attributes, abilities, behaviors, etc.

Examples of proper performance elements:

- Example 1. Tracks, monitors, and prepares, analytical information for reports. Organizes monthly "XYZ" meeting and coordinates agenda and discussion items with attendees. Monitors/analyzes the status of Quality Performance Measurement (QPMs)/Quality Performance Indicators (QPIs).
- Example 2. Initiates, processes, and completes Deficiency Reports (DRs) and/or Technical Coordination Group (TCG) projects for assigned systems/equipment.
- Example 3. Examines and computes all types of settlements. Determines authorized entitlements to the individual traveler.

Examples of poor performance elements:

- Example 4. Prepares proposal development worksheets, work breakdown structure and dictionary, proposal outline and mockup, compliance checklists and compliance matrix. Data is accurate and provided within established times. Provides a positive influence to team members and readily adapts to new situations or changing work environment.

  In this example the first sentence does describe **what work** is done and ending the element at this point would make it proper. However, by adding the second and third sentence, this element becomes distorted and confusing. The second sentence of this element is a statement of **how well** the work is to be accomplished and is therefore language describing a standard. Again, the last sentence does not describe **what work** is to be done.

Tips for Writing Performance Elements and Measurable Standards (continued)

Step 4: Convert Expected Accomplishments Into Performance Elements (continued)
Example 5. Complies with security, safety, and good housekeeping practices. This example uses the phrase "Complies with" which indicates **how well** something is being performed or accomplished; therefore, this statement contains language that actually makes it a standard.

Checklist for Writing Performance Elements

Position Title:	Grade:	Organization:

Is performance/execution of this element necessary for mission accomplishment?	Yes	No
Does the element establish an "end product" or outcome that will be the consequence of performing it?	Yes	No
Is there a negative consequence to the organization's mission if performed inadequately or if the "end product" were not produced?	Yes	No
Is it reflected in the employee's position description?	Yes	No
Is this a significant component of the position?	Yes	No
Is the "end product" central to the purpose of the position?	Yes	No
Is the element a regular or recurring requirement of the position?	Yes	No
Does employee have full authority to perform this element?	Yes	No
Is it distinguishable from other performance elements?	Yes	No
Does the element describe generalized personality traits? (If so, it cannot be used)	Yes	No

Measurable Standards Job Aid

A Good Measurable Standard Is . . .
• **Specific and objective**. It should be clearly written, be free from ambiguities/bias/personal feelings or opinions, and contain finite measures that specify the line between satisfactory work and less-than-satisfactory work. A measurable standard should also allow room for an employee to exceed the satisfactory level. Additionally, whenever possible, use ranges when setting numeric measures. • **Mission related**. The measurable standard should directly link the required performance of the job. • **Nondiscriminatory**. The measurable standard should be able to be consistently applied to all personnel in the same or similar position or grade with the same authority. Although the standards may be the same for similar positions, the measures should reflect the grade level of the employee. • **Observable**. You must be realistically able to observe and monitor the performance to ascertain whether the measurable standard has been met. Those observations should be based on measurable outcomes in terms of quality, quantity, timeliness, and/or cost-effectiveness. • **Written to the Fully Successful level**. Measurable standards should reflect the required level of performance and expected results for the job. A fully experienced and competent employee will consistently achieve or meet the standards for the job given circumstances within his or her control.
Types of Measures. . . .
• **Qualitative measures** refer to the accuracy, appearance, or usefulness of the work effort. For example, typical quality measures may focus on the number of errors allowable on customer satisfaction surveys. • **Quantitative measures** refer to the number of products produced, services provided, or a general result. They are expressed in terms of numbers, percentages, frequencies, etc. • **Timeliness measures** refer to completion times and are usually expressed as how quickly, when, or by what date an employee produces the work. • **Cost-effectiveness measures** refer to dollar savings or cost control for the Government that can be documented and measured in agency annual fiscal year budgets. Cost-effectiveness measures may include maintaining or reducing unit costs, reducing the time it takes to produce or provide a product or service, or reducing waste.

Measurable Standards Job Aid (continued)

Tips for Developing Measurable Standards. . .
To determine the type(s) of measure(s) that might be appropriate for each task, think about the following questions. • Is quality important? Does the stakeholder or customer care how well the work is done? • Is quantity important? Does the stakeholder or customer care how many items are produced? • Is it important to accomplish the element by a certain time or date? • Is it important to accomplish the element within certain cost limits? • What measures are already available?
Tips for Evaluating the Measurable Standard. . .
Evaluate the tasks using a combination of descriptive and numeric measurements. **Numeric measures** are easy to verify and provide a quantifiable, objective tool. Numeric measures should be presented as ranges instead of exact numbers or percentages. **Descriptive measures** have three components: a judge, what the judge looks for, and a verifiable description of what would represent meeting expectations. Think about the following questions to evaluate the measurable standards for each task: • How could quality, quantity, timeliness, and/or cost-effectiveness be evaluated? • Is there some number or percent that could be tracked? If the task does not lend itself to being evaluated with numbers but can only be described, ask: • Who could judge that the expectations of element were met? • What factors would they look for?

Menu of Recommended Elements

Execution of Duties. Completed work assignments are performed in a timely manner, assuring a quality of work that meets the needs of the organization. Appropriate work methods are selected for the development of work products. Work products do not require substantive revisions. Assignments are completed in accordance with applicable agency guidelines, including timeframes.

Communications. Oral and written communications are clear, correct, timely, and presented in an understandable manner. Supervisor and coworkers are informed of issues and problems when necessary. Information and guidance provided is timely and correct.

