

GUIDE TO WRITING EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES



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Guide to Writing Effective Performance Objectives

Purpose

Current Defense Civilian Intelligence Personnel System (DCIPS) regulations and the National Intelligence Civilian Compensation Program (NICCP) policies and directives¹ call for a performance management system that includes the use of individual performance objectives aligned to the goals and objectives of the Intelligence Community (IC) element and the National Intelligence Strategy.

One of the most challenging aspects of the DCIPS and NICCP performance management systems is writing meaningful performance objectives. The criteria and guidelines presented in this manual will help you do just that.

How to Use This Guide

This guide supplements the DCIPS and NICCP training on writing performance objectives. It provides a step-by-step reference you can use to write objectives for yourself and employees you supervise. Your DCIPS or NICCP training can provide further details and guidance.

This guide contains the following sections:

- *Tips for Writing Performance Objectives* summarizes basic strategies for writing effective performance objectives.
- *Performance Objective Checklist & Examples* provides criteria you can use to ensure each objective you write meets all requirements for an effective objective.
- *Accomplishment Evaluation Criteria & Examples* provides the criteria supervisors and managers will use to evaluate employee attainment of their objectives. You should refer to them when you develop your performance objectives to ensure they allow measurement using these criteria.
- *Common Challenges and Potential Solutions* provides guidance on dealing with some of the more difficult issues that may arise when developing performance objectives.

¹ *Intelligence Community Directive 650: National Intelligence Civilian Compensation Program: Guiding Principles and Framework* (2008).

Intelligence Community Directive 651: Performance Management System Requirements for the Intelligence Community Civilian Workforce (2008).

TIPS FOR WRITING PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

Overview

- 1) Understand the Purpose of Performance Objectives
- 2) Compile Your Resources
- 3) Determine the Most Important Aspects of the Job
- 4) Work Activities → End Results
- 5) End Results → Objectives: Make Your “End Result” SMART +
- 6) Review Your Objective Using the Checklist for Writing Effective Performance Objectives

1) Understand the Purpose of Performance Objectives

- What is a Performance Objective?

DEFINITION: A performance objective is a specific end result that contributes to the success of the unit or organization and that an employee is expected to accomplish or produce.

Performance objectives provide focus to an employee's work to ensure that his or her actions are directed toward achieving important mission-related outcomes. Performance objectives are **not** work activities, task descriptions, or responsibilities listed in a performance description.

- A **work activity** is the *action* that an employee takes when performing his/her job.
- A **performance objective** specifies the *outcome* or *end result* of a work activity.

EXAMPLES:

Work Activity: Determine acquisition strategies.

Performance Objective: By the end of the fiscal year, present two acquisition plans for new computer systems based on a thorough analysis of customer needs, capabilities, and cost/benefits.

Work Activity: Prepare and deliver briefings.

Performance Objective: By 28 February, deliver three briefings to key stakeholders regarding the new security initiative within the organization, and write a detailed report on the feedback received.

Work Activity: Collaborate with others.

Performance Objective: For each project received during the fiscal year, solicit at least one individual from outside of your work unit to provide input at the planning stage. Incorporate the individual's input into your final report.

- Recurring Performance Objectives

DEFINITION: Recurring performance objectives are objectives written for activities that are part of an employee's routine tasking which may be unforeseen in terms of volume and timing.²

² *Performance Management: Writing To It.* Office of the Director of National Intelligence/ Office of Human Resources.

Writing objectives that cover unforeseen work can be challenging, but this type of work is often an important part of an employee's job and should be evaluated.

- A **recurring task** is a routine *action* an employee performs that varies in terms of timing and volume.
- A **recurring performance objective** specifies the *action*, the *customer*, and an expected *outcome* of performing the recurring task.

EXAMPLES:

Recurring Task: Process incoming travel requests.

Recurring Performance Objective: Process and approve/disapprove all travel requests for the Human Capital office. Deliver 90% of approval notices within 10 business days of receipt.

Recurring Task: Facilitate informational training sessions, as requested, for new employees.

Recurring Performance Objective: Facilitate informational training sessions on how to use the organization's internal online tools for new employees who request training. Achieve a 90% satisfaction rate from employee training feedback surveys over the course of the evaluation period.

Getting Started

2) Compile Your Resources

- As appropriate, gather the following sources of information to help you write accurate, job-specific performance objectives:
 - Position Descriptions
 - Duty Statements
 - Performance Examples
 - Standard Operating Policies
 - Directives
 - Other guidance documents

- As appropriate, gather the following to help you tie the objective to higher-level goals/objectives:
 - Supervisor Performance Objectives
 - Work unit goals/objectives
 - Organizational goals/objectives
 - Defense Intelligence Strategy
 - Defense Intelligence Guidance (DIG)
 - National Intelligence Strategy (NIS)
 - National Intelligence Priorities Framework (NIPF)

- Access the repository of exemplar performance objectives relating to your job.

- **In a recent evaluation of another pay-for-performance system, one of the best strategies cited by employees for successfully writing effective objectives was to collaborate with colleagues doing or overseeing similar work to develop a set of**

common objectives that could apply to all individuals doing similar work within a given unit. This strategy

- Leverages the combined knowledge and experience of the group.
- Helps ensure that employees doing the same work have consistent expectations.

3) Determine the Most Important Aspects of the Job

Make a list of the most important work activities for the job. Consider work activities

- Performed most often by the individual
- Critical for supporting the mission
- Key to supporting other jobs

Writing Objectives

4) Work Activities → End Results

Choose three to five of the most important work activities on your list, and, for each one, write down what the *end result* of performing that activity should be.

EXAMPLES:

Work Activity: Performs research on emerging foreign technologies.

End Result: Produce a report on emerging foreign technologies.

Recurring Task: Ensures computer program is working effectively.

End Result: Submit weekly inspection reports, documenting problems and corrective actions.

5) End Results → Objectives: Make Your “End Result” SMART +

Once you have written down several end results, turn each one into a “SMART+” objective. The additional “+” criteria presented here will improve the quality of your objectives and increase the impartiality of the rating and review process.

- **Specific** – The objective needs to specify clearly defined expected results.
 - Details are important so you know what is expected.
 - Clearly defined expectations and results make it easier for your rater to determine if you met the objective.
 - **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Objectives that are too specific may quickly become out of date.

EXAMPLES:

Objective A

Too Vague: Update report on emerging foreign technologies.

Specific Information that could be included:

- What report should be updated?
- What is meant by "updated?"
- How much of the report will be updated?
- Updates should be current as of when?
- What are the standards for evaluating the quality of the updates?
- How would the rater know if the report was successfully updated?

Appropriate Specificity: By 10 March, update the yearly report on emerging foreign technologies to include information available through 31 December. As needed, provide new sections for information not previously addressed and revise previous sections for which you have found new information. The final product should demonstrate a thorough analysis of appropriate sources and meet quality standards as determined by relevant organizational guidelines and supervisor review.

