

Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

Supervisor and Trainer Course:
Assessment and Management of Trainees

Surgical Education and Training (SET)

Performance Counselling for Supervisors



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Overview

Performance counselling is a comprehensive process that should form a primary component of all training and development. It typically involves the trainee and supervisor meeting to discuss past performance and develop plans for future performance objectives. When facilitated effectively, it can enrich the training experience and dramatically improve outcomes.

The following presents an overview of considerations for effective performance counselling in training.

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Performance counselling process

In planning a performance counselling session it is useful to follow a 3-phase process consisting of:

- 1. Preparation**
- 2. Conduct**
- 3. Review**

Through following a phased process, the supervisor is encouraged to incorporate relevant information and use it effectively, without overlooking detail or content. It allows for simpler replication and promotes objectivity.

These phases should be followed as a means of augmenting the Performance Management Plan for the trainee and should provide a structure for including outcomes from assessments and performance objectives into the counselling process.

In order to be effective, performance counselling should always be prepared, conducted and reviewed in a professional manner. Following such a process ensures that the supervisor considers all data, formulates reasoned assessments, and provides an appropriate opportunity to discuss those assessments with the trainee in a developmental framework.

Phase 1 Preparation

The preparation phase involves gathering and reviewing information, formulating objectives, identifying the time, place and resources for the interview, and advising the trainee.

Step 1 Information gathering

Information gathering is a critical building block of the interview. The supervisor must study the trainee's past record and most recent performance evaluation, together with any other data that can be obtained regarding their situation. This step allows the supervisor to form preliminary expectations and objectives for the interview.

At this step, all information from the trainee's record should be reviewed as appropriate, including mini-CEX, DOPS and other assessments.

Step 2 Planning for the Interview

The supervisor must determine the reason for interview and the structure that it will take, and clearly formulate interview expectations and purpose. It is important to provide enough time for the interview and identify a suitable venue. If possible, additional attendees may be identified to attend the interview as supports and objective reviewers. This information should be communicated to the trainee with enough time to enable them to prepare.

In completing this process, an interview guide should be constructed to provide a carefully structured overview of topics and issues to be discussed during the interview. Such a guide ensures that all information is substantiated by background data, that each topic or issue of relevance is covered during the interview, and that enough time is allocated. It also enables the supervisor to formulate goals and objectives for future review.

The interview guide is used to support the interview process itself and should reflect the emphasis of the Performance Management Plan. As such, assessments should be reviewed in detailed the guide and any outcomes from the interview are then built back into the overall plan.

Example Interview Guide:	
Trainee Name	
Date of last review	
Phase of training	
Date and Time of Interview	
Location of Interview	
Attendees	
Reason for Interview	
<i>Why is the interview required? Is it a standard review or has something occurred in the course of training?</i>	
Purpose of Interview	
<i>What is the purpose of the interview? The interview is being conducted in order to...</i>	
Performance Issues	
<i>What are the performance issues to be discussed during the interview?</i>	
Expectations of Interview	
<i>What are my expectations of the interview?</i>	

Step 3 Preparing an Interview Schedule

In addition to the interview guide, performance counselling sessions should be supported by an interview schedule. The interview schedule enables the supervisor to plan the content and sequencing of the interview, and to pre-determine questions and possible outcomes.

The interview schedule is essentially an elaboration of the interview guide and provides a template by which to conduct the interview itself. The content of the interview schedule is typically seen only by the

supervisor and may include highly detailed steps. However, it may be appropriate to include options for both supervisor and trainee to sign the document.

Example Interview Schedule:			
Trainee Name			
Date of last review			
Phase of training			
Date and Time of Interview			
Location of Interview			
Attendees			
Reason for Interview			
Purpose of Interview			
OPENING			
<i>Opening summary [statement of purpose, statement of roles and expectations – rapport and orientation]</i>			
BODY			
<i>Performance Issues [both positive and negative, number as required]</i>			
<i>Consider the GROW Model</i>			
<i>Performance issue:</i>			
<i>Questions:</i>			
<i>Trainee comments:</i>			
<i>Supervisor objectives: [pre-recorded]</i>			
<i>Agreed objectives:</i>			
Agreed Performance Objectives			
<i>Numbered summary of agreed objectives</i>			
Additional resources required			
Actions to be undertaken by supervisor			
Actions to be undertaken by trainee			
Plan of Action including Timeline for completion			
CLOSING			
<i>Review of content and agreed outcomes, plan of action and further requirements, date of next review</i>			
Notes			
<i>Signed</i>	<i>Signatures may be used depending on the supervisor requirements – an alternate form to the interview schedule may also be used</i>	<i>Signed</i>	
<i>Date</i>		<i>Date</i>	