Supervision (Mandatory for all supervisors and managers). Work is assigned in a fair and effective manner. Technical guidance to subordinate staff is given in a timely manner. Performance management is implemented in accordance with procedures. Issues, concerns, or problems are handled promptly and fairly. To the extent possible, staff is properly trained and complies with occupational health and safety programs. Management decisions are supported and implemented within appropriate timeframes.

The required measurable standards under this element are:

- Has an employee performance plan that focus on results achieved, contain at least one element that is aligned with organizational goals, and are in place within 30 calendar days of the beginning of the appraisal period. Mid year reviews are conducted timely and according to Agency guidelines. Ratings are accurate and issued within 30 calendar days of the end of the appraisal period.

- Adheres to Safety and Occupational Health practices and procedures in order to promote and maintain a safe and healthful work environment for all employees. Upon report of unsafe/unhealthful condition, notifies appropriate office within 48 hours, and follows up and/or takes appropriate action until condition is resolved.

Team Leadership. Routinely leads individuals and team members toward specific goals and accomplishments. Provides encouragement, guidance, and directions as needed. Adjusts style to fit situation. Delegates appropriate authority in an effective manner. Coordinates functions of the team members. Demonstrates a sincere interest in employees' activities, abilities, etc.

Program Management. Manages program(s), resolving issues and problems within the employee's control. Monitors all aspects of program(s) for quality, effectiveness, and consistency. Program plans and guidance are responsive to objectives and requirements of the Agency. Policy instructions are appropriately issued and are accurate. Evaluates effectiveness of work and adjusts plans accordingly.

Special Projects. Special projects are regularly completed on time in a competent, accurate, and thorough manner. Completed projects comply with regulations and procedures. Special projects are completed independently, or reflect research and collaborations with others as required.

Menu of Recommended Elements (continued)

Research and Analysis. Thoroughly and accurately researches issues in a timely manner, using available reference sources (e.g., USDA manuals, or applicable law or regulations.) Makes reasonable recommendations or decisions based on available guidance.

Customer Service. Routinely displays courteous and tactful behavior. Projects a positive and professional image of USDA. Provides advice that is timely, responsive and accurate. Maintains appropriate rapport with internal and external customers. Develops and establishes working relations with external organizations as required. Keeps supervisor and/or team leader informed of difficult and/or controversial issues and unique problems. Takes actions to effectively solve problems before they have an adverse impact on the organization or other employees.

Resource Management. Monitors allocated funds and maintains complete and accurate records of expenditures. Routinely utilizes resources in an efficient and effective manner. Ensures that funds, property, and other resources are guarded against waste, loss, unauthorized use, and misappropriation.

Individual Contributions to the Team. Ordinarily displays dependability and reliability. Promotes open communication. Contributes creative ideas and actively participates in team meetings resulting in added value to the team's products and services. When problems arise, explores causes and assists in resolving them. Works with team members to appropriately implement decisions. Is usually open minded to new ideas and approaches in implementing the team's goals. Willingly accepts and acts on constructive criticism.

Supervisory Equal Employment Opportunity and Civil Rights. (Mandatory for all supervisors and managers). Performs all duties in a manner which consistently demonstrates fairness, cooperation, and respect towards coworkers, office visitors, and all others in the performance of official business. Demonstrates awareness of EO/OCR policies and responsibilities of Agency and Departmental goals of working to employ and develop a diverse, yet unified workforce.

Nonsupervisory Equal Employment Opportunity and Civil Rights. Performs all duties in a manner which consistently demonstrates fairness, cooperation, and respect towards coworkers, office visitors, and all others in the performance of official business. Demonstrates awareness of EO/OCR policies and responsibilities of Agency and Departmental goals of working to employ and develop a diverse, yet unified workforce. ***The element can be standalone or the language must be included with another element.***

Required Measurable Standards and Language

Element	Required Measurable Standard for SUPERVISORS
Supervision Element	As a minimum, the Supervision element must include the following measurable standard: • Has an employee performance plan that focus on results achieved, contain at least one element that is aligned with organizational goals, and are in place within 30 calendar days of the beginning of the appraisal period. Mid year reviews are conducted timely and according to Agency guidelines. Ratings are accurate and issued within 30 calendar days of the end of the appraisal period. Additionally, supervisors must have the following measurable standard related to health and safety included under the Supervision element. • Also, adheres to Safety and Occupational Health practices and procedures in order to promote and maintain a safe and healthful work environment for all employees. Upon report of unsafe/unhealthful condition, notifies appropriate office within 48 hours, and follows up and/or takes appropriate action until condition is resolved.
Element	**Required Measurable Standard for NONSUPERVISORS**
Any Appropriate Element(s)	Nonsupervisors must have mandatory language related to Health and Safety as part of their measurable standards under any selected element. • **Health and Safety.** Demonstrates a basic understanding of the Agency's Safety and Health Program. Complies with safety and health rules and regulations that apply to all employees. Ensures all reports of unsafe and unhealthful conditions are reported to supervisor or designated official within 48 hours.

Nonsupervisors must have language related to EEO/Civil Rights included in their elements. The Nonsupervisory EEO/Civil Rights element may be selected or the descriptive language from that element may be combined with the descriptive language of another element. Refer to the Menu of Elements in Appendix for more information. Regardless if the Nonsupervisory EEO/Civil Rights element is selected or if the descriptive language has been combined with another element, measurable standards must still be developed to address performance related EEO/Civil Rights.

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions

Civil Rights: Supervisors

Makes progress towards the goal of ensuring that 97% of employees have measurable civil rights performance elements in their annual performance plans within established timeframes.

Provides Civil Rights/EEO/Sexual Harassment/Diversity information (USDA material) to employees through information sessions, staff meetings, etc. at least 2 times a year.

Ensures that employees receive required Civil Rights, EEO, and Sexual Harassment training within established timeframes.

