Effective performance management begins with **clear, measurable expectations**. This Success Criteria Library is designed to help supervisors craft high-quality success criteria that support fair, consistent, and meaningful evaluations. By aligning performance measures with job duties and objectives, and ensuring they are observable, attainable, and objective, supervisors can better guide employee development, recognize contributions, and address performance concerns. **Use this guide as a resource to strengthen your planning stage and set your employees up for success.**

## **Success in a role is defined by “Successful” – consistently meeting expectations, delivering quality work, and contributing to team goals.** “**Exceptional” performance** goes beyond just fulfilling requirements; it’s about exceeding expectations, bringing innovation, and driving outstanding results that elevate the team and organization. **Managers play a critical role in setting clear expectations, helping employees understand what it takes to be successful and what actions or behaviors will distinguish them as exceptional.** The focus should not be on being busier, but on being more productive and impactful in the right areas. By providing clarity and guidance on both successful and exceptional performance, managers empower employees to reach their full potential and make meaningful contributions.

## Success Criteria Quality Checklist

Use this checklist to ensure your success criteria are effective and meaningful:

* Is it measurable or observable?
* Is it clearly tied to a specific job duty or objective?
* Is it within the employee’s control?
* Does it describe what successful and exceptional performance look like?
* Does it avoid subjective or vague terms (e.g., “prompt,” “friendly,” “as needed”)?

## Characteristics of Effective Measures

The most effective performance measures are:

* **Sensitive:** Capable of detecting meaningful differences in performance
* **Consistent** (Reliable): Collected and evaluated the same way every time
* **Accurate:** Reflects the true value of performance as defined by the role

## Evidence Sources for Objectivity

Use tangible, traceable evidence whenever possible:

* Direct observation
* Reports and records
* Completed work samples
* Feedback from others (e.g., peers, clients)

Ensure the criteria:

* Are attainable in the context of the employee’s workload
* Demonstrate competency rather than chance or dependency on other(s)

## Common Employee Performance Measures

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Measure | What It Evaluates | Example Formula |
| Quality of Work | Accuracy and precision in task completion | (Number of Errors / Total Output) × 100 |
| Error Rate | Frequency of mistakes in operations | (Number of Errors / Total Operations) × 100 |
| Cost Efficiency | Output generated per dollar spent | (Revenue Generated / Cost Incurred) × 100 |
| Turnaround Time | Speed and effectiveness in task completion | (Sum of Completion Times / Number of Tasks) |
| Cycle Time | Time spent completing a product or service | (Finish Time – Start Time) / Units Produced |
| Productivity Rate | Inputs vs. outputs; use of time/resources | (Total Output / Total Input) × 100 |
| Goal Achievement | Completion rate of assigned goals | (Goals Achieved / Total Goals) × 100 |
| Customer Satisfaction | Client or user satisfaction with service | (Sum of All Scores / Number of Respondents) |
| Engagement Index | Employee satisfaction and advocacy | Net Promoter Score (NPS) |
| Lead Generation / ROI | Output metrics for business development or outreach initiatives | Varies based on strategy |

**Words to Avoid in Success Criteria**

Avoid vague, unmeasurable terms like:

* Frequently, always, never
* On time, promptly, as soon as possible
* Upon receipt, regularly, consistently
* Positive presence with a smile

Replace these with specific timeframes, actions, or quality indicators.

## Role-Specific Success Criteria Examples

#### Administrative Support

* Number of accurate reports submitted by deadline
* Calendar scheduling accuracy (conflict-free)
* Response time to internal/external inquiries

#### Customer Service / Student Services

* First contact resolution rate
* Average email/ticket response time
* Post-interaction satisfaction ratings

#### Project / Program Management

* % of deliverables completed on time and within scope
* Stakeholder satisfaction survey results
* Budget variance as % of total project budget

#### Supervisors / Managers

* EPMS completion rate and timeliness
* Team turnover rate and engagement index
* % of direct reports achieving individual goals

**Examples: Well-Written vs. Poorly Written Criteria**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Poor Criteria** | **Improved Criteria** |
| Responds to emails promptly | Responds to emails within one business day |
| Is a team player | Actively participates in team meetings and contributes to group problem-solving |
| Completes tasks as assigned | Submits reports by deadline with less than 2% error rate |
| Maintains a positive attitude | Demonstrates courteous and professional behavior in all client interactions |

## Qualitative Evidence Guidance

In higher education—where many roles involve service, collaboration, and intellectual or interpersonal contributions that aren't easily reduced to numbers—**qualitative success criteria** are essential. Below are examples organized by key competency areas commonly observed in higher education roles. These are designed to be observable, behavior-based, and suitable for inclusion in the EPMS process.

**Acceptable Source for roles where outcomes are harder to quantify, incorporate qualitative evidence:**

* Peer or stakeholder feedback (formal or informal)
* Reflective self-assessments
* Project summaries or narratives
* Student or client testimonials

**How to Evaluate:**

* Use structured, behavior-based frameworks like:
  + SBI (Situation, Behavior, Impact)
  + STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result)

## Qualitative Success Criteria Examples

#### Service & Support

* Demonstrates empathy and professionalism in student or faculty interactions, resolving concerns with care and by timelines noted in standard operating procedures manual
* Anticipates the needs of students, faculty, or staff and offers proactive support or guidance
* Maintains accurate and accessible records that enable continuity of service across departments

#### Collaboration & Teamwork

* Actively contributes to cross-functional initiatives and follows through on commitments made to colleagues
* Encourages inclusive participation in meetings and respects differing viewpoints
* Supports team success by sharing knowledge, tools, or resources without being prompted

#### Communication

* Produces clear, concise, and audience-appropriate written materials (e.g., reports, student communications, proposals)
* Responds to emails and inquiries with professionalism and within agreed-upon timeframes
* Effectively communicates updates, expectations, or concerns to appropriate stakeholders

#### Problem Solving & Initiative

* Identifies inefficiencies in processes and proposes realistic improvements
* Takes initiative to address recurring issues without being prompted
* Seeks clarification or guidance when encountering ambiguity or barriers

#### Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility

* Considers diverse perspectives and cultural backgrounds when planning or delivering services
* Actively works to ensure programs or communications are accessible to all populations
* Demonstrates a commitment to fostering a respectful and inclusive environment

#### Professionalism & Accountability

* Maintains confidentiality, accuracy, and compliance with university policies and procedures
* Follows through on assignments and meets deadlines with minimal oversight
* Accepts feedback constructively and incorporates it into future work

#### Leadership & Development (for supervisors/managers)

* Provides consistent, balanced feedback to direct reports to support their growth and performance
* Encourages staff participation in professional development opportunities
* Promotes psychological safety and trust within their team

**PRO TIP: Utilize USC secure AI resources and tools to assist you in writing successful and exceptional success criteria.**

For additional guidance, contact your coll/div HR Representative or DHR-Employee Relations.