Objective B

Too Specific: For the Communications Improvement project within the work unit, provide 12 recommendations for improvement strategies in the following areas of communication: 1) Top-down, 2) Bottom-up, 3) Peer-to-Peer, 4) Computer mediated, 5) Face-to-Face, and 6) Non-verbal. Use the organization's communication guide, Shannon's 1948 model of the communication process, and a work unit survey to inform your recommendations. Ensure the amount of time and money required to implement the recommendations is reasonable given the project constraints. Submit a draft to your supervisor. Make necessary revisions, and re-submit to your supervisor within 3 weeks of receiving feedback. Provide the final recommendations in a report to members of Team A, your supervisor, and your work unit director by the end of the first quarter.

Appropriate Specificity: For the work unit's Communication Improvement project, develop a set of recommendations for improvement strategies based on relevant research and work unit feedback. By the end of the first quarter, provide to all relevant personnel a set of recommendations that is realistic in terms of time and money required for implementation, as determined by the communication project goals, in a written report.

➤ **Measurable** – The objective should specify how to measure your success (i.e., provide a verifiable standard for evaluation).

- Providing concrete values sets the parameters for what you must achieve and standards for evaluating that achievement. Make sure that the measure does not require perfection (e.g., performance must be 100% error free), otherwise you will never be able to exceed the objective.
- Types of measurement include:
 - *Quality* – how well the work is performed (e.g., accuracy, effectiveness, or usefulness)

- *Quantity* – amount produced (e.g., raw numbers, percentages, level of productivity)
 - *Timeliness* – how quickly the work is completed (e.g., a certain time period or by a certain date)
 - *Cost Effectiveness* – how efficiently the product or service was produced and/or outcomes that result in a savings of time or money (e.g., dollar amount saved by creating an efficient method of performing a duty)
- The table below provides examples of different types of quality measures.

Commonly Used Quality Dimensions	
Product-based	
Conformance to Standards/Accuracy	The degree to which the product meets relevant standards and is free of errors.
Reliability/Durability	The dependability or life-expectancy of the product.
Appearance/Aesthetics	The degree to which the physical characteristics or layout of the product is appealing to the customer.
Distinctiveness	The degree to which the product is unique from other similar products.
Usefulness	The degree to which the product meets the needs of the customer.
Service-oriented	
Reliability	Consistency of performance and dependability.
Responsiveness	Willingness or readiness to provide service; timeliness of service.
Competence	Demonstrates skill and knowledge to perform the service (e.g., knowing who to contact at what time).
Access	Approachability and ease of contact (e.g., ability of customer to reach employee by phone).
Courtesy	Politeness, respect, and friendliness demonstrated.
Communication	Ability to listen to and clearly inform customers.
Understanding/Knowing the Customer	Understanding the customer's needs (e.g., learning individualized requirements and meeting them).
Credibility	Trustworthiness, believability, honesty.
Security	Ensuring the customer is free of doubt, risk, or danger (e.g., financial security, confidentiality).
Tangibles	Physical evidence of the service (e.g., cleanliness of physical facilities, receipts or statements).

References: Stone-Romero et al. (1997). Development of a multidimensional measure of perceived product quality. *Journal of Quality Management*, 2(1), 87-111; Parasuraman et al. (1985). A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research. *Journal of Marketing*, 49, 41-50.

- **Achievable** – The objective should be within your control and not overly dependent on outside factors. You should be rated only on work for which you are responsible.
 - If accomplishing a project requires an adequate amount of funding that is beyond your control, the objective should specify that raters consider the availability of resources in evaluating attainment of the objective.
 - The objective should not require that a higher authority gives your product final approval within the evaluation period.

EXAMPLE:

Inappropriate: Revise the work unit’s Contracting Instructions and/or guidance so that associated policies, processes, roles, and responsibilities are up-to-date, thorough, and clear, as determined by supervisor review. Supervisory edits of final products should be minimal.

Accomplishment is achieved when instructions/guidance are released for final signature by the appropriate signature authority.

Appropriate: Instructions/guidance should be submitted to the appropriate signature authority by the end of the third quarter.

- **Relevant** – The objective should have a direct and obvious link to your job, the manager’s objectives, the work unit’s goals, and to important organizational goals. It should be job-specific and focus on work important to the organization’s success. You can ensure this linkage by including a “source” in your objective.

A source is a document at the component, Agency, IC, or Federal level that contains specific or overarching guidance.³ Examples include:

- 500-Day Plan
- Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (IRTPA)
- Internal statement of strategic intent
- Internal mission/vision statement

- **Time-bound** – The objective should specify a timeframe associated with production of the product or service. Such timeframes help clarify performance expectations and ensure the work gets done in a timely manner. Timeframes can be within a certain period of time or by a certain date.

****Refer to your DCIPS or NICCP training for detailed strategies and processes for meeting the SMART criteria.***

The following additional criteria will help you avoid some common difficulties associated with developing effective objectives:

- Ensure recurring objectives are labeled as such at the end of the objective (see example below) and that they address the following questions:
 - What is the recurring action?
 - Who is the customer?

³ *Performance Management: Writing To It.* Office of the Director of National Intelligence/ Office of Human Resources.

EXAMPLE:

Manage receipt, tasking, tracking, and closure of all incoming congressional inquiries relating to Chief Financial Officer Affairs. Provide review of all draft responses to inquiries and ensure delivery of final product. Achieve closure within 10 business days of receipt, with 95% of responses satisfying request without need for follow-up. (Recurring)⁴

This example meets the SMART criteria.

- *Specific* – “Manage the receipt, tasking, tracking, and closure”
- *Measurable* – “95% of responses satisfy the initial request”
- *Achievable* – It is assumed the employee has the resources to accomplish this objective.
- *Relevant* – It supports the mission of the organization.
- *Time-bound* – “Achieve closure within 10 business days of receipt”

➤ Make the objective clear to an external audience.

- Avoid the use of jargon or acronyms in your description.
- Use action verbs to explain the employee’s role in achieving the objective.

Sample Action Verbs		
- Oversee	- Facilitate	- Evaluate
- Coordinate	- Produce	- Draft
- Lead	- Prepare	- Develop

- Provide one or two sentences that describe background or project-related information that might clarify the importance of the objective for the work unit and the complexity/difficulty of the work.
- As appropriate, specify the customer—explain who will benefit from the action performed in the objective.

➤ Write the objective at the Successful level (3) of performance.

- DCIPS and NICCP require that objectives be written at the Successful level (3) of performance.
- Refer to the *Work Level Descriptions* table (pg. 18 of this guide) to determine if the objective is appropriate for the employee’s work level, as specified by ICD 652 and DoD Instruction 1400.34, Volume 2007.
- Refer to the *Accomplishment Evaluation Criteria* (pg. 22 of this guide) or the guidance in ICD 651 *Performance Management System Requirements for the Intelligence Community Civilian Workforce* and the information contained in DoD Instruction 1400.32, Volume 2011 to determine what type of results meet the criteria for a Successful level of performance.