Responds to issues/actions/allegations according to agency procedures and within established timeframes with no more than 3 approved exceptions.

Takes action to reduce the number of valid employee complaints by actions such as increasing information provided for interpersonal skills training to employees, etc. at least 2 times annually.

Reviews the USDA's Civil Rights Policy with employees at least 2 times a year to ensure that customers and employees are treated in accordance with the policy

Increase awareness of programs with all socially disadvantaged (SDA) groups of the following activities: provide information to SDA high schools, establishing partnerships with SDA institutions and community-based groups, articles and success stories to newsletters, newspapers., utilize the County Committee and/or SDA Advisor to identify all SDA organizations, place informational posters in public facilities and churches or businesses serving socially disadvantages members.

Develops an election outreach plan to increase the number of SDA producers on the County Committee within established timeframe that includes actively soliciting and accepting nominations from producers and groups representing socially disadvantaged producers.

Be available to meet with socially disadvantaged groups to fully explain the COC nomination and election procedures

Increases the number of SDA members on County Committees based on election outreach plan.

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Civil Rights: Supervisors (continued)

Encourages employees to attend training to increase interpersonal skills; i.e., cross-cultural communication, negotiation, dispute resolution, problem solving, active listening, etc.

Provides pro-active assistance to employees to help with problem solving and resolving conflicts. Results based on employee feedback or surveys, random oral surveys from second level supervisor, providing employee skills training in related topics.

Meets USDA established Civil Rights/EEO goals for recruitment, selection, promotion, training, awards, and other personnel activities.

Models appropriate behavior by treating employees, peers, supervisors, and customers with respect, fairness, and politeness with no more than 6-8 valid complaints.

Ensures requirements of AO Notice 1338 are met.

Ensure that complete application materials are provided to all customers or potential customers of FSA, ensuring that all SDA, female, and persons with disabilities receive complete applications within established timeframes.

Ensure that all SDA, female, and persons with disabilities are provided guidance and instructions for completing applications for loans or farm program benefits within established timeframes.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Communication: All

*(S) identifies objectives as supervisor only.

Communicates clearly with producers and shares accurate information 90% of the time.

Responds to general program questions within 24 hours with no more than 6-8 exceptions. Elevates more complex questions to supervisor, team leader, or other individual responsible within 2 hours of inquiry.

Schedules staff meetings on a regular basis (at least monthly and after major program conferences and meetings or more often if required by management). (S)

Prepares written documents that are clear, concise, and understandable as well as following prescribed procedures and within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions.

Responds in writing (when appropriate) to customer inquiries within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions.

Regularly shares program information for which one is responsible with co-workers to increase staff awareness of all program areas within timeframes established by management (cross-training, collaboration, reports at staff meetings, etc.) 90% of the time.

Resolves disputes and problems with others through use of problem solving, conflict resolution, and negotiation.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Customer Service: All

Responds to customer questions accurately, according to procedures with no more than 6-8 valid complaints. Responds, by at least acknowledging receipt of an inquiry as soon as possible, but within 24 hours 90% of the time.

Provides internal training that is accurate and given within established timeframes 90% of the time.

Completes assigned program training within established timeframes 90% of the time.

Ensures external customers are acknowledged within 3 minutes of the time they enter the office with no more than 10 exceptions.

Uses a customer transaction checklist to ensure all required information is obtained and applications are completed and accurate with no more than 5 exceptions.

Provides program benefits information to producers and other customers; e.g. newsletters, counter information, producer meetings, producer organizations, newspaper articles, radio announcements within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions.

Ensures that customer applications are accurate and processed within established timeframes with no more than 1-3 exceptions.

Ensures that payments are processed within timeframes with no more than 1-3 exceptions.

Responds to other agencies (NRCS, RMS, Conservation Districts, Extension Services, etc.) regarding shared programs within established timeframes with no more than 1-5 exceptions.

Makes improvement on customer satisfaction measures compared to previous data[1] (comment/feedback cards, customer survey, random customer calls, direct observations, etc.).

Receives no more than 6-8 of valid customer complaints.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

[1] In order for this performance objective to be meaningful, a valid customer service measure must be in place.

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Execution of Duties: Nonsupervisors

Prepares reports [insert examples] that are accurate and completed within established timeframes with no more than 1-3 exceptions.

Achieves utilization of the EFT for 90% of loan obligations.

Achieves utilization of the EFT for 95% of payments.

In accordance with FSA policy, deposits and processes payments within 24 hours of receipt.

Achieves or demonstrates progress toward ensuring that no improper payments are issued.

Achieves or demonstrates progress towards working to provide information about program benefits to producers to ensure that they can make an informed decision [insert outcome measures here] e.g., newsletters, counter information, producer meetings, meeting with producer organizations, etc.

Achieves or make progress towards ensuring payment amounts are accurate.

Ensures applications are completed accurately 97% of the time in order to minimize inaccurate payments.

Completes all actions required on an application within established timeframes or goals 95% of the time.

Achieves or make progress toward ensuring farm loan transactions or other assigned work is accurate and complete.

Loads software within two days of receipt 95% of the time.

Achieves or makes progress towards delinquency rates within the states' established goals.

Ensures that operations occur in an efficient manner to support the program areas (e.g., printing and distributing materials, creating regulations and guidance, etc.) with no more than 3 exceptions.

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Execution of Duties: Nonsupervisors (continued)

Contracting: Meets Federal contracting regulations with respect to processing, follow through, and life span with no more than 3 exceptions.

Processes requests in a timely manner (purchasing agents) 90% of the time.

Files notices and amendments within two days of posted receipt.