Phase 2 **Conduct**

The conduct of the interview is the primary determinant of success and an interview schedule can provide a reliable framework. A host of factors impact on the effective conduct of the interview and considerations include rapport, orientation, questions used, participation and the overall flow of information.

In general terms, all performance interviews should consist of two elements:

1. **A retrospective analysis and discussion of performance**
2. **An appreciation of future performance objectives and plan of action**

Most performance interviews should tend toward the second element as this avoids over-scrutinising past performance and allows the sentiment of the interview to remain developmental and positive.

The supervisor should follow a clearly defined process of interview which includes an opening, body and closing:

1. Opening This will typically include an explanation of purpose and statement of roles and expectations for the interview. The opening is best achieved by implementing a two step process, consisting of *rapport* and *orientation*. Which of these steps comes first is determined by the interviewer according to their own preference.

a. Rapport is simply the process of establishing or maintaining the relationship between supervisor and trainee by engendering feeling of goodwill, trust and openness. Rapport consists of greetings and small talk which enable the trainee to gauge the supervisor's attitude and feeling towards them. The process can be brief and never should be too long.

b. Orientation usually forms the second step in the opening and typically explains the purpose, duration and format of the interview and how any information will be used in the future.

At the end of a successful opening, each party should be aware of the purpose of the interview, attitudes and feelings toward the purpose, the roles of each party and the expected outcomes. Each party should also have an understanding of the level of trust, expectations of control and the general sentiment that is likely to pervade the interview.

2. Body The body of the interview provides the supervisor and trainee the opportunity to discuss all content areas and must include the following:

a. Review of past performance issues The supervisor should engage with the trainee and encourage their input regarding their performance, aiming for the trainee to self-appraise as often as possible. Effort should be made to explore the reasons for trainee performance in a non-judgmental and positive manner. Argument should be avoided and the focus must remain on facts and the performance issues being discussed. The trainee should not be compared with others and the discussion should not introduce information that is a surprise to the trainee

b. Agreement on performance objectives and plan of action Agreement should be reached regarding future performance objectives together with the resources and actions required to achieve these. This information should be built into a timeline and overall plan of action.

It is important to note that goal setting is the key to successful performance interviewing and should constitute 75% of the interview.

Because performance is always greatest when trainees set their own goals, the interview should act as a means by which the trainee is able to recognise or identify further performance objectives in accordance with expectations. The trainee should be made to feel that they are taking part in their own development plan.

Performance goals should always be few in number, specific, well defined, practical and measurable.

Structured Feedback using the GROW Model

Feedback should be structured by following the **GROW** (Goal, Reality, Options, Wrap-up) Model. Through this process, feedback should start with the supervisor clearly highlighting the area of performance requiring remediation and then identifying:

- The situation or context in which the problem is occurring
- The expected standard of performance
- The scale of the problem, i.e. a minor or major problem
- The longer term outcome if performance is not remedied

The GROW Model identifies the key areas for the body of the performance interview as follows:

Step 1: Goal

Supervisor and trainee identify and agree on a number of clear and achievable goals (outcomes) from the discussion. The goal is not a long term solution to the problem but a short term desired outcome to be achieved within the limits of the discussion.

Step 2: Reality

The supervisor:

- Provides specific examples to illustrate the points and provide an accurate picture of the problem
- Explains the impact of the performance on others and recipient
- Invites the trainee to provide a self-assessment

Step 3: Options

The supervisor and trainee develop a list of possible solutions that will satisfy the needs of all parties

Step 4: Wrap-up

The supervisor and trainee select the most appropriate option and commit to action, define the next steps and a timeframe for their objectives and identify how to overcome obstacles. Write down the action plan and go forward with agreement that both parties feel committed to support.