⁴ Example taken from the ODNI *Performance Management Reference Guide*.

- Make the objective consistent with expectations for similar jobs across the organization.
 - If possible, use standardized objectives from the repository of examples. If needed, tailor the example objective to be job-specific and at the appropriate work level.
 - Meet with other supervisors to compare objectives that have been written for employees in similar positions and collaborate to develop a set of common objectives that may be used (or slightly tailored) for individuals with the same job at the same level.

- Write the objective in a way that allows you to exceed it.
 - Try to avoid using extreme and limiting words like “all,” “always,” or “never.”
 - Give yourself the opportunity to receive an Excellent (4) or Outstanding (5) rating on your objective instead of capping your performance at Successful (3).

- Do not include too many different work activities and outcomes in a single objective.
 - A common error in writing objectives is to try and cover too many aspects of the job in a single objective. If two different outcomes are included in one objective and an employee exceeds expectations in one area but performs at the successful level in the other, how will a rater decide on a final rating?
 - Prioritize the work activities and decide which 3 to 5 are the most important. Write a single objective for each of the top work activities.
 - If some routine work activities are very important, consider whether performance on these may be evaluated in the performance standards ratings. If you would like to write an objective for the routine activities, then write a recurring objective that describes requirements for completing routine activities as a whole.

6) Review your objective using the Checklist for Writing Effective Performance Objectives

- The checklist is a useful resource because it asks specific questions to help you determine whether you are missing any critical components to make the performance objective effective. If you are
 - Missing something, then add it to your objective.
 - Having trouble meeting some of the criteria on the checklist, refer to the *Common Challenges and Potential Solutions* (page 30 of this guide).

Performance Objective Checklist & Examples

The following page provides a checklist with specific criteria to help you evaluate the effectiveness of your objectives. These are targeted questions meant to help you evaluate whether your objective is as good as it could be. Pages 14 through 17 present examples in which the checklist is used to evaluate if the objective meets the SMART+ criteria.

The table of *Work Level Descriptions* in this section can help you determine if your objective is written at the appropriate work level.

Checklist for Writing Effective Performance Objectives

-
- 1. Does the objective clearly link to the strategic goals or objectives of the organization?

 - 2. Does the objective clearly link to the goals or objectives of the work unit and/or your supervisor?

 - 3. Does the objective relate to a critical or important work activity you perform? (Was the objective written using a position description, duty statement, performance example, or other guidelines as a reference to ensure relevance?)

 - 4. Is the objective broad or flexible enough to allow for minor changes in your job (e.g., receive an important new project) to occur and have the objective still apply?

 - 5. Is completing the objective within your control, given environmental constraints and available resources?

 - 6. Is the objective appropriate to the your occupation and work level?

 - 7. Does the objective provide a degree of challenge that will stretch you, yet will still be achievable?

 - 8. Does the objective specify an end result rather than just the work activity?

 - 9. Is the result described in the objective observable or verifiable?

 - 10. Does the objective include at least one type of measurement (e.g., quality, quantity, cost-effectiveness, or timeliness)?

 - 11. Does the objective specify a period of performance (i.e., is it time-bound, such as "within one month" or "by June 1st")?

 - 12. Can the objective be accomplished within a single evaluation period?

 - 13. Is the objective written at the Successful level of performance?

 - 14. Is the objective written in a way that allows you to exceed it (i.e., it is not written as pass/fail and avoids using words like *all*, *always*, or *never*.)

 - 15. Is this objective consistent with objectives written for other, similar jobs within the organization in terms of responsibilities and difficulty of the work?

 - 16. Is the objective written in a way that avoids the use of jargon or acronyms?

 - 17. Is the objective focused around a single result or outcome?

Performance Objective Examples: Applying the Checklist

EXAMPLE 1:

Employee Information: Stacy is a Computer Engineer at the Full Performance work level. She has worked on several past server upgrades for the purposes of increased data management. The position description for this job describes managing data storage systems as one of her important job functions.

Performance Objective:

With minimal guidance, develop and recommend one feasible alternative process or long-term solution to recurring server-limitation problems by the end of the fiscal year. The recommendations should be unique from other existing solutions and be able to meet projected data storage needs over the next three years. That is, it should enhance the organization's ability to efficiently manage, organize, and store increasing amounts of data. Present recommendations in a briefing following the standard organizational format. Give a draft to your supervisor at least one month in advance of the due date and incorporate supervisor's feedback into the final briefing by the end of the fiscal year.

Link to Higher-level Goals:

Organization Strategic Plan, Goal 5: Forecast and meet technological needs of the mission.

Work Unit, Goal 4: Establish data storage capabilities that meet organizational demands and technology requirements.

Does this performance objective meet the criteria on the checklist?

- The objective clearly links to an organizational strategic goal and to work unit goals. One new process for addressing a server limitation will contribute to meeting organizational demands and the needs of the mission. (Criteria 1 & 2)
- According to the position description, the objective relates to an important work activity. (Criterion 3)
- The objective appears to be challenging, but achievable. Developing potential solutions to an unresolved issue often "stretches" an employee. (Criterion 7)
- The objective is results-focused. It mentions developing potential solutions, but focuses on the product (the briefing) that will be used to present the solutions. (Criterion 8)
- The result is observable (a briefing) and has specific standards related to quality of the report (organizational format) and timeliness (given to supervisor one month before the final deadline), and quality of the recommendations (unique and able to meet projected needs over the next three years). (Criteria 9 & 10)
- The objective is time-bound (completed by end of the fiscal year). (Criterion 11)
- It is not a pass/fail objective. Stacy could exceed expectations if she provided more than one high-quality solution. She could also do many other things to exceed this objective, such as working more independently than expected and/or developing recommendations that are extraordinarily creative and effective. (Criterion 14)

EXAMPLE 2:

Employee Information: Lindsey is at the Full Performance work level in a position related to Information Technology Security. She has assisted in several past training evaluations. The position description for this job describes evaluating training on security systems as an important function.

Performance Objective:

By the end of the fiscal year, evaluate the computer security system (CSS) training, assessing the extent to which the training is easy to use and if it covers the learning objectives sufficiently. Document the evaluation in a report that provides a detailed description of the evaluation methodology and results, and includes feasible recommendations for improvements that address the complaints as determined by your supervisor and one other reviewer. Write the report in the standard department format with no more than minimal editing errors. The draft report is due by 31 July, and the final report is due within 10 business days after feedback is received from the reviewer.

Link to Higher-level Goals:

Organization, Goal 6: Develop and maintain a security-conscious workforce that is knowledgeable about how to protect the organization against the latest threats.