Demonstrates a basic understanding of the Agency's Safety and Health Program. Complies with safety and health rules and regulations that apply to all employees. Ensures all reports of unsafe and unhealthful conditions are reported to supervisor or designated official within 48 hours.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Individual Contributions to the Team: All Except Team Leaders and Supervisors

Demonstrates collaborative efforts between Farm Programs and Farm Loan Programs by regularly sharing information and providing other support. Attends and participates in joint staff meetings with no more than 2 exceptions.

Regularly cooperates with coworkers and others in meeting commitments and accomplishing assigned work on time; i.e., sharing information freely.

Responds constructively to feedback, seeking ways to improve.

Consistently raises concerns in constructive manner and offers potential solutions.

Fosters productive and cooperative working relationships by showing understanding, courtesy, tact, and politeness to others with no more than 6-8 valid complaints.

Updates records that affect other programs in the office within timeframes established by management.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Performance Alignment: FSA State and County Office Supervisors

Communicate how organizational goals are linked and cascaded to individual and work group performance, and how the accomplishments support employees' organizational goals within their organizations, through:

- staff meetings
- individual or team meetings
- electronic and internal correspondence

Ensure that all employees review the Agency's current Strategic Plan Framework or organizational goals at http://bpms.wdc.usda.gov/bpms.htm

Develop performance plans that include a critical element with standards that identify clear and measurable (quality, quantity, cost, and/or timely) tasks and results that are aligned to organizational goals for each individual.

***Note**: When cascading goals, be sure to consider the level of responsibility of the position. For example, do not use the same language for a program technician (PT) that would be used for District Director (DD). Standards must be realistic and attainable.*

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Program Management: Supervisors

Processes loans within the States' established goals with no more than 3 exceptions.

Ensures that reviews are conducted and reports are filed and submitted within established timeframes.

Achieves or makes progress towards delinquency rates within the states' established goals.

Ensures that applications for benefits are processed within required timeframes.

Ensure that producer payments are made within required timeframes.

Ensure that staff is fully trained in the program areas for which each employee is responsible.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Research and Analysis: All

Reviews and analyzes temporary directive notices and procedure notices on a daily basis 95% of the time.

Takes actions required by directives within the timeframes required 97% of the time.

Asks questions for clarification and makes suggestions for implementation within the timeframes established by management.

Writes state procedural notices required by the supervisor that are clear, concise, and understandable within established timeframes 95% of the time. [Applies to State Office]

Conducts research and data gathering in response to legal issues and other assignments that are complete, accurate, and relevant within established timeframes 95% of the time.

Assembles, indexes, and organizes work papers to expedite analysis and develop quality summaries and report segments with no more than 3 of revisions by supervisor 90% of the time.

Analyzes data to identify weaknesses, patterns, and trends that are communicated to supervisor and other required staff within established timeframes.

Prepares case files that are complete and accurate within established timeframes for use in legal or administrative forums with no more than 3 exceptions.

Prepares case files for program appeals that are complete and accurate within established timeframes 95% of the time.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Resource Management: All

Manages within established budget for program, function, or work assigned; notifies appropriate individual of potential budget shortfalls at least 60 days in advance.

Ensures that budget object codes are correctly entered 97% of the time.

Ensures that travel, training, and other administrative forms are properly completed, timely, and followed-up to ensure proper processing 97% of the time.

Plans resource needs accurately 97% of the time.

Ensures bills are paid accurately so that payments are not deemed improper.

Plans projects or other assignments, monitors, and completes within schedule and quality goals 95% of the time.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Supervision: Supervisors

Schedules staff meetings at least monthly and after major program conferences or meetings or more frequently if required by management.

Prioritizes work of staff to deal with workload shifts and to ensure mission-critical work is accomplished with 95% accuracy.

Ensures that all new employees receive training on operational and procedural requirements within timeframes required by management.

Ensures that all employees are assessed and training needs are identified, communicated to employees, and planned on an annual basis.

Ensures that all employees receive required training within established guidelines.

Ensures issues and problems are identified, documented, and dealt with in a timely manner (immediately for minor issues, usually within one week for others, or within agency established timeframes as applicable) 90% of the time.

Ensures that all individual performance plans are linked to SED goals and that the links are explained to employees by the required deadline.

Conducts all requirements of the performance management cycle including encouraging two-way discussion of planning, reviews, evaluation, and career development, setting goals and conducting reviews and evaluations within established timeframes, encouraging and implementing on-going feedback throughout the year, 99% of the time.

Ensures fair treatment of staff by dealing with issues such as absenteeism, tardiness, and other chronic problems within one week of identification of problem.

Prepares required reports that are accurate, according to stated requirements, and within established timeframes 97% of the time.

Ensures all personnel responsibilities (recruitment, staffing, promotion, training, evaluation and discipline) are conducted fairly, meet established procedures, and within established timeframes 90% of the time.

Adheres to Safety and Occupational Health practices and procedures in order to promote and maintain a safe and healthful work environment for all employees. Upon report of unsafe/unhealthful condition, notifies appropriate office within 48 hours, and follows up and/or takes appropriate action until condition is resolved.

*** Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Team Leadership: All

Provides leadership or oversees subordinate or co-workers' work and achieves desired results 90% of the time.

Plans projects, monitors or reviews work within schedule and quality goals for assigned program or functional work 90% of the time.

Identifies and pursues opportunities to improve services or products.

Demonstrates collaborative efforts between Farm Programs and Farm Loan Programs by ensuring team regularly shares information and provides other support. Joint staff meetings will be held on a regular basis as established by management, frequency of the meetings must be established in writing.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Monitoring Performance Job Aid

Monitoring Methods

There are many ways to monitor the employee's performance, but the most frequently used is periodic, direct observation or "management by walking around." Other methods you can use include gathering information by:

- Asking for and reviewing customer compliments/complaints ☐
- Seeking feedback from coworkers, peers, or other supervisors ☐
- Reviewing logs and/or activity reports ☐
- Reviewing the employee's work or records ☐

What to Collect

To obtain fair work examples that collectively are not biased in either a high or low direction for the entire review period, determine if you are collecting . . .