- 3. Closing** The closing is typically brief although it is a significant determinant of the success of the interview as a whole and the ongoing relationship between supervisor and trainee. The supervisor should therefore remain positive and ensure that the interview closes without ambiguity or uncertainty on the part of the trainee.

If the performance interview has not been successful, the closing should focus on containing the interview and establishing further actions and undertakings.

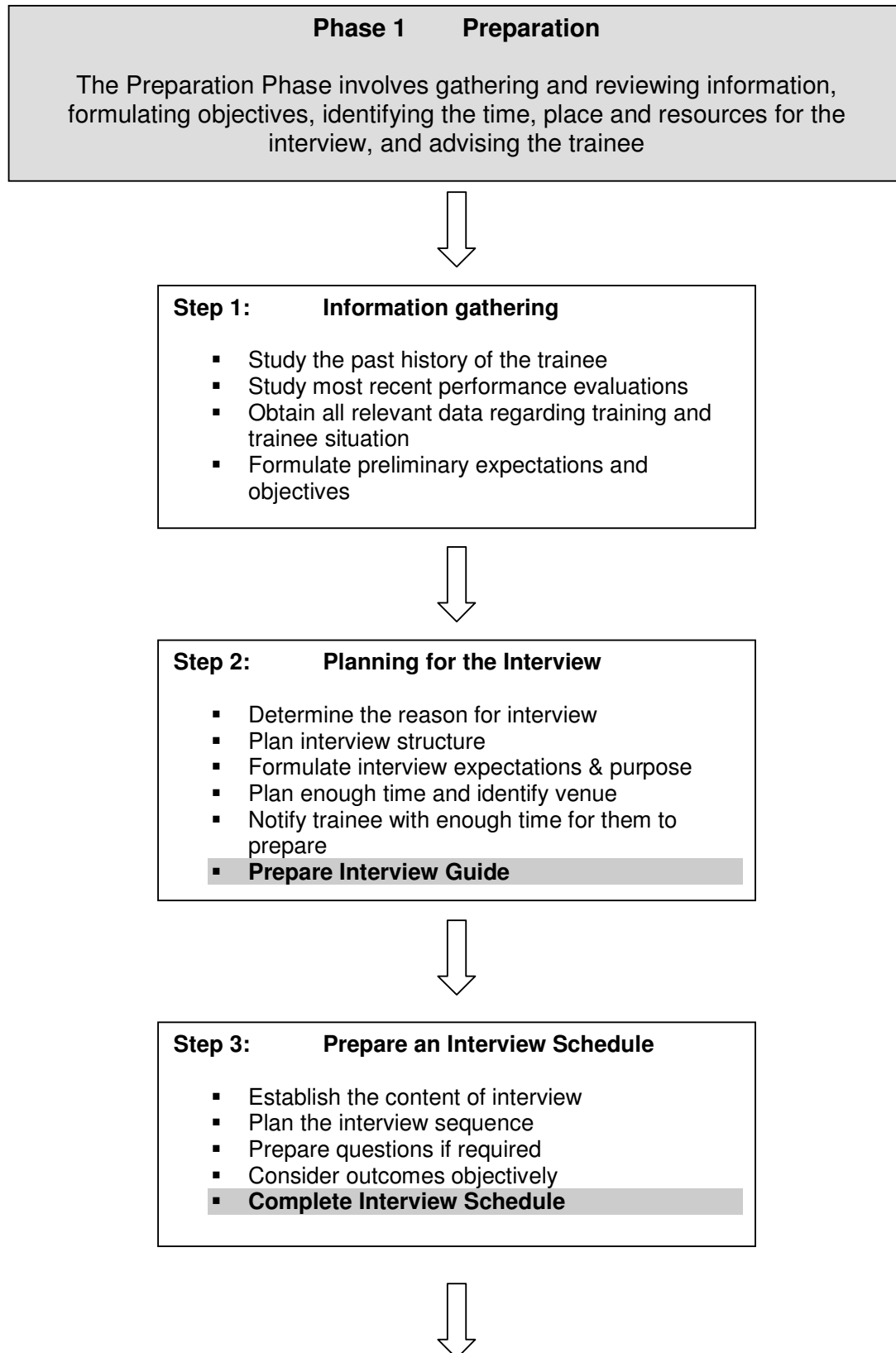
Phase 3 Review

The review phase includes consolidating information from the interview and ensuring that the objectives of interview have been met, that the trainee has achieved understanding of the interview objectives and that supervisor and trainee have reached agreement on outcomes.

