

Real World Assignments: Performance Standards Report and Letter of Notification

Suppose the following story appeared in newspapers across the state:

UPI: Radical Changes Approved for Higher Education Funding

After increasing concern with budget shortfalls, the Federal and Tennessee State legislatures today voted to discontinue blanket funding for higher education. In the past, schools have been funded by formulas based on student enrollment, and students have received funding based on financial need. However, studies have shown that large percentages of students drop out of school after only a few terms. The most significant factor contributing to these high drop out rates appears to be student apathy. As a result, huge amounts of taxpayer monies are wasted each year on these students. In a radical move, the legislatures have passed the Stifler Act, which states that only those students who demonstrate their commitment to education

by their efforts may receive any funding for higher education. At the same time, schools will no longer receive funding for the *number* of students enrolled. Instead schools will *only* receive funding for those students who qualify for admission as previously noted. Other students may attend school but must bear the full cost of their education, which in many cases means tuition rates four or five times what are currently being paid.

The Governor today commissioned a group of experts to develop a set of criteria for evaluating student commitment and performance.

You are the experts that the governor has commissioned. Each of you will write a one to two page report in which you identify and describe the characteristics of students who are committed to educational excellence. Then you will write a letter addressed to yourself notifying you of whether you qualify for financial aid.

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS REPORT

Companies with hourly employees working production often establish production or performance standards for their employees. These standards for measuring employee performance are used in setting base salary ranges, determining incentive pay, or deciding disciplinary actions. Companies usually hire outside consulting firms to establish the performance standards. These consultants review and measure employee performance in order to determine what should be reasonable and appropriate levels of performance.

Whenever performance standards are being set, several dangers exist. First standards may be set too high. Remember, a standard is what someone's general behavior should be. It should always be possible to exceed a standard. If a standard is set so high that no one can either reach or exceed the standard, then that standard is not reasonable or appropriate. Second, standards may be set too low. If someone can meet the standard with little or no effort or if it is impossible for anyone to perform below standard, then that standard is not reasonable or appropriate. Third, standards must be measurable. The standard should identify specific behaviors and the means to measure that behavior. For instance, if an attendance standard is set, what is the standard (how many absences or what percentage of absences will be tolerated), how is the standard measured (teacher's gradebook, sign-in roster, some other method?), and is their a probation range?

Your responsibility in this report is to establish *reasonable and appropriate performance standards for students*. These standards should identify the *behaviors* that students should engage in which best help them be successful in their college work. Remember these are *performance* standards, not *achievement* standards.

Grades are achievement standards. Teachers are required to evaluate students based on how students' work measures against clearly defined standards of quality for that work. That is, students are not graded on their *effort*, but on how well the characteristics of the finished product (the assignment) compare to the qualities required for an excellent example of that kind of assignment. This means that some students, because of natural ability or previous experience, may make high grades without much effort while other students may work very hard and still not make good grades.

In this report, you are establishing *performance* standards for deciding whether students will have their education funded by the state. The standards you set should measure how hard students work and *not* the results of that work. In other words, although Johnny failed all his classes, he worked extremely hard and met the standards set for performance. He will be funded even though he did not achieve passing grades. On the other hand, Sally is an A student but puts forth no effort and did not meet the performance standards set. Even though she achieved A grades, she would not receive funding.

Format: Use standard business format, which means the report should be single spaced, but double-spaced between paragraphs. The paper should have one inch margins on all four sides and should be typed on the front side of unlined white typing (or printing) paper.

Language/Grammar/Spelling: The report should follow standard usage rules. It must not contain first (I, me, we) or second (you, your) person pronouns. The language should be clear, formal, and specific.

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS REPORT FORMAT

Heading: The report will have the following heading, centered at the top of the first page.

Report of
The Governor's Commission on Performance Standards for Student Excellence
Date (date this assignment is due)
Chairman, Your Name

Introduction: The report will contain an introductory paragraph stating the purpose of the study.