Work Unit, Goal 2: Identify and develop effective security systems and programs for the organization's workforce.

Does this performance objective meet the criteria on the checklist?

- The objective clearly links to an organizational goal and to a work unit goal. Determining how to better train individuals to use the computer security system will help protect the organization against threats. The training for the computer security system is an important program for the organization's workforce. (Criteria 1 & 2)
- The objective is written at the appropriate work level for a Full Performance employee in this type of job as defined by the work level descriptions. (Criterion 6)
- The objective is results-focused. It mentions that Lindsey must conduct the evaluation, but the final report is the main focus of the objective. (Criterion 8)
- The result is observable (a report), and has specific standards related to quality (recommendations that resolve the main issues, department format, only minimal editing errors) and timeliness (to reviewer by 31 July and revisions made within 10 working days of receiving feedback). (Criterion 9 & 10)
- The objective is time-bound (completed by 31 July). (Criterion 11)
- It is not a pass/fail objective. For example, Lindsey can still achieve most of the objective even if the report requires more extensive editing than specified. She can exceed the objective by turning in a high-quality report early and also creating a presentation to gain buy-in from key stakeholders regarding the recommended solutions. (Criterion 14)
- Acronyms are spelled out (computer security system). (Criterion 16)
- The objective is not very flexible. If Lindsey is no longer responsible for reviewing the computer security system, this objective will no longer apply to her. (Criterion 4) The objective is still good if the supervisor is certain that her assignment to evaluate the CSS training will not change. A more generic version of the objective may specify standards she should meet when evaluating any training program throughout the fiscal year.

EXAMPLE 3:

Employee Information: Patrick is a program analyst at the Senior Work Level.

Performance Objective:

In support of the Business Excellence Campaign #6, Goal 1, Objective 1.1, serve as team leader for the Travel Team. Ensure that a 100% quality review is performed on all travel vouchers prior to being forwarded for payment. Analyze and report on performance metrics monthly. Provide required metric data for travel within 5 business days after the close of the month.

Link to Higher-level Goals:

Organizational Goal: The Business Excellence Campaign will modernize the organization's business practices, align infrastructure capabilities, and improve strategic workforce management so that the organization can better achieve its mission.

Does this performance objective meet the criteria on the checklist?

- The objective clearly links to an organizational goal. (Criterion 1)
- The objective focuses on the end result of the work activity, and the result is observable or verifiable. (Criteria 8 & 9)
- The objective provides a measure of timeliness ("within 5 business days") and provides a type of quality measurement. (Criterion 10)
- However, the quality standard is not specific and also creates a pass/fail situation for Patrick, so he has no way to exceed Successful. (Criterion 14) What constitutes a "100% quality review" needs to be specified. If a person needs to use a checklist in reviewing a travel voucher, it may be acceptable to require that all pieces of the voucher (100%) are reviewed. The objective also states that "all" vouchers must have this 100% review. Better wording might be: "Ensure that no more than 5% of the spot-checked vouchers contain more than two errors."
- The objective does not specify the period of performance. Simply adding, "over the next 12 months serve as team leader..." would correct this (Criterion 11).
- Because Patrick is in a team leader role, it may be useful to specify how he should go about ensuring that the quality review is performed by his team members (e.g., develop a system for monitoring the review process).

EXAMPLE 4:

Employee Information: Jose is in an Entry/Developmental position and has a very dynamic job in which it is hard to anticipate the projects he will work on over the next year.

Performance Objective:

For every project to which you are assigned over the next fiscal year, provide high quality deliverables in the timeframe specified at the beginning of the project. Each deliverable must be produced according to applicable guidelines and procedures and may contain only minimal errors, as determined by supervisor review. As part of this objective you must also develop a feasible draft personal work plan for each project that shows how you will accomplish the deliverables on time. This draft must be submitted to your supervisor within one week of receiving the project. You may work with your supervisor to finalize this plan.

Link to Higher-level Goals:

Work Unit, Goal #2: Provide quality and timely customer service to clients within the agency.

Does this performance objective meet the criteria on the checklist?

- The objective clearly links to a goal of the work unit. (Criterion 2)
- The objective is flexible. It is general enough that the individual can receive different types of work (different projects) and still apply. (Criterion 4)
- The objective appears to be within the employee's control, given his resources. (Criterion 5)
- The objective is at the appropriate work level (Entry/Developmental). It specifies that a supervisor may provide guidance in helping Jose prioritize work and develop a plan for accomplishing the objective. (Criterion 6)
- The objective focuses on the end result of the work activity (high quality deliverable), and the result is observable or verifiable (produced according to applicable guidelines). (Criteria 8 & 9)
- The objective provides measures of timeliness (in timeframe specified at the beginning of the project) and quality (minimal errors). (Criterion 10)
- The objective is written in a way that allows the individual to exceed it. For example, Jose may independently develop personal work plans that do not need any revisions from the supervisor; or deliverables may be of exceptional quality with no errors.

Work Level Descriptions

Use the table below to ensure that the objectives you write are at the appropriate work level. For example, if the employee is at the “Full Performance” level the objective should NOT be written such that the employee is required to use a high degree of individual judgment in applying appropriate guidelines, as this expectation is more in line with a senior work level.

Entry/ Developmental	Full Performance	Senior	Expert
Objectives for All Employees			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Objectives are accomplished with detailed instruction or supervision ▪ The employee is expected to use established guidelines and procedures to accomplish objectives ▪ Objectives relate to routine assignments and situations of limited scope 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Objectives are accomplished independently with minimal day-to-day instruction or supervision ▪ The employee is expected to apply general guidance to accomplish objectives ▪ The employee is expected to prioritize own work to accomplish the objective ▪ Objectives relate to semi-routine assignments and situations of moderate complexity and scope ▪ Achieving objectives may involve coordinating and working with others outside of own work unit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The employee is not expected to need guidance to accomplish the objective ▪ The employee is expected to use individual judgment in choosing and applying appropriate guidelines to accomplish objectives ▪ Objectives relate to complex assignments and situations ▪ The employee is expected to independently handle issues and challenges that arise while working to achieve the objective ▪ Objectives may include providing guidance to others ▪ Objectives may involve coordinating work of different individuals or teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The employee is not expected to need guidance to accomplish the objective ▪ Objectives relate to highly complex assignments and situations ▪ Objectives may involve working with others across the IC or external to the organization ▪ Objectives may involve coordination of multiple employees, teams, or task forces ▪ Objectives may involve providing guidance to others ▪ Objectives may focus on outcomes that affect other organizations in addition to one’s own
Objectives for Supervisors			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Achieving objectives may require directing and coordinating work within one’s specific unit ▪ Objectives may require working with other supervisors across the Agency or organization ▪ Objectives may focus on outcomes that affect one’s immediate work unit ▪ Objectives may relate to managing work unit resources ▪ Objectives may relate to ensuring technical quality and timeliness of the unit’s work 		
Objectives for Managers			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ N/A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Objectives may be directly related to one of the organization’s primary missions/ objectives ▪ Objectives may require working with high-ranking officials across the government or external organizations ▪ Objectives may focus on outcomes that affect multiple work units or organizations ▪ Objectives may relate to managing resources across the organization 		

Performance Objective Examples: Applying Work Level Descriptions

EXAMPLE 1:

Employee Information: Merrick is a Collector who has been working at the Full Performance level for two years. The position description for his job describes recommending improvements to collection strategies as an important work activity.