The supervisor should undertake a reflective analysis of their own performance during the interview for self development purposes. If a peer has attended the interview, their feedback should also be sought during this process.

In some instances the interview may not have proceeded according to the planned schedule and few or none of the expectations of interview were achieved for various reasons. In such circumstances the supervisor should review options and plan the next step in the trainee's development, which may include professional counselling or assignment of an alternate supervisor.

Interview Process Flowchart

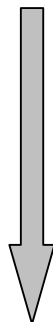


Phase 2 Conduct

The Conduct Phase of the interview is the primary determinant of success and an interview schedule can provide a reliable framework, with additional considerations including rapport, orientation, questions used, participation and the overall flow of information



O P E N I N G	<p>The aim of the opening is to ensure that each party has an understanding of the level of trust, expectations of control and the general sentiment that is likely to pervade the interview</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Explanation of purpose▪ Statement of roles and expectations▪ Establish Rapport▪ Orientate the interview
	<p>Rapport:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ establish or maintain relationship▪ engender feelings of goodwill, trust & openness▪ includes greetings and small talk▪ should never be too long
	<p>Orientation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ explains the purpose▪ establishes duration & format▪ explains use & treatment of information



B O D Y	The body of the interview provides the supervisor and trainee the opportunity to discuss all content areas
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of past performance issues ▪ Agreement on performance objectives & plan of action ▪ Use of the GROW Model
	<p>Review of Performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ engage the trainee & encourage input ▪ aim for self-appraisal ▪ explore reasons for performance ▪ remain non-judgmental & positive ▪ avoid argument ▪ focus on facts & issues ▪ do not compare trainee with others ▪ information presented should not be a surprise
	<p>Agreement on Performance Objectives & Plan of Action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ performance objective should always be few in number, specific, well defined, practical & measurable
	<p>Use the GROW Model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ clearly highlight the area of performance requiring remediation & then identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the situation or context in which the problem is occurring ▪ the expected standard of performance ▪ the cause of the problem ▪ the longer term outcome if performance is not remedied <p>STEP 1: Goal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ identify & agree on goals for discussion <p>STEP 2: Reality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ provide specific examples ▪ explain impact ▪ invite trainee to self assess <p>STEP 3: Options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ develop a list of possible options <p>STEP 4: Wrap-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ select the best option & commit to action ▪ define next steps & timeframe ▪ identify how to overcome obstacles ▪ write down an action plan



C L O S I N G

The closing must ensure that mutual understanding has been achieved and that both parties are committed to a plan of action

- **Summarise outcomes & agreements**
- **Remain positive**
- **Avoid ambiguity or uncertainty**
- **Keep it brief**

If the interview has been unsuccessful:

- use the closing to contain the content
- establish further actions



Phase 3 Review

The Review Phase provides an opportunity to consolidate information from the interview and prepare for further actions



If Interview was successful:

- Consolidate information from the interview
- Confirm that objectives have been met
- Confirm that trainee understanding was achieved
- Confirm that agreement was reached
- Review Plan of Action and prepare for next steps

If Interview was unsuccessful:

- Consolidate information from interview
- Identify reasons for failure
- Consider options including
 - Further interviews
 - Mediation
 - Professional counselling
- Consult peers or supervisors and embark on course of remedial action at earliest convenience

Interview Facilitation Skills

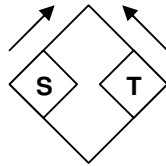
Successful performance interviewing is vastly improved through an understanding and implementation of appropriate questions and facilitation methods.

Facilitating the interview

Effective interview facilitation skills are encapsulated in the acronym SOLER, which refers to the following:

Seated

The supervisor and trainee should be seated in a comfortable setting free of noise and interruption. The seating arrangement should be **squared** so that the supervisor and trainee are facing at angles to one another, not directly opposite. The interview should never occur over a desk or on seating of differing heights.



