

6 OBSERVING PERFORMANCE

Description

The unit provides information and four tools to help you to make the most of the process of observing performance. The tools are:

Tool 6A Noting impressions: an exercise to help you decide the basis of your first impressions

Tool 6B Gathering data: moving on to note specific items of behaviour

Tool 6C Watching for results: beginning to use observation as a means to provide evidence of competence

Tool 6D Planning your observations: an exercise to help you plan for the observation process and decide which format suits you best – narrative, summaries or pro formas.

Purpose

When you observe your candidate in action and record your observations you are providing crucial evidence of competence, so this unit is designed to help you to:

- test and develop your skills as an observer
- learn to analyse the impressions you receive when carrying out an observation
- learn to note the data you receive when carrying out an observation.

When to use the tools

Use this unit to develop your understanding and skills in one of the most important aspects of your role. If you are new to assessment, work through the background information which will help you to think through the challenges of observation, then do each of the exercises. The first three tools are structured to help you move from gathering general impressions (Tool 6A *Noting impressions*), to noting specific data (Tool 6B *Gathering data*) and then to noting the data which provides useful evidence for occupational standards (Tool 6C *Watching for results*). Unless you have previous experience of systematic observation it is worthwhile working through them in turn before you are called on to complete an observation of a candidate. It is particularly important if the standards you will be assessing include observation of interpersonal skills. Tool 6D *Planning your observations* then builds on the experience in order to decide the best approach to observing the particular standards you will be working with. Whatever your level of experience of observation you should carry out this exercise whenever you need to start assessment of a new set of standards.

(Tool 1C *Do it yourself*, from Unit 1, is also useful for developing your skills as an observer.)

What do you see?

Observation is a direct and powerful way of establishing your candidate's competence and this takes practice. You need to develop the habit of seeing what is really happening and learn to collect the data which makes our records of observation specific and convincing.

In everyday life we tend to gather impressions rather than data about other people's behaviour – unless they have particularly irritating habits! We notice that someone is pleasant or persuasive, or shy or pushy. That is our general impression based on the behaviour we have seen. What we rarely spot is how they achieved that effect. To become a skilled observer you need to start recording the actual behaviour that has led to that impression.

Getting started

Remember that occupational standards are based on functional analysis – breaking down a task to its components. We may get an *impression* that someone is competent – but we can all be fooled by a good talker who covers up their mistakes well. To prove competence we are asked to note the details that build the whole picture.

The hardest test of our powers of observation is usually to do with observing our candidate communicating with other people – colleagues, clients, customers – and so this is what these exercises concentrate on. Tool 6A *Noting impressions* makes us think about the impressions we have formed and start to identify the reasons. Tool 6B *Gathering data* moves us on to noting specific items as we observe behaviour.

Providing evidence

When you are observing candidates in order to provide evidence of competence (or feedback on the areas where they are failing to demonstrate competence) you are looking for answers to a set of very specific questions posed by the occupational *standards* you are assessing them against. In one way that makes life easier – you have a clear job to do and the standards are set – you don't have to decide what someone should do or how they should be doing it. However, the job is not an easy one for the following three reasons.

1. Interpretation

The standards are written in general terms but you are looking at real-life situations. That means you have to make decisions about the way the real-life activity and behaviour you are observing can be interpreted as meeting the generalised requirements of the standards.

2. Complexity

You may be looking for evidence against several elements within one observed session. That is all right if the standards follow a process step by step and so you can note each area in a logical order. However, many of the activities you observe – especially those involving interactions with other people – may not be such a straightforward step-by-step matter. So in addition to concentrating on what you are observing you somehow have to spot the connections with the standards.

3. Responsibility

Your job is not just to say whether the individual is competent but to provide evidence; you are looking for the kind of specifics which make connections between real life and the standards clear – not just noting impressions but also gathering data.

Try using Tool 6C *Watching for results* to give you practice in observation intended to provide evidence against occupational standards.

How to use the tools

Tool 6A *Noting impressions*: to use this you need to select a snatch of activity from a video or a meeting and then note down your impressions on the sheets provided. Next, check out your impressions either by replaying the tape or by talking to others who were present, and review how accurately you gathered impressions.

Tool 6B *Gathering data*: you watch another exchange but this time you make notes as you go along, listing not just impressions but more detailed information about the activity. If possible, when you finish, check with the second person involved whether you were right about the impression the person you were observing had on them.

Tool 6C *Watching for results*: to use this you need to find an opportunity to observe someone carrying out one of the two tasks – there are detailed suggestions at the start of the exercise. Then carry out an observation making notes of the actual words or activities which show that the individual is meeting the standard. Try this exercise several times and test out different ways of collecting your information to see what suits you the best.

Tool 6D *Planning your observations*: this asks you to work through a set of questions in order to see how much observation will be involved in the standards you assess and how complicated it will be. Then think carefully about your answers and decide which approach to note-taking is going to suit your circumstances the best. As well as thinking about it yourself you are recommended to discuss your conclusions with your internal verifier and, if possible, with experienced assessors.

TIP

Invisibility is the final test of the observer. How invisible can YOU be? Throughout this unit think about being invisible. When you observe an exchange between other people in your assessor role you are not a part of it. You have to listen very hard but not give all the listening signals – the nods and shakes and smiles. You have to see everything but fade into the background yourself. Think about where you sit or stand, how you make notes, and how you can avoid doing things that will disturb or influence the situation.

Noting impressions

You can assess your impressions of someone by undertaking either one of the tasks below.

1. Make a short video recording of someone in conversation. It might be an extract from a news or current affairs programme, a snatch of a documentary