Performance Objective:

Identify one aspect of a current collection strategy that needs improvement. Independently research the issue and coordinate with collectors from other agencies to brainstorm and gather relevant information. Draft a report with at least two thoroughly detailed and realistic options for changes to the strategy that may mitigate the current problem. The recommendations must meet relevant laws and regulations. The report should have minimal editing errors, conform to the organizational format, and be submitted to your supervisor by 30 June.

Is this performance objective written at the appropriate Work Level?

Examine the *Work Level Benchmarks* table and see if any wording in the performance objective indicates a responsibility that is higher or lower than that which is specified in the Full Performance column.

Key wording related to work level:

"Independently research the issue and coordinate with collectors from other agencies to brainstorm and gather relevant information."

"Independently... coordinate with collectors from other agencies" – Employees at the Full Performance level should not be required to coordinate with collectors from other agencies independently. They may be expected to perform certain aspects of their job independently, but coordinating across agencies is an example situation where at least minimal guidance would be expected.

"...incorporating ideas and information from collectors in other work units..." – Employees at the Full Performance level are expected to work with and coordinate with employees in other work units. Incorporating input from other collectors is an appropriate expectation. (It would be inappropriate to expect, for example, that the employee would be in charge of coordinating the work of several people from different work units working to resolve the issue.)

Conclusion: The activity of coordinating with collectors across agencies should be removed from the objective, or the word "independently" needs to be replaced with "with minimal guidance" for the objective to be written at the appropriate work level.

EXAMPLE 2:

Employee Information: Sarah is a manager at the Expert work level. She has extensive experience and contacts throughout the IC.

Performance Objective:

Lead a task force of employees from different IC organizations (who you identify and from whom you gain cooperation). The goal of the task force is to do "X" (a substantial task related to higher-level goals). Write a final report, appropriately incorporating contributions from members of the task force which outlines the activities of the task force and provides creative and concrete recommendations that will be implemented by the organizations involved. Submit the report to each of the directors at the five organizations by 31 January.

Is this performance objective written at the appropriate Work Level?

Examine the *Work Level Benchmarks* table and see if any wording in the performance objective indicates a responsibility that is higher or lower than that which is specified in the *Expert* and *Manager* columns.

Key wording related to work level:

"Lead a task force..." – Employees at the Expert work level may be required to coordinate and lead task forces that involve individuals from different IC organizations.

"The goal of the task force..." – The specified goal should be related to higher-level goals (e.g., organizational goals or IC-wide strategic goals). Managers are expected to work on issues directly related to primary organizational missions and objectives.

An example topic is the issue of collaboration and communication across IC organizations. This is a very complicated and ambiguous issue. Employees at the Expert level are expected to deal with issues of this magnitude.

Write a final report... which provides creative and concrete recommendations that will be implemented by the organizations involved. – This indicates that the findings of this task force and the recommendations provided will affect many work units and organizations. Managers are expected to work on issues that may impact multiple units or organizations.

Conclusion: The objective is written at the appropriate work level for an employee who is both an Expert and a Manager.

Accomplishments

Performance objectives are established at the start of the rating period, and you should document your progress toward meeting those objectives throughout the year. This documentation need not be formal or cumbersome. However, keeping a regular log of major milestones, obstacles encountered and overcome, and significant achievements can help greatly when it comes time to write your accomplishments at the end of the rating cycle. Accomplishments provide documentation of the extent to which you met or exceeded your performance objectives. This documentation then helps your supervisor rate your performance against those objectives accurately and fairly.

Tips on Writing Accomplishments⁵

You are responsible for providing written descriptions of your accomplishments related to your performance objectives at the end of the evaluation period. Written accomplishments form a foundation from which your raters evaluate your performance on your objectives. Use the following guidelines to help you write your accomplishments:

- *Address Each Performance Objective Individually.* For each accomplishment you write, connect it to one specific performance objective by restating your understanding of the relevant performance objective.
- *Write in the Past Tense, Using the Action, Situation, Result Format.* Provide an accurate description of your achievement by including:
 - Action – What specifically did you do?
 - Situation – Describe the conditions under which you achieved your performance objective. Did you face any specific challenges?
 - Result – It enabled what? What was the outcome or end-product?
 - Describe the impact of your outcome.
 - Did you save time or money?
 - Did the customer provide positive feedback?
- *Describe Why Your Accomplishment Matters.* Highlight why your accomplishment matters to your organization. Specify how your work supported higher-level goals within the work unit and/or organizational-level goals.

Evaluating Accomplishments

The table in the next section provides the criteria for supervisors to apply when evaluating an employee's accomplishments relative to his/her performance objectives. You can also use these guidelines when writing your objectives, to ensure that your supervisor can rate each objective accurately at the end of the evaluation period.

Directions for Making Ratings: Read the criteria for receiving a Successful rating. If the employee met all of the criteria for a Successful rating, then consider whether the employee met the additional criteria for an Excellent rating (4) or an Outstanding rating (5). If the employee did not meet all of the criteria for a Successful rating, then determine if the employee met most of the criteria and should receive a Minimally Successful rating (2), or met none to very little of the criteria and should receive an Unacceptable rating (1).

⁵ Information taken from the ODNI *Performance Management Reference Guide* and DCIPS *iSuccess* online training.