Open

The supervisor should maintain an open posture and avoid folding legs, arms, or clenching hands. This positive body language expresses openness to the purpose of the interview and encourages engagement from the trainee.

Leaning

The supervisor should maintain a slight lean in the direction of the trainee without being overbearing. This body language expresses interest in what the trainee has to say and an active engagement in the interview purpose on the part of the supervisor.

Eye-contact

The supervisor should aim to maintain eye contact with the trainee as this expresses genuine interest and encourages openness and honesty from most trainees.

Relaxed

The supervisor should be as relaxed as possible to assist the trainee to relax also. Effective interview schedules, time allocation and environment assist this.

*Cross-cultural considerations apply to the SOLER model.

Active Listening

Active listening is the process of listening for meaning and as such, focus is given to confirming with the speaker that verbal content is correctly heard and understood. The aim of active listening is to enhance mutual understanding. Active listening is supported by reflecting the content of what is spoken, checking for nonverbal cues of the speaker, and confirming that understanding has been achieved mutually. It is a core requirement of effective interviewing and supervisors should consider it as an essential tool when conducting an interview with a trainee.

Effective use of Questions

A question is any statement or nonverbal act that invites an answer. Each question has three characteristics:

1. **Open or Closed,**
2. **Primary or Secondary, and**
3. **Neutral or Leading.**

Open questions are broad and allow the respondent a good deal of freedom in terms of how much and what kind of information to provide. Open questions enable the respondent to do the talking, revealing what they view as important, and volunteering information. However, they may also produce time consuming responses.

Examples: *How do you think you performed during the training module?*

How do you perform when working in a team?

Closed questions are restrictive and sometimes provide answer options. Some are moderately closed, requesting a specific type of information, while others are highly closed, with respondents required to select specific answers. Closed questions allow the supervisor to control the length of answers provided and guide the answers toward specific information requirements. However, the answers provided may be too limited and a greater number of questions may be required to access the information needed.

Examples: *What was your main strength during the training module?*

How many hours study per week did you undertake?

Primary questions introduce topics or new areas within a topic and can often be posed independently even when out of context.

Examples: *Tell me about your experience in the ACME Ward*

How many procedures did you undertake?

Secondary questions are used to elicit additional information following a primary or another secondary question – these are sometimes referred to as ‘probing’ or ‘follow-up’ questions.

Examples: *How did you find working with Professor X?*

Did you find any procedure difficult?

Neutral questions allow the respondent to decide on an answer without any direction from the questioner.

Examples: *Do you enjoy working with others?*

Have you ever turned up late to work?

Leading questions lead the respondent toward a particular answer by making one answer more desirable than another.

Examples: *I assume you enjoy working with others?*

Have you continued turning up late for work?

In the context of performance interviews, a variety of these question characteristics may be implemented. It is important for the supervisor to consider the nature of questions to be used depending on the information objectives of the interview itself.

It may be useful to prepare questions prior to interview and incorporate these into the interview schedule in order to avoid clumsy, time consuming or otherwise erroneous questioning.

Consideration should also be given to the sequencing of questions during the interview. Generally speaking, for each performance issue raised, a separate **funnel sequence** should be implemented, which begins with a broad open question and proceeds with increasingly restricted questions.

Overview of effective performance interviewing considerations

Performance counselling requires skills in general counselling, interviewing and coaching. It should be structured, planned and implemented according to objective criteria. Important considerations for the conduct of an effective performance interview include:

- Establishing reasonable expectations
- Avoiding new information or surprises
- Identifying a suitable time and location
- Keeping to your interview guide and schedule
- Controlling the sequence of discussion in order achieve expectations
- Control the range of the discussion (issues beyond the interview guide should be rescheduled for a further session if relevant)
- Be constructive – aim for agreement regarding outcomes and objectives
- Communicative and listen actively
- Use questions effectively
- Generate and Invite solutions
- Agree on a plan of action
- Agree on a timeline
- Summarise the discussion at the closing
- Make a record of interview and invite the trainee to sign off if in agreement
- After the session, follow up if required any materials, persons or information
- Commence planning the review session

In order to be effective, performance feedback should always be:

- Based on open, two-way communication
- Timely and regular
- Factual and specific
- Understood
- Honest and constructive
- Reviewed