- A representative sample (you won't get everything) of the overall work? ☐
- Information on both typically slow and busy days? ☐
- Data for important projects and for routine ones? ☐
- Examples of work at all times of the day? ☐
- Information representing all of the employee's elements and standards? ☐
- Input from your employees regarding his or her own performance? ☐
- Data on all your employees, not just those performing unsatisfactorily? ☐
- Work samples consistently for all your employees? ☐

Types of Documentation Job Aid

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Official Documentation</th></tr>
<tr><th>Characteristics</th><th>Types of Documentation To Maintain</th></tr>
<tr><td>

Is information used for the employee's performance review or for formal performance-based actions.
Must be shared with the employee. It is best to have the employee sign the official documentation to show that he or she has reviewed it.
Is kept in a separate folder or file with the employee's name on it.
May be used in legal or adverse action disputes.

</td><td>

Records of formal performance discussions.
Records of any performance counseling sessions as a result of deterioration in performance.
Notes concerning any performance issue that may lead to formal feedback or adverse action.
Employee input (information submitted by the employee).

Note: Consult with your Human Resources Office for information on documentation that your agency is required to maintain.
</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Supervisor Notes</th></tr>
<tr><th>Characteristics</th><th>Types of Documentation To Maintain</th></tr>
<tr><td>

Are memory joggers of regarding performance.
Must be maintained by you and for your personal use.
Must not be shown to anyone.
Are usually kept in a notebook or a calendar that contains information on many topics.
Must not be kept under any official system of agency records.

Note: The Privacy Act allows you to keep personal notes, as long as the above conditions are met. Even supervisor notes, however, can be subpoenaed and are subject to disclosure in discovery before most administrative and judicial proceedings.
</td><td>

Notes about all your employees.
Observations about performance problems and other job behaviors - both positive and negative.
Notes on informal positive and constructive feedback discussions.
Notes from informal discussions or meetings.

</td></tr>
</table>

Documenting Performance Job Aid

Documentation Guidelines
You are responsible for maintaining documentation related to your employees' performance. It is in an employee's best interest to make sure you remember his or her good performance as well as that which needs improvement. Keep the following guidelines in mind when you are documenting an employee's performance. • Include complete identification of the situation, circumstances, or results of the performance. • Use brief, specific, and detailed statements that support the facts. • Include information on the impact of the performance. • Include information that illustrates performance in relation to expectations. • Be objective. Do not include biases or judgments. • Include only data that reflect performance and results. • Keep the documentation confidential by keeping official documents locked in file cabinets and not leaving your notes in open view. • Maintain the same documentation system for all employees. • Establish folders to hold work samples and observation notes. Set up one folder for each employee. Keep a copy of the employee's performance elements and standards in the folder to remind yourself to collect information about all of them.

Tips for Writing Performance Narratives Job Aid

Tips for Writing the Narrative . . .

The supervisor must prepare a written narrative outlining the employee's accomplishments for each element. The narrative should:

- Include examples of performance where appropriate
- Be brief and specific
- Avoid adjectives and adverbs that are not objective.
- Use clear, concise statements or bullets.
- Avoid writing in third person.
- Describe accomplishments with regard to quantity, quality, timeliness, and manner of performance or other measure of performance.
- Use language that lay reviewers will understand versus highly technical language.
- Avoid statements that describe your personal beliefs or philosophies; focus on specific challenges and results achieved.

Include in the narrative . . .

Narratives should address the breadth, scope, and/or impact of achievements, and can include items such as:

- Innovation in approach and results obtained;
- Flexibility, adaptability, and resourcefulness, despite the presence of obstacles;
- Program efficiencies or other measurable improvements gained that promoted effectiveness and mission achievement;
- Favorable feedback and evaluations from customers, stakeholders, and others, including staff;
- Flexibility and adaptability in responding to changing priorities;
- Initiation of significant collaborations, alliances, and coalitions;
- Invitations to serve on or lead workgroups, consortiums, etc., or other indicators of stature and expertise;
- Accolades and recognition received; and/or
- Other indicators demonstrating excellence in meeting agency strategic initiatives and individual management and program outcomes that contributed to the success of program goals.

Recognizing Bias Job Aid

Bias occurs when you allow your personal opinion of the employee to influence your decisions. Try to identify the cause or root of the bias and then address it. Common types of bias can be grouped into three broad categories:

- Bias based on judgment of performance
- Bias based on personal preference or style
- Bias based on time factors.

Bias Based on JUDGMENT OF PERFORMANCE

Type of Bias	Description
Horns/Halo Effect	Underrating in all areas an employee who does poorly in one area. Alternatively, overrating in other areas an employee who is outstanding in one area of performance.
Contrast Effect	Evaluating employees in comparison with other employees rather than against the standards for the job.
Central Tendency Error	Attempting to treat all employees equally by rating everyone in the middle of the scale even if some performances clearly warrant a substantially higher or lower rating.
Rotating	Rotating higher ratings to make everyone happy.
Negative and Positive Skew	The opposite of central tendency. Rating all individuals as higher or lower than their performance actually warrants.
Interpretation	Developing conclusions or making assumptions. Not based on facts but on the rater's opinion of the facts.

Bias Based on PERSONAL PREFERENCE OR STYLE

Type of Bias	Description
First Impression Error	Making an initial positive or negative judgment of an employee and allowing that first impression to distort later interactions.
Similar-to-Me Effect	Rating an employee who resembles you higher than you rate other employees.
Attribution Bias	Attributing performance failings to factors under the employee's control and performance successes to external causes.
Stereotyping	Generalizing across groups and ignoring individual differences.

