

## Avoiding Stereotypes and Bias in Assessment of Learner Performance

Narrative evaluations can contain bias. Focusing on traits associated with certain groups based on race/ethnicity, gender, or other characteristics reinforces stereotypes and can ignore other aspects of learner performance. Avoid these stereotypes by focusing on observed behaviors and describing competency-based performance. Scan your written evaluation to check for any unintended stereotypes.

<b>Caution: avoid this language</b>	<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Instead, consider using this language</b>
'She was quiet yet participatory.'	'Quiet' can be associated with gender or race/ethnicity.	'She listened well; she participated thoughtfully.'
'She was warm, caring and empathic.' (as the only descriptors)	These are strengths but are also the characteristics that evaluators tend to focus more on for women than men; the evaluator should comment on other competencies as well.	Describe clinical skills, knowledge and interactions with patients and team.
'He worked hard through the rotation.'	Effort is commendable; it is also important to describe performance and connect effort to accomplishments.	'Due to his hard work creating a discharge plan, our team was able to discharge the patient safely to home.'
'He did well despite his many outside responsibilities.'  'Her knowledge grew as she balanced outside family responsibilities.'	Qualified language detracts from the student's accomplishments.	'He contributed to the team by doing...' 'She gained knowledge and applied it to her clinical practice.'
'Compared to other people with his background, his performance was...'	Avoid focus on comparing students to other students particularly in a stereotyped way; focus on observed performance.	'He successfully performed the following key clinical tasks for this clerkship....'
'He contributed a lot to the team despite being gone from the rotation for weekly appointments.'	Student with approved accommodation to attend medical appointments cannot be penalized for this.	Focus narrative on what student did on the service, not when the student was not there.
'After initially not having a very strong fund of knowledge of our specialty, they seemed to read a lot over the course of the rotation.'	The evaluator may be trying to comment on improvement but the focus should be on the student's achievement by the end of the rotation, not just on the deficit.	'The student read a lot and achieved the expected fund of knowledge by the end of the rotation. They applied their reading effectively to patient problems in their notes and case discussions.'

**Watch for and ask the student and other team members about student contributions you may not have observed.**

Student contribution	Competencies	Description
Spending time with a patient explaining a diagnosis that was unclear to the patient on rounds	Interpersonal and communication skills Patient care	‘The student spent extra time with the patient explaining his diagnosis and answering questions to ensure his understanding and provide reassurance.’
Working on discharge planning to ensure that the patient will receive all of her medications, have secure housing, and understand her follow up appointments	Systems-based practice Interprofessional collaboration	‘The student coordinated discharge planning for a complex patient discharge by working with the with the pharmacist, case manager, and resident to ensure that the patient understood the discharge plans. This included finding a pharmacy to provide all of the prescribed medications, securing temporary housing and explaining the plans to the patient to confirm her understanding.’
Answering questions from a patient’s family about an upcoming procedure	Interpersonal and communication skills	‘When a patient’s family had questions about an upcoming procedure, the student listened to their questions and concerns with empathy. The student then coordinated with the resident to answer all of their questions accurately and thoroughly.’

## References

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