

**Library of Congress  
Workforce Performance Management Program**

**Writing Effective Performance Requirements**

Performance standards describe “how many times, how well, in what time, or in what manner a duty must be performed to be considered satisfactory.” (CBA AFSCME Local 2910, Article 15. Section 2.A) Standards may also state the outcomes expected as a result of performing assigned major tasks.

[The term “standard” is used in this context to be synonymous with “requirements” and “expectations” as used in Library and bargaining unit documents governing the workforce performance management program.]

The Library may have an obligation to bargain the implementation of the new or revised performance requirements with the union. Contact the Labor-Management Relations Team at (202) 707-2356 before communicating new or revised requirements to bargaining unit employees.

Before you begin to develop requirements, you will need:

1. The current position description
2. A copy of the LC strategic plan 2008-2013 goals
3. A copy of the departmental mission and goals
4. Your (manager/supervisor) priorities, deliverables, and expectations for outcomes
5. A job status-appropriate performance plan format

Requirements are written for the position rather than for a person. Requirements should be reasonable and appropriate no matter who is performing the job. Requirements are developed for specific duties and tasks. It is not necessary to develop a requirement for each task in a job. Focus on the most important duties.

Describe the behaviors and results that would constitute meeting the minimal acceptable performance for a task or function. This level of performance will be rated as *successful/satisfactory*. You may also describe behavior and performance that would exceed or fall below expectations.

Requirements should be written in clear language and describe specific behavior and actions required. Use specific terms that are measurable, observable, or verifiable. Examples include: timeliness (deadlines and dates), cost (budget limits), quality (subjective or objective measures of satisfaction), quantity (how many), customer satisfaction, and independent initiative demonstrated. Remember that perfection is rarely a reasonable standard, even for outstanding performance. Avoid “absolute” measurements, such as “always” or “never.” Specify acceptable margins for error.

If you supervise a supervisor or manager, be sure to refer to LCR 2017-2.2, Performance Appraisal Plan for Managers and Supervisors, GS-15 and Below, Section 5.A.1-2 to include the appropriate critical elements against which performance will be measured. “Critical elements are those components of a manager’s or supervisor’s position which

contribute significantly toward accomplishment of the Library’s mission, goals, and objectives and to those of the immediate supervisor.”

Performance requirements may be written at different levels of specificity. The more specific you can be, the lower the risk of misunderstanding or challenge to performance ratings. See examples below:

<b>LEVEL of SPECIFICITY</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Simple description of general expectation.</b>  <u>Example:</u> Task Description: Assemble widgets. Standard: Put widgets into the correct slots.  <u>Example:</u> Task Description: Write annual reports. Standard: Annual reports will be submitted by agreed upon date.
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Simple description of specific expectations.</b>  <u>Example:</u> Task Description: Assemble widgets Standard: Put widget A into slot B, completing 5 correct placements per minute.  <u>Example:</u> Task Description: Write annual reports. Standard: Annual reports will be submitted to the Administrative Officer 5 working days before January 15.
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Description of specific expectations and success indicators.</b>  <u>Example:</u> Task Description: Assemble widgets. Standard: Put widget A into slot B, completing 5 correct placements per minute for 95 widgets out of 100.  <u>Example:</u> Task Description: Write annual reports. Standard: Annual reports will be produced following the departmental format and submitted to the Administrative Officer 5 working days before January 15.
<b>Level 4</b>	<b>Description of specific expectations, success indicators, and conditions, if any.</b>  <u>Example:</u> Task Description: Assemble widgets. Standard: Put widget A into slot B, completing 5 correct placements per minute for 95 widgets out of 100, assuming the equipment is in working order.

Example:

Task Description: Write annual reports.

Standard: Annual reports will be produced following the departmental format and submitted to the Administrative Officer 5 working days before January 15, unless otherwise directed by Department Head.

## **Guidelines for Performance Requirements**

Keep in mind the following guidelines when writing performance requirements:

- Performance requirements should be related to the employee's assigned work and job requirements.
- Unit reporting and/or data gathering systems should be adequate to measure and report any quantitative data you list.
- Quantifiable measures may not apply to all functions. Describe in clear and specific terms the characteristics of performance *quality* that are verifiable and that would meet or exceed expectations.
- Accomplishment of organizational objectives should be included where appropriate, such as cost-control, improved efficiency, productivity, project completion, process redesign, or customer service.

## **Employee Involvement in Establishing Requirements**

The manager should check with HRS/WFM/Labor Management Relations for advice on appropriate ways to solicit input from bargaining unit staff.

When performance requirements are developed in collaboration with the employee for whom the plan is being developed, it is more likely the plan will:

- Be appropriate to the requirements of the job
- Reflect the realities of the work content and conditions
- Be understood by the employee and manager
- Be accepted by the employee and manager

Better understanding leads to better performance.

In the collaborative process of developing requirements for a task or function, include all of those employees whose work will be evaluated according to those requirements. If the task or function is unique to one position, then include the employee in that position in the development process. In the interest of fairness and consistency, consider collaborating with other units in your department if employees reporting to different managers perform the same tasks or functions.

Before you meet, explain to everyone involved exactly what performance requirements are, why they are important, and how they will be used. Confirm that the employees understand the process and solicit their comments and questions. Tell them that you would like to work together to develop requirements for their positions and that their recommendations and concerns will

be considered seriously. Also explain that it is your responsibility to make the final determination about the appropriateness of the requirements. If the employees are in a bargaining unit, state that the Library will meet any bargaining obligations regarding implementation of the requirements.

Mutual *agreement* with the employee about requirements is preferable, but not always possible. Mutual *understanding* and *recognition* of the requirements is necessary.

## Checking Your Requirements

After you have written your performance requirements, check them against the following questions:

1. **Are the requirements realistic?** Requirements should be attainable and consistent with what is necessary to get the job done. Requirements for performance that meets expectations represent the minimum acceptable level of performance for all employees in that position.
2. **Are the requirements specific?** Requirements should tell an employee exactly which specific actions and results he or she is expected to accomplish.
3. **Are the requirements based on measurable data, observation, or verifiable information?** Performance can be measured in terms of timeliness, cost, quality and quantity.
4. **Are the requirements consistent with organizational goals?** Requirements link individual (and team) performance to organizational goals and should be consistent with these goals. Accomplishment of the Library's and units' missions depends on this strategic connection.
5. **Are the requirements challenging?** Requirements may describe levels of performance that exceeds expectations. Recognizing performance that is above expectations or outstanding is crucial to motivating employees.
6. **Are the requirements clear and understandable?** The employees whose work is to be evaluated on the basis of the requirements should understand them. Requirements should use the language of the job.
7. **Are the requirements dynamic?** As organizational goals, technologies, operations or experiences change, requirements should evolve. For bargaining unit positions, requirements should be reevaluated and revised as needed, consistent with union bargaining obligations.

When performance requirements are in place, both you and your employees will know what the expectations are for the performance of essential functions and related tasks. This common understanding provides the basis for ongoing feedback and performance reviews between appraisals as well as for the formal performance appraisal process.