Bias Based on TIME FACTORS

Type of Bias	Description
Quick and Dirty Effect	Giving all employees the same rating regardless of their performance in order to get the evaluations done quickly.
Recency Effect	Allowing events that happened recently to have more influence on the rating than events of many months ago.
Time Delay	Forgetting the details of performance over the rating period.

Give, Get, Merge Communication Model Job Aid

Give, Get, Merge is a communication model that incorporates skills to optimize communication with your employees.

- Give your perspective in a way that the employee can understand and relate to. Show your commitment to the communication process, not to your position of power over the employee.
- Get the employee's perspective in a way that will build his or her involvement in the process. Make sure the employee knows that he or she is not merely a passive observer but, instead, an active participant in evaluation and planning.
- Merge the perspectives and strive to come to agreement to increase the likelihood of a high level of performance and success. Blend your view and your employee's view to create as clear a consensus as possible. Finish your discussion so that both of you are confident in the conclusions you've reached together.

GIVE Your Perspective

Give your perspective to communicate a clear and objective message about performance expectations/behavior—both expected and actual.

What to Do	How to Do It
1. Describe **expected** performance	Be concise. Express yourself completely and directly, without excessive wordiness.
2. Describe **actual** performance or behavior	Be objective. Keep your perspective free of emotions, personal prejudice, or judgments.
3. Describe why the performance or behavior is important	Be specific. Focus your statements on particular, distinctive actions or accomplishments.

Give, Get, Merge Communication Model Job Aid (continued)

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">GET Employee's Perspective</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Get the employee's perspective to involve him or her in the performance management process and strengthen his or her buy-in and commitment.</td></tr>
<tr><th>What to Do</th><th>How to Do It</th></tr>
<tr><td>Attend
Attending demonstrates to the speaker that you are paying attention and listening to what he/she is saying.</td><td>Give your full physical and mental attention to the employee:
• Maintain eye contact.
• Keep an alert but relaxed posture.
• Use appropriate facial expressions.
• Nod your head.
• Say "I see …" or "Uh-huh …" to let people know they have your attention.
• Be sensitive to cultural differences that may exist in a diverse workforce. (Be aware, for instance, that in some cultures maintaining direct eye contact can be offensive.)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Encourage
Encouraging can stimulate or spur other people to offer you more information, insight, or ideas. It conveys to them that you are interested in what they have to say.</td><td>Draw the employee out to involve him or her in the discussion:
• Do not interrupt
• Provide cues that you are engaged; e.g., nod your head or respond to comments with "I see" or "Right"
• Use phrases such as "Tell me more" to elicit further elaboration of ideas and concerns.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Paraphrase
Paraphrasing is the key skill to make certain that you have understood the other's message. Paraphrasing is summarizing in your own words the gist of what someone has said. It:
• Lets the person know that you are listening
• Encourages the person to expand on what he/she is saying
• Helps you confirm what the person is saying before you react.</td><td>• Mentally summarize the key points of what the person is saying.
• Reflect the gist of what the person has said in your own words. Begin with a phrase such as:
– "What I hear you saying is … "
– "In other words, you're saying …"
– "You're saying …."
Criteria for Effective Paraphrasing
• Interchangeable (that is, you don't take away from or add to what the person has said)
• Brief
• In your own words
• Free from judgment (that is, you're not agreeing or disagreeing with what the person has said; you're simply acknowledging that you understand what he/she meant)</td></tr>
</table>

Give, Get, Merge Communication Model Job Aid (continued)

GET Employee's Perspective (continued)

What to Do	How to Do It
Ask questions Sometimes you don't have enough information to really understand what the person has said or to understand it from his/her point of view. Or you may simply need to elicit more information about a situation. The best way to do this is to ask questions.	**Closed Questions** • Are used to elicit a "yes" or "no" or other limited response—a finite amount of information; provide only the information you ask for (assuming you know what questions to ask). • Typically begin with "have," "is," "can," and "do." Examples include: – "Is 2 days enough time?" – "Can Pat handle the job given her skill level?" – "Does this computer error occur often?" • Are used to elicit quick facts and stimulate closure; most useful for confirming understanding or agreement. For example, "Did I understand you correctly when you said that…?" **Open-Ended Questions** • Can yield a great deal of information; are used for gathering information, understanding a problem or concern, drawing out, solving problems. • Often begin with "how," "what," "why," "when," "where," or phrases such as "Tell me about …." Examples include: – "How do you think we should proceed?" – "Tell me about …." • Encourage participation in the communication process or participation at a deeper level.
Listen for content	Reflect back what you heard, in your own words, to ensure that you understand what the employee has said.
Listen for feelings	Pay attention to more than just the words the employee uses: • Observe the employee's nonverbal language (body language, facial expressions) • Listen to what the employee is saying and how he or she is saying it (tone, volume, pacing) • Reflect back the feelings.

Give, Get, Merge Communication Model Job Aid (continued)

MERGE Perspectives	
Merge perspectives to achieve agreement and alignment on issues related to performance—what performance is expected, what actual performance is, etc.	
What to Do	**How to Do It**
1. Identify goals	Keep in mind the desired outcome of the discussion with the employee: • Successful completion of a specific job, task, or behavior, • Support of your professional relationship with the employee, or • A combination of both.
2. Find common ground	Look for and build on similarities in interests, summarizing areas of agreement.
3. Determine specific differences	Identify where you and the employee differ.
4. Explore alternatives	Use a merge strategy—such as integrate, compromise, or accommodate—that will move you and the employee toward the goal.