Body: The body of the paper will be a numbered list of the qualities (or standards) students should exhibit to qualify for funding. Each item on the list should be followed by a period and an explanation of the standard.

Here is an example to illustrate how performance standards are set. Martin Industries is a company which manufactures bobbins on which the thread used by large textile companies is wound. One of the bobbins which the company manufactures must have a legend printed on it which identifies the type and characteristics of the thread which will eventually be wound on the bobbin. These various legends are printed in different colors although most are printed in black ink. The following is an example of a performance standard which was set for the printers who are responsible to print these legends.

Production. Over the course of a week, the printer should average a total of 300 cases printed. Since changing inks during the shift requires that the printing press be completely cleaned and reset, the weekly production requirement is reduced by four cases for each change of color. For example, if during Monday the printer runs black ink and then switches to green and on Wednesday begins with red ink, changes to blue ink, and then changes back to red ink, the week's production amount would be 300 cases minus (4 cases times 3 changes) or 288 cases. Any printer who prints more than 10% below production will be reprimanded. After the fourth reprimand, the printer will be terminated.

You must set performance standards for students. Each standard on the list should be explained as specifically as possible, and the report should indicate ways to measure a student's performance of this standard. Each report must have a minimum of five (5) standards. The standards should be listed beginning with the most important and ending with the least important. Each standard *must* identify *specific* student *behavior*. Double-space between each standard listed.

Normally there should not be overlap between standards. For the purposes of this project, you are allowed some overlap. For instance, you might use note-taking both as a way of measuring classroom participation (one performance standard) and attitude (another performance standard). However, do not set standards which have a large amount of overlap. It should be possible to distinguish clearly between the performance standards you set.

You may indicate behavior which, while not up to standard, is close enough to the standard to warrant a student being placed on probation. Normally individuals placed on probation are given a set period of time to improve their performance. Failure to improve performance is grounds for dismissal. In the case of students in this example, the failure to improve performance would result in the loss of funding.

Conclusion: The conclusion should be a brief paragraph restating the purpose of the study and the belief that these standards represent the best indicators of student commitment to excellence.

LETTER OF NOTIFICATION

In actual Performance Standards studies, supervisors use the performance standards to evaluate workers' productivity. Each employee is evaluated regarding how well he or she performs using the standards as a measure of what reasonable and acceptable performance should be.

The second part of this assignment requires that you write a letter of notification from a school administrator. In this letter, the administrator evaluates a student's behavior based on how the behavior measures up to the standards. I want each of you to use this letter to evaluate your own performance as a student. Using each of the performance standards you defined in your Performance Standards report, evaluate your personal performance as a student. Be sure to include specific details from your actual performance this semester.

Format: Use standard business format, which means the letter should be single spaced, but double-spaced between paragraphs. The paper should have one inch margins on all four sides and should be typed on the front side of unlined white typing (or printing) paper. The letter should be similar in appearance to the sample letter of application in Holt. It will be addressed to you with your address as the inside address, and addressing you by title (Mr., Ms., Mrs., etc.) and last name. The heading should be Chattanooga State's address. The letter will be signed, Dr. Alice Cartwright (who is not a real person) with her name and title (Dean of Instructional Support) typed under her signature.

Language/Grammar/Spelling: The letter should follow standard usage rules. The language should be clear, formal, and specific.

Introduction: The first paragraph will read, "This is to inform you that you will receive funding /will not receive funding/will receive funding but are placed on probation (choose the one that fits your circumstances) for the academic year 1997-8."

Body: The body will identify each performance standard from the report and explain how you have met or have not met that standard. Include specific details. Double-space between each standard.

Conclusion: The concluding paragraph will state either Dr. Cartwright's congratulations to you as an example of an outstanding student, Dr. Cartwright's regrets that you will not receive funding for the coming academic year, or a warning and encouragement from Dr. Cartwright that you improve your performance in order to continue to receive funding.

Grading: Grading for both assignments will be based on how well you follow these guidelines, how well you identify and explain the standards, and how accurately you assess your own situation.