

Criteria for Written Objectives

Definitions

- **Objective:** a specific description of a result to be achieved by a specific time.
- **Performance standard:** A statement of the conditions that will exist when a job responsibility is being performed satisfactorily.

Criteria

- **Written** -- Objectives/standards should be written so that they can be referred to later without distortion due to memory.
- **Specific** -- Objectives/standards should be specific as to the results they describe.
- **Measurable** -- Objectives/standards that cannot be measured in some way will be useless because it will never be possible to tell if they were achieved.
- **Time related** -- The point in time by which an objective/standard should be reached is a necessary ingredient for effectiveness. Undated objectives/standards (unless related to the maintenance of ongoing results) will generally not cause the desired performance to happen.
- **Attainable** -- Objectives/standards must be obtainable by the employee or they will cease to act as motivators. Objectives set unrealistically high may result in a situation where performance is improved over the year but the objectives are not met and the individual is rated low even though performance was much improved.
- **Flexible** -- Objectives/standards should not be considered as cast in concrete. They are very much related to the conditions existing when they are set. If these conditions change significantly, the objectives/standards also should be modified.
- **Challenging** -- Objectives/standards should be designed to challenge the employee enough so that growth is encouraged. The manager and the employee together can define the amount of challenge that will be productive.
- **Vertically/horizontally compatible** -- Care should be taken to link objectives/standards vertically to those of the manager and the next highest level. They should also be examined for proper coordination with people in other departments with whom the staff member must work to achieve her or his own objectives/standards.
- **Consistent with authority** -- The employee's objectives/standards should be consistent with her or his authority to attain them. It does no good to set objectives/standards for an individual if that person does not have the authority to control the process by which they can be achieved.

Source: American Management Association, Performance Planning and Appraisal Guide