Depending on your goals for the performance discussion, you will use one of the following five ***strategies for merging perspectives***.

Strategy	Outcome	When to Use
Integrate	Fully incorporates the perspectives of both you and the employee	• You want to create a solution because you both have concerns that are too important to be compromised. • You need to pull together various insights on how to deal with a problem. • You want to increase the level of commitment from the employee. • You need to work through contentious feelings that have been interfering with your relationship with the employee.

Give, Get, Merge Communication Model Job Aid (continued)

Strategy	Outcome	When to Use
Compromise	Meets some, but not all, concerns/ needs of both you and the employee	• The goals you and the employee have set are moderately important, but not worth the effort or potential disruption of fighting it out. • You want to achieve temporary settlements to complex issues. • You need to arrive at an expedient solution under time pressure.
Accommodate	Fully supports the employee's concerns/needs, without meeting your concerns/ needs	• You lack information regarding a situation. It is counterproductive to maintain an uninformed position, so the best resolution may be to accept the employee's views as the blueprint for agreement. • The issue is more important to the employee than to you. Yielding to the employee's position is a goodwill gesture that can help maintain a cooperative relationship. • You and the employee have conflicting viewpoints on especially controversial issues. You may decide that avoiding disruption is more important than forcing a resolution with which neither of you is happy.
Avoid	Neither your nor the employee's concerns/needs can be addressed; decision is postponed	• The dividing issue is trivial. • The potential damage of confronting a conflict outweighs the benefits of its resolution. • You or the employee needs to cool down (to reduce tensions and to regain perspective and composure). • You believe that others could resolve the conflict more effectively.
Impose	Fully meets your concerns, without considering or incorporating the employee's concerns/needs	• You must resolve important issues that require the implementation of unpopular courses of action. • You know you are right and the issues at stake are vital to the organization's welfare. • There are time constraints and you ***must*** set deadlines for the completion of work.

Words to Communicate Emotions

Most of our feelings can be categorized in four groups: happy, sad, angry, and scared. Here is a list of feeling states. Notice the differences in intensity of feeling.

Happy	Sad	Angry	Scared
confident	ashamed	aggravated	afraid
content	awful	annoyed	anxious
delighted	bad	bothered	disoriented
energetic	depressed	bugged	distracted
excited	disappointed	burned up	fretful
exhilarated	discouraged	disgusted	frightened
fantastic	dissatisfied	fed up	insecure
glad	disturbed	frustrated	intimidated
good	down	furious	jumpy
great	embarrassed	impatient	lost
hopeful	helpless	incensed	mixed up
optimistic	hopeless	irate	nervous
pleased	inadequate	irked	overwhelmed
positive	lonely	irritated	powerless
proud	lost	mad	tense
relieved	low	mean	threatened
satisfied	miserable	peeved	timid
secure	sorry	resentful	troubled
thrilled	terrible	riled	uncertain
up	uneasy	vexed	uncomfortable
	unhappy		uneasy
	upset		unsure
			worried

Handling Emotional Reactions Job Aid

Reaction and Description	Strategies for Handling . . .
Anger. Angry behavior can be very complex. Behavior may range intermittently from total silence and withdrawal to harassing and negative comments or questions. Angry employees tend to be angry "at the whole world" and are not necessarily angry with you.	• Do not become defensive or invite criticism. • Use silence. Silence gives an angry person nothing to push back against. • Sidestep or ignore. Change the topic and refocus the discussion on the underlying problem or issue. • Refuse to be punished. Draw a boundary by asking the person what he or she wants from you. • Use your empathetic listening skills. Actually listen as a way to recognize and defuse anger.
Bullying. People who use bullying behavior need to zero in on a defenseless target. Bullying behavior manifests itself in verbal attacks; or in using threats, demands, or other attempts to intimidate and push others around.	• Draw boundaries. Let the person know what behavior you will and will not tolerate (e.g., "I will be happy to talk about the situation, but I will not continue the conversation if you threaten me in any way"). • Create a negative consequence that outweighs whatever benefit the person is getting from his/her current behavior. • Explicitly identify the bullying behavior and invite the person to do something more constructive (e.g., "Your repeated verbal attacks aren't getting us any closer to an agreement. I suggest that we …").
Complaining. Complaining employees are not problem solvers, but problem magnifiers. They find fault, gripe, and share an endless list of things they do not like. They use words like "never" and "always" frequently in their complaints.	• Ask for ideas to cope with the complaint. This forces the employee into a problem-solving mode. • Encourage a search for the other side of things (e.g., "You've told me how terrible things are in Department X. However, you are a fair person. Think of one positive thing about it"). • Switch to more positive ground early on (e.g., "Yes, there may be a problem with Department X, and the reason we're here is to find some answers. How can we accomplish this?").

Handling Emotional Reactions Job Aid (continued)

Reaction and Description	Strategies for Handling . . .
Avoiding. Avoiding behaviors include emotional withdrawing, hiding out, procrastinating, or refusing to interact. Employees who are avoiding are often unresponsive and not willing to listen, saying things like, "We don't have anything to talk about," and, "That's not my problem."	• Identify their concerns or fears and help them feel safer (e.g., "Would you be more comfortable if we met in your office?"). • Actively listen so they feel understood. • Help them create safe conditions by asking them what they need (e.g., "What do you need to be willing to stay here and talk this out?").
Crying. When confronted with an employee who is crying, acknowledge the feelings he or she might be having. This will diffuse a lot of the emotion. However, if the crying continues, the employee is trying to find someone or something to blame and wants you to take responsibility.	• Give permission. • Give time and space, but don't end the conversation. • Proceed gradually.