Accomplishment Evaluation Criteria				
Unacceptable (1)	Minimally Successful (2)	Successful (3)	Excellent (4)	Outstanding (5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The employee did not meet the expectations of the objective even though circumstances allowed for its achievement. <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No significant barriers or problems arose, yet the objective was still not accomplished. Despite the employee receiving extra guidance, the objective was not met. There were no circumstances beyond the employee's control that prevented him or her from achieving the objective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The employee partially met the expectations of the objective; the result fell short of meeting the standards for quality, quantity, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness associated with the objective. <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The employee's work required significant revisions. The employee required additional guidance to meet the objective, beyond what would normally be expected for his/her level. The result was not as good as it could have been, given available resources, and therefore only had a minor impact on work unit, organizational, or IC-related goals. Others (e.g., peers, customers, stakeholders, etc.) acknowledged that the results did not fully meet their expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The employee fully met the expectations of the objective; the result met the standards for quality, quantity, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness associated with the objective (e.g., met designated budget and/or timeframe) and was achieved with the appropriate level of guidance. <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The employee's work required only minimal revisions. The result had a clear, positive impact on organizational or IC-related goals. Others (e.g., peers, customers, stakeholders, etc.) acknowledged that the results met their expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The employee exceeded expectations of the objective; the results surpassed the standards for quality and quantity, and the timeframe associated with the objective (e.g., saved time or money). <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The employee's work required very few minor revisions or changes (fewer than expected). The objective was exceeded with less guidance and support than would ordinarily be expected for the employee's level. The result had a direct and significant positive impact on achieving work unit, organizational, and/or IC-related goals. The result reflected outstanding judgment in identifying procedures to accomplish the objective. Others (e.g., peers, customers, stakeholders, etc.) acknowledged that the results exceeded their expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The employee greatly exceeded expectations of the objective; the result was exceptional and significantly surpassed the standards for quality, quantity, and timeframe associated with the objective (e.g., saved significant time or money) <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The employee's work was thorough, error-free, and served as a role model for others The objective was greatly exceeded with far less guidance and support than would ordinarily be expected for the employee's level. The result had a highly significant impact and played a vital role in achieving critical work unit, organizational, and/or IC-related goals. Others (e.g., peers, customers, stakeholders, etc.) acknowledged that the result far exceeded their expectations.

Examples for Applying the Accomplishment Evaluation Criteria

Example 1: Stacy is a Computer Engineer at the Full Performance work level.

Performance Objective:

With minimal guidance, develop and recommend one feasible alternative process or long-term solution to recurring server-limitation problems by the end of the fiscal year. The recommendations should be unique from other existing solutions and be able to meet projected data storage needs over the next three years. That is, it should enhance the organization's ability to efficiently manage, organize, and store increasing amounts of data. Present recommendations in a briefing following the standard organizational format. Give a draft to your supervisor at least one month in advance of the due date and incorporate supervisor's feedback into the final briefing by the end of the fiscal year.

Link to Higher-level Goals:

Organization Strategic Plan, Goal 5: Forecast and meet technological needs of the mission.

Work Unit, Goal 4: Establish data storage capabilities that meet organizational demands and technology requirements.

What rating is appropriate given the performance objective and the result that was achieved?

Accomplishment: Stacy received minimal guidance in her analysis of the problem and developed a briefing that fit the standard organizational format and required only minor editing revisions. A draft of the briefing was provided to her supervisor one month in advance of the end of the fiscal year and the briefing was delivered two weeks before the end of the fiscal year. Participants in the briefing commented on its usefulness.

3

A Successful (3) rating for performance on this objective is appropriate.

Why?

- The result met the quality standards set for this objective.
- The objective was accomplished in the designated timeframe.
- The objective was achieved with minimal guidance, which is appropriate for the Full Performance level.
- Positive feedback was received about the product.

Accomplishment: Stacy independently analyzed the problem and developed a briefing that required only minor revisions to meet the standard organizational format. She gave a draft of the briefing to her supervisor two months in advance of the end of the fiscal year. She also sent the briefing to a mentor for extra feedback. The briefing was delivered two weeks before the end of the fiscal year, and participants in the briefing provided positive comments about the high degree of innovation represented in her solution.

4

An Excellent (4) rating for performance on this objective is appropriate.

Why?

- The result met and exceeded the quality standards for this objective. Stacy

demonstrated innovative thinking in her analysis and solution for the problem.

- The objective was accomplished ahead of the designated timeframe because Stacy took into account situational factors (she knew the supervisor had received extra work and would need more time to review it) that might create delays. Importantly, the product was very well done despite the fact that it was turned in early.

Accomplishment: Stacy independently analyzed the problem and developed a briefing that required no revisions to meet the standard organizational format. While conducting her analysis, she coordinated with employees at other agencies to determine if they had come up with solutions to similar problems. She went through appropriate channels and set up e-mail communications with employees in similar positions, so they could brainstorm and comment on ideas. The result of this was a briefing that provided an innovative solution and clearly articulated the specific pros and cons of implementing the proposed solution. In addition, other agencies benefited from the exchange of ideas. A draft of the briefing was provided to her supervisor two months in advance of the end of the fiscal year. The briefing was delivered two weeks prior to the end of the fiscal year, and participants in the briefing provided very positive comments about the high degree of innovation represented in the solution.

5

An Outstanding (5) rating for performance on this objective is appropriate.

Why?

- The result far exceeded the quality standards set for this objective.
- The objective was accomplished ahead of the designated timeframe but was still very well done.
- Stacy achieved the objective independently, which exceeds expectations for the Full Performance level.
- Stacy put forth extra effort and demonstrated an ability to coordinate and integrate many resources in order to produce a high-quality, innovative product.
- Not only did the result benefit her organization, it also had a positive impact on other organizations facing similar issues.

Accomplishment: Stacy required extensive guidance in her analysis of the problem and developed a briefing that required substantial revisions to meet quality standards. A draft of the briefing was provided to her supervisor one month in advance of the end of the fiscal year, but the briefing required significant revisions and was consequently delivered a few weeks after the end of the fiscal year.

2

A Minimally Successful (2) rating for performance on this objective is appropriate.

Why?

- The result did not fully meet the quality standards set for this objective.
- Part of the designated timeframe was met.

Example 2: John is a CI Analyst at the Entry/Developmental Performance work level.

Performance Objective:

With guidance, complete weekly intelligence reports that compile all relevant target information gathered from multiple sources into the standard format for dissemination. Reports should meet the analytic standards described in Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 203, have minimal errors, and be delivered (at least 90% of the time) by 1500 on each Friday throughout the performance rating period.

Link to Higher-level Goals:

Organizational Goal: Protect the U.S. from terrorist activities.

What rating is appropriate given the performance objective and the result that was achieved?

Accomplishment: John received some guidance in completing his reports. In his supervisor's opinion, the reports were free from bias, clarified the quality of the underlying sources, and expressed caveats or uncertainties where appropriate. Most of the reports had minimal to no errors in terms of formatting and editing. The total number of reports turned in on time throughout the rating period equaled 92%. He exhibited a strong dedication to producing a quality product by meeting the analytic standards, and this helped the department achieve its goals.

3

A Successful (3) rating for performance on this objective is appropriate.

Why?

- The result met the quality standards set for this objective.
- The objective was accomplished in the designated timeframe.
- The objective was achieved with the appropriate level of guidance for the Entry/Developmental Performance level.
- John put forth the effort required to make sure he consistently fulfilled her responsibilities with respect to this objective, which had a positive impact on department goals.

Accomplishment: John required minimal guidance in completing his reports. In his supervisor's opinion, the reports consistently met the analytic standards and went beyond what is typically expected in terms of incorporating alternative analyses and identifying caveats to certain judgments. Most of the reports had minimal to no errors in terms of formatting and editing. The total number of reports turned in on time throughout the rating period equaled 98%. Three months into the performance rating period a change was made to the reporting procedures. John spent extra time independently reviewing and learning about the new requirements. His reports following the change in procedure were a much higher quality than typically seen at this level. He exhibited a strong dedication to producing a quality product, and this helped the department achieve its goals.

