

Top Tips

Assessing

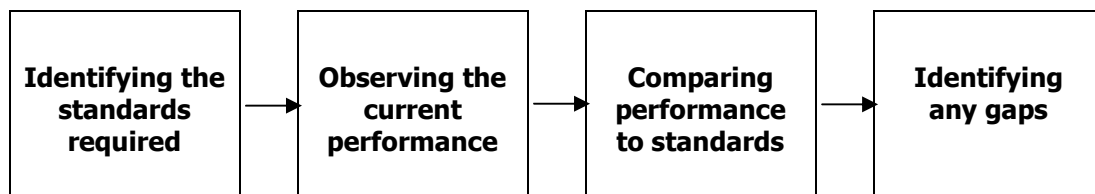
What is assessing?

Assessing is all about observing and comparing the standards a person is achieving, with the standards they are required to be achieving. You can then decide whether the standard has been reached. This may be to determine their:

- **Knowledge** – eg do they have product knowledge?
- **Skills** – eg can they use and demonstrate the products they sell?
- **Behaviours** – eg how do they come across when making a sale?
- **Potential** – eg are they suitable for promotion?

Given that your decision on the person's ability can affect their career, their income and ultimately their job security, you owe it to them to make a fair assessment in a professional manner. These notes are designed to help you do that, and will complement your own experience of the tasks or processes involved.

There are four key stages to assessing an individual's ability:



Identifying the standards required

Before assessing a person's ability, you must agree the standards for the task, and the criteria against which they will be assessed. In these instances, the standards and criteria are laid down in various company documents:

- Operating procedures and processes.
- Training material or notes, such as sessions on new products
- Their Role Profile, available through your line manager or the HR dept.
- The Capability Framework for their role

In other instances you may need to agree targets at a one-to-one meeting, such as sales or margin increases, an improvement in timekeeping, or the amount of work someone needs to get through. The important point is that both you and they should agree precisely what is required so that there can be no doubt at a later date. You will find it helpful to set **SMART** objectives (see Top Tips on Writing Objectives), so that you can both agree whether the person has met the standards or not – there should be no 'shades of grey'.

For a **Knowledge** or **Skill** improvement, consider also how you will expect to see this demonstrated, for example how can a person prove what they know? For example, for someone in HR, this might be by listing relevant employment laws and explaining their impact on our operation. For **Behaviour**, all the expected standards are documented in the relevant Capability Framework for their role, as statements of what people should do.

Top Tips

Observing the current performance

One of the difficulties with observing performance is that you will already have formed a subconscious impression of the person's general ability, and this will affect the impartiality of your observation. To overcome this:

- When observing, focus only on what you see and hear at the time, and set aside – for example – all the mistakes you may have seen the person make whilst learning
- If you are observing a person over a period of time, do not allow yourself to be unduly influenced by a one-off example, good or bad
- Try not to be influenced by comments from colleagues about the person; any 3rd party observations must be thoroughly checked
- Remember also to assess the topic that is relevant at the time, and don't allow yourself to be influenced by other factors such as the person's personality or appearance

Evidence

You may also need to take physical evidence into account when observing performance. The points above apply equally to items produced as evidence, but additionally:

- Make sure the evidence offered is authentic – how do you know it was produced by the person you are assessing? When was it produced?
- If a long report is offered, take time to read it carefully and note any questions you wish to ask - ask for it before a OTOM
- Be sure what they believe the evidence proves. For example a photocopy of a manual does not prove they have read it, understood it, or even know what's in it!

Comparing performance to standards

You may find it helpful to list the standards required and the corresponding performance in a table (see example below). It is then an easier matter to make a comparison between the two and to make a decision as to whether the person has demonstrated the required ability or not. Go through the list of requirements and ask yourself: 'Did the person do this correctly or not?' You should then have a list of points with a clear 'Yes' or 'No' by each, and none with 'Yes, but'. The decision should then be obvious: if a person needs to fulfil all of a number of criteria, any 'No's will indicate a need to practise and be re-assessed, alternatively if they only need to fulfil a certain number of 'Yes's, it will be clear whether this has been reached. Either way it takes the emotion out of the decision, and both parties can more readily agree on the decision.

Required standard	Performance observed	Satisfactory Yes / No	Gap

Identifying any gaps

When you have the table of standards and performance above, the ones - if any - marked 'No' will define the gap in performance, and the things the person needs to work on. This may best be discussed at the next OTOM, and will suggest an appropriate development plan for the person to work on.

Future action

You may need to re-assess the person after a while even if they have shown the required ability, because:

- Their ability may have increased or decreased
- Technology, business needs or standards required may change
- A lack of opportunity to practise may have affected their ability
- Their strengths may now suit a different role, e.g. a promotion

Key skills and behaviours of an assessor

- Agree exactly the criteria against which the person will be assessed
- Use the SMART objectives approach
- Avoid 'shades of grey'
- Agree how you will expect to see knowledge and skill demonstrated
- Show interest and confidence in the individual
- Remain objective and unbiased
- Avoid pre-formed ideas about the person's ability
- Check 3rd party observations thoroughly
- Assess only the topic that is relevant at the time
- Ask questions that get them to give specific facts and information
- Listen actively to what is said
- Compare standards and performance objectively, using 'Yes' or 'No'
- Help the person create a development plan as needed (capture on OTOM document)
- Encourage a desire to improve, and commitment to agreed actions
- Set up a review process to monitor and reinforce progress (e.g. at monthly OTOMs or may need to be more frequently)

For related topics see Top Tips:

- ➔ **Objectives - Writing**
- ➔ **One-to-One Meetings (OTOMs)**
- ➔ **PDR**