Tips for Managing Your Own Emotions
• Be aware of and recognize your signs of anger, annoyance, and frustration. Know your own "hot buttons" and recognize when employee behaviors are likely to trigger them. • Learn how to take time out from a discussion if you need to cool off and get your emotions under control. Develop some techniques for skillfully ending a conversation if you feel yourself getting emotional. • Remind yourself of why it is important to solve the problem, what your goal is, and what the consequences of not solving it might be. • Do not take the employee's behavior personally. The behavior likely is not meant as an attack on or an affront to you. • Reframe what you are experiencing. If you cannot change the way someone is reacting to feedback, then you might need to alter your perception of the experience. Reframing might mean changing a negative assumption about an employee's behavior and transforming the interpretation into a positive one. • Let it go. Talk to a trusted ally and then drop the subject. Minimize the effects that challenging behaviors have on you. • Be reflective about the situation. Spend structured time reflecting about what you did in a difficult situation, why you did it, and what you could do in a similar situation in the future.

Assertiveness Techniques for Handling Difficult Behaviors

In situations where difficult behaviors continue and it becomes necessary for you to take measures to control the interaction, consider applying the following assertiveness techniques.

"Given That" Statements

- Sometimes there are factors that limit or interfere with an employee's ability to get the job done. These problems prevent good employee performance when they become excuses for not trying to improve performance.
- "Given that" statements involve acknowledging real obstacles while insisting that the employee be responsible for helping to find a way to be more productive given the obstacles. This technique can eliminate long—and generally unproductive—discussions about how bad things really are or about whether the employee is justified in being frustrated with the situation. It is useful when an employee keeps presenting new ammunition to justify his or her complaints rather than working with you to find solutions.
- Rather than trying to argue away real limitations, you might say, "Given that we're short of analysts today – which increases everyone's workload, what could you do so that this problem doesn't interfere with your getting your job done?"

Verbal Judo

- "Judo" translates to "the gentle way." It teaches the principle of flexibility—the flexible and efficient use of balance, leverage, and momentum. Verbal judo combines active listening and "given that" statements to gently draw out an employee's resistance to a request you have made. You draw out his or her resistance and then refocus the attention on solving the problem or meeting your request.
- The first step is to invite the employee to describe his or her objections as clearly as possible. Once he or she has clearly expressed the resistance, you then use active listening or "given that" statements to circle back around to solving the problem.
- For example, you have an employee who has consistently resisted entering data using a new automated procedure, complaining that he "is too busy to do it and it is a waste of time anyway." You say, "I understand that you're busy and that you think the new procedure may not be worthwhile. However, given that we need to use this procedure to process the data, I need for you to make sure you enter the data in accordance with it."

Broken Record

- The broken record technique is used most appropriately for maintaining or regaining control of a situation in which the employee is unwilling to listen or is trying to sidetrack the conversation.
- In this technique, you acknowledge what the employee is saying but go right back to the point of your message as if you were a broken record. Here's an example:

Assertiveness Techniques for Handling Difficult Behaviors (continued)

Broken Record (continued)

- Lee's reports are consistently late. You've tried talking to her about this problem only to have her place the blame on someone else. This time, when Lee tries to lay blame by stating that the last supervisor wasn't such a stickler about promptness, you respond by saying, "That may be the case, but right now I'm concerned about finding ways for you to get your reports in on time."
- Lee replies that Helen doesn't always get her reports in on time. You again use the broken record technique by saying, "Perhaps I need to talk with Helen about that, but for the moment I'm more concerned about your reports being on time."
- Then Lee tries to change the subject by telling you that she's having trouble with Jack in the next department. You say, "I'm interested in hearing about Jack, but first let's settle the issue of your late reports."

Selective Ignoring

- Selective ignoring is similar to the broken record technique in that it involves a refusal to respond to certain issues. This can be done by reiterating your refusal to discuss an issue in a particular way, by not responding at all when certain topics are raised, or by changing the subject.
- For example, when a person complains loudly to you in the hallway or within earshot of other employees you might use selective ignoring by saying, "I'd be more than willing to discuss the issue with you if you will come into my office and sit down."
- If the employee continues to rant and rave, you would continue to refuse to discuss the issue until he or she comes into the office. If this does not work, you may want to combine this technique with the next, assertive withdrawal.

Assertive withdrawal

- Assertive withdrawal involves a clear verbal or nonverbal signal that indicates you are postponing or terminating a conversation. This is a drastic measure that should be used only when a situation is clearly out of hand and you have no option but to withdraw.
- Walking away, hanging up the phone, or nonverbally removing your attention by starting other work reinforces the verbal message that the conversation has ended. You need to accomplish this in a professional and calm manner. Before you take any action, say, "I believe we need to postpone this discussion until we are both calmer; I'll be happy to arrange another time to discuss this with you, but for now I am ending this conversation."

Barriers to Getting Another's Perspective Job Aid

Barrier	Method to Remove Barrier
Prematurely passing judgment on what is being said	Suspend your judgment until you have recognized and removed any filters you may have.
Lacking energy to listen and focus on the speaker	Reschedule the conversation until you are able to be fully attentive.
Focusing on distractions (e.g., noises, diverted attention, activity surrounding you)	Turn off the computer screen or telephone, close the door.
Lacking motivation to listen (e.g., because the information is repetitive, the excuses are the same, it's the same old "spiel")	Stay focused on why and what the speaker wants you to hear. Ask questions; be curious.
Focusing on details and not understanding the overall meaning	Remind yourself of the speaker's purpose and/or restate the primary objective.
Letting your own thoughts get in the way of listening (i.e., your personal "to do" list)	Become an active listener (i.e., question, paraphrase, comment) and stop your internal monologue.
Being preoccupied by the use of the language (e.g., accents, rate of speech, grammar)	Listen attentively, paraphrase, and ask questions.