4

An Excellent (4) rating for performance on this objective would be appropriate.

Why?

- The result met and exceeded the quality standards set for this objective.
- Reports were submitted in the designated timeframe more often than the required 90% of the time.
- The objective was achieved with less guidance than what is expected for the Entry/Developmental Performance level.
- John coped with a change to the requirements by putting forth extra effort to make sure his product was of the highest quality. The result was a product that was higher quality than those produced by his peers.

Accomplishment: John independently applied correct reporting procedures when writing his reports. In his supervisor's opinion, he consistently demonstrated exceptional insight and logic in his assessments, providing key information relevant to U.S. national security. All of his reports had minimal to no errors in terms of formatting and editing. The total number of reports turned in on time throughout the rating period equaled 98%. Three months into the performance rating period a change was made to the reporting procedures. John spent extra time independently reviewing and learning about the new requirements. He then created a set of tips and a checklist to ensure the new reporting requirements were met. John shared this with his colleagues. The result was a significant increase in the quality of reports throughout the department, which greatly contributed to the department goals and the efficiency of the work unit.

5

An Outstanding (5) rating for performance on this objective is appropriate.

Why?

- The result greatly exceeded the quality standards set for this objective.
- Reports were submitted in the designated timeframe more often than the required 90% of the time.
- The objective was achieved with less guidance than what is expected for the Entry/Developmental Performance level.
- John coped with a change to the requirements and demonstrated creativity and commitment to the organization by independently creating tools that would ensure high quality, efficient reporting.

Accomplishment: John required extensive direct supervision in completing his reports; he did not always apply the reporting guidelines appropriately and consistently fell short of meeting a few of the analytic standards. A significant number of reports required substantial revisions to clarify certain judgments and take care of formatting and editing errors. Reminders to turn in reports were required, and the total number of reports turned in on time throughout the rating period equaled 83%. John did put forth effort to improve his performance on the reports throughout the performance rating period.

2

A Minimally Successful (2) rating for performance on this objective is appropriate

Why?

- The result did not fully meet the quality standards for this objective.
- John fell short of turning in 90% of the reports on time.
- A greater degree of supervision was required to complete his reports.

Common Challenges and Potential Solutions

Writing Objectives for a Job that Changes

Challenge: The tasks and responsibilities that will occur over a year are difficult to predict for some jobs. How do I write objectives that will apply throughout the year, so I don't have to keep changing the objectives as the situation changes?

Potential Solutions:

- Set at least one relatively short-term objective that you know will be completed within the first few months of the year.
- Identify the types of activities you perform that are common and important across different projects. Write an objective based on one of these activities, and include a type of measurement that may apply across situations (e.g., providing a quality standard if you can't anticipate a timeframe).
 - EXAMPLE: If the job entails responding to customer requests for service, you may not know how many requests will be received and what the nature of these requests will be. (This is a recurring task.) However, you can set an objective to respond to requests within 24 hours on average with a 90% positive customer feedback rate. Or, you may wish to set an objective to evaluate the work flow process for receiving and responding to customer calls with the objective of speeding up response times.
 - EXAMPLE: For a procurement specialist – At the start of the year, it is not known how many or what type of procurements will be made. However, an objective can still be written to set expectations for how these procurements will be handled. For example: "For the next year, you will be responsible for procuring materials for the X organization. Purchasing contracts and licensing agreements will be established and renewed with financial terms and conditions that are favorable to the government and in accordance with applicable guidelines, as determined by supervisor reviews. The contracts and agreements will be completed in the timeframe you and your supervisor agree upon at the beginning of the task."

To meet this objective, the employee must execute these activities within established guidelines. Exceeding this objective may be accomplished by exceeding quality or timeliness guidelines, establishing contracts with more advantageous terms than previous contracts, and/or developing improved methods for record keeping and processing.
- If the type of measurement required is likely to vary depending on the situation: 1) write the objective with a generic type of measurement and specify that the details will be agreed upon by the employee and supervisor at the beginning of the assignment, or 2) write a generic type of measurement that the supervisor agrees will apply across situations.
 - Example: You can't anticipate the timeline that will be required or you don't know the exact date.

- "X" will be completed in the timeframe agreed upon by the employee and supervisor at the beginning of the assignment.
- "X" will be completed within 3 weeks of receiving each request.
- EXAMPLE: You don't know which rules and regulations will apply to a future assignment.
 - The product will be produced in accordance with relevant rules and regulations as determined by the employee and supervisor at the beginning of the assignment.
 - The product will be produced in accordance with Intelligence Community Directive (ICD) 203: Analytic Standards. (This applies to all analytic products and is a directive that would apply across assignments for analysts.)
- EXAMPLE: You don't know the exact number of products the employee will be required to produce.
 - 90% of the products will require no more than one revision.
 - Each product should be completed within three days of receiving the request.
 - Each product should be completed in accordance with customer requirements and within the agreed upon timeframe.

Writing Objectives for Long-term Goals

Challenge: There are several important long-term goals that will not be achieved by the end of the evaluation period. How do I write objectives for something that won't be completed in this evaluation period?

Potential Solution: Break the long-term goal into smaller chunks with specific milestones that can be achieved during the evaluation period. Write objectives for these milestones.

- EXAMPLE: An employee in the EEOD office is responsible for managing a two year study related to EEOD trends in the organization. This is a significant responsibility and should be reflected in the employee's performance objectives, but the evaluation period is only one year. A potential solution is to look at the timeline for the study and identify one or more activities that will be completed during the one year period of performance.
 - For example, the employee may need to publicize the purpose of the study and gain buy-in from stakeholders throughout the organization as an initial step. A performance objective for this activity may be written as follows: "With minimal guidance, conduct a communication campaign and obtain confirmation from 80% of the work unit leaders in the organization that they will complete the required surveys throughout the two year project. Complete this step by the end of the second quarter."
 - The employee could submit regular status reports on the study or give a status briefing to stakeholders within the evaluation period. A performance

objective for this example may be written as follows: "On a monthly basis throughout the rating period, submit a status report to stakeholders that addresses accomplishments, next steps, and any issues/risks to the study or timelines."

Writing Objectives for Activities Not Easily Measured

Challenge: The job is not easily quantifiable. How do I write objectives that are specific and measurable?

