



Writing Effective Performance Objectives Fact Sheet June 2009

This Writing Effective Performance Objectives Fact Sheet provides general information concerning the DCIPS performance management system and writing effective performance objectives. For more information on performance management and other DCIPS subjects, please visit the DCIPS web site at <http://dcips.dtic.mil>. You are encouraged to consult with your servicing Human Resources office for supplemental Component or local guidance.

General

The DCIPS performance management process promotes a performance culture in which the performance and contributions of the workforce are linked to the mission, goals, and objectives of the organization. Making meaningful distinctions between levels of performance and rewarding performance according to those distinctions helps to drive performance. Performance objectives are used as a way for rating officials to communicate the major work that needs to be accomplished during the evaluation period.

What are Performance Objectives?

Performance objectives communicate major individual, team, and organizational responsibilities or contributions and the related outcomes and accomplishments that are expected of the employee. Performance objectives:

- Focus on results and describe a future situation or expected outcome; objectives are different from task descriptions that focus on activities.
- Capture the larger or more significant aspects of an employee's work – not the small daily tasks of the job.

Requirements for Performance Objectives

Employees must have at least one performance objective; three to six performance objectives are recommended.

Performance objectives must be written to the position. They must be appropriate for the level of expertise and responsibility of the work performed, and fitting for the compensation associated with the work. When defining the measurability aspect of a performance objective, remember to set it at the Successful (3) level.

Finally, performance objectives must be aligned with organizational mission, goals, and objectives. This direct line of sight is critical to linking individual performance to organizational performance.

What are SMART Objectives?

There are many ways to write an effective performance objective. Many employees find it useful to follow the SMART approach:

- **S - Specific** means that the objective describes an observable or verifiable accomplishment. The performance objective should be specific about the result, not the way it is achieved. Specificity ensures that managers, rating officials, and employees share the same expectations.
- **M - Measurable** (or observable or verifiable) means that a method or procedure is in place to assess and record the behavior or action on which the objectives focuses and the quality of the outcome. Some work can be measured easily by outcomes; in other cases, accomplishments or behaviors need to be verified or observed.
- **A - Achievable** means that a performance objective is something an employee can do that will support a work unit goal. The performance objective should be sufficiently challenging but not so complex that it cannot be accomplished. At the same time, it should not be so easy that it does not add value. Achievable also forces the employee and rating official to consider whether the performance objective can be accomplished with the resources and personnel available, and within the time available.
- **R – Relevant** means that the performance objective is tied to organizational goals. It is derived from the Defense Intelligence Strategy (DIS), National Intelligence Strategy (NIS), the Defense Intelligence Guidance (DIG), and the mission, goals, and objectives of the employee's organization.
- **T – Time-bound** means there is a point in time when the performance objective starts and when it ends. When developing objectives for ongoing work, a date when the assessment period is to begin should be specified. If it is a short-term or project-related objective, specify when the assessment period is to be completed.

SMART Objective Checklist

Refer to this checklist to determine if you have developed a SMART performance objective:

- Is the objective written so that you and your rating official have a shared understanding of what is expected?
- Does the objective describe a result, an outcome, or an ideal future situation?
- Is the objective specific enough to assess whether it was actually accomplished?
- Is the objective written concisely?
- Is the objective measurable or verifiable?
- Does the objective link to organizational mission, goals and objectives?

- Does the objective realistically challenge you?
- Is achievement of the objective within your control?
- Is the objective tied to a timeline and can it be accomplished within a single evaluation period?

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Are all employees under DCIPS required to have a written performance plan containing performance objectives?

A: Yes, all employees must have a written performance plan with at least one performance objective (three to six are recommended) that focuses on the critical work the employee performs; aligns with organizational mission, goals, and objectives; and communicates expected results.

Q: If the employee is working toward goals that span several evaluation periods, how is the work evaluated?

A: The work should be divided into smaller portions with milestones that fall within a single evaluation period.

Q: Can standard objectives be developed for employees in similar positions?

A: Performance objectives must be tailored to the unique responsibilities and assignments of individual employees.

Q: Where can I go for help when writing my performance objectives?

A: Employees and rating officials are encouraged to use *iSuccess*, an on-line application tool, to help develop effective performance objectives. *iSuccess* is a self-paced, interactive course that uses a step-by-step approach, as well as a “virtual coach” and “virtual employees” to teach employees and rating officials how to write SMART performance objectives and Self-Reports of Accomplishments. *iSuccess* is available on the DCIPS web site (<http://dcips.dtic.mil>).