Potential Solutions:

- Try to identify at least one type of measurement that can be used (quality, quantity, cost-effectiveness, timeliness).
- Subjective ratings can be used to some degree. That is, quality can be assessed by judgments from knowledgeable individuals such as supervisors, peers, and/or customers.
 - EXAMPLE: In any given year an analyst may produce 10 reports that are of minor importance or one report that is groundbreaking. The number of reports is not important; however, the quality of the reports is essential. Therefore, the objective might entail the following: "For X issue, analyze intelligence that is received, extract relevant conclusions, and produce finished intelligence products as appropriate to the topic that meet the Analytic Standards for Tradecraft defined in ICD 203. Submitted draft intelligence products should require no more than a minimal amount of revision." In this case, the measure is quality and will be assessed by the supervisor. The criteria against which the quality will be judged are outlined in the ICD.

Challenge: If an objective is written at the Successful level, how do I know what is required to exceed expectations?

Potential Solutions: (Advice for Supervisors/Managers)

- Review the performance objective evaluation standards to identify benchmarks that may fit your particular objective.
 - When writing the objective, think about what you would like to see from the individual to truly exceed the objective. If you can't think of anything concrete, you need to rethink the objective. However, be careful of specifying exactly what would constitute a rating of Excellent or Outstanding (e.g., I expect the report to be finished in 6 months, but to really exceed, you should aim to finish it in 5), as employees may be focused just on reaching these benchmarks while losing sight of other important aspects of the goal (e.g., the report is done in 5 months, but the quality is merely adequate and not outstanding).
 - EXAMPLE: For a policy specialist, an objective might read "Draft policy guidance for X topic and coordinate this draft through the appropriate channels to obtain concurrence from all relevant parties. Submit completed policy guidance for final signature by the appropriate signature authority by the end of the fiscal year." This objective may meet the SMART guidelines, but

it is not an effective objective because the way it is written makes it essentially a pass/fail objective.

An alternative way to write this objective is as follows: "Draft policy guidance for X topic that clearly outlines the procedures for handling routine and non-routine challenges that arise in relation to this topic. Submit a draft of the guidance by X date, ensuring that all relevant parties have expressed concurrence and disagreements have been resolved prior to submission. Submit completed policy guidance for final signature by the appropriate signature authority by the end of the fiscal year." The revised objective specifies additional quality guidance and allows many opportunities to exceed, such as requiring less revision than expected for the draft submitted to the supervisor, a greater attentiveness to stakeholder needs, a proactive approach to handling and mediating disagreements, etc.

Writing Objectives at the Appropriate Level of Difficulty

Challenge: How do I write an objective that is challenging enough to be credible, but not too difficult to obtain?

Potential Solutions: (Advice for Supervisors/Managers)

- Refer to the Work Level Descriptions provided in this guidebook (p. 18) and ensure the objective is anchored at the appropriate work level. For example, for an entry/developmental level employee, you can add qualifiers to the objective to make it clear that the employee is expected to accomplish the objective with guidance. In contrast, a suitable objective for a senior level employee should entail a high degree of independent judgment. For an expert level employee, the objective should involve highly complex work, coordination across the IC, and/or producing results with far-reaching impact.
- Meet with your colleagues to discuss what is an appropriate level of difficulty for employees in similar types of jobs and within certain pay and band levels.
- Where possible, try to set common objectives for individuals who are essentially doing the same work.

Writing Clear Objectives

Challenge: How can you write an objective that is specific to an individual job, but understandable to an external audience (e.g., the pay pool)?

Potential Solutions:

- Use position descriptions or other resources as a basis for writing the objective. This will provide language that may be easier for an external audience to understand.
- Provide detail in the objective regarding the context of the work so an external audience has background information to help their understanding.
- Avoid the use of jargon or acronyms, no matter how common you may think they are.
 - EXAMPLE of Too Much Jargon (Taken from an actual objective): "Develop and put in place a sound strategy to ensure BUS codes are accurately IDed for

DoD/DON to determine which orgs/entities are ripe for spiraling into JPMS. By X date, review empl info to ID questionable BUS codes and forward findings to the appropriate HRO for resolution. By X date, review BUS Code info to ID those areas where a question concerning representation exists and make recommendations to those HROs & activities. By X date, IDed petitions addressing representation should be filed. Perform all BUS code work on or before the specified deadlines with no substantive errors in accurate identification as determined by supervisory review."

- At a minimum the acronyms and abbreviations should be spelled out and contextual information should be provided, where appropriate.

Writing Objectives that Relate to Higher-level Goals/Objectives

Challenge: It is not clear how this job links to higher level goals (e.g., job is very entry level, job is very routine, and/or job is a support function that does not obviously relate to work unit goals). How do I show that the performance objective supports the organization's goals?

Potential Solutions:

- Every job contributes to the mission—either directly or indirectly. Think about how this job may support the work of others who are directly involved in supporting the mission and how the work of those individuals might be more difficult if this employee's work did not get done.
 - EXAMPLE: Janitorial staff are important to keeping a clean and safe workplace. Without them, other staff members would be distracted from their work by unsanitary or even dangerous conditions. Therefore, an appropriate objective for janitorial staff might include keeping assigned work spaces clean and maintained within acceptable quality standards, responding to customer needs within a given timeframe, and developing new procedures to improve effectiveness or efficiency.
 - EXAMPLE: For an Administrative Support Person, an objective might read "For the next year, provide administrative support for the X unit. Your role is to ensure that tasks (e.g., scheduling appointments, coordinating calendars, etc.) are carried in a manner that results in smooth and efficient unit operations and high-quality, timely support services so that unit members are able to focus their energy on supporting the organization's mission."

Although this objective indirectly rather than directly supports the mission, it serves an important function in that its successful completion will allow other members of the unit to spend more of their time on accomplishing the organization's primary mission. Moreover, this objective leaves room for exceeding it if the support person provides an exceptionally high level of responsiveness and support.

Challenge: My organization or work unit has ambiguous objectives or goals. How do I link my objectives to higher-level goals if they are not clear?

Potential Solutions:

- Work with your colleagues to come up with a common understanding of the work unit's or organization's goals and use this common understanding to develop more specific expectations for individuals. Verify your understanding with senior leaders to ensure you are on the right track.
- Use a bottom-up rather than top-down strategy to cascading goals. That is, develop meaningful objectives for your unit and then seek to link those objectives to higher level goals.
- Link the objectives to higher level goals if immediate unit goals are not clear.

Using Mandated, but Poorly Written Objectives

Challenge: My organization or work unit has a common objective for everyone that does not meet SMART+ guidelines. How do I prove at the end of the year that I met the objective?

Potential Solutions:

- Meet with your supervisor to discuss how the common objective applies to your role specifically. For example, if the common unit objective is to conduct timely and relevant intelligence analysis, translate that broad objective into specific expectations for your role.
 - EXAMPLE: Specific expectations for a broad objective to “conduct timely and relevant intelligence analysis” might include the following:

“Ensure analysis includes information from multiple sources, identifies underlying assumptions, distinguishes between assumptions and facts, and identifies the impact of gaps and uncertainties to the final conclusions.”
- Try and work with the leadership that established the common objective to see if they are amenable to either changing the objective or to allowing modification of the objective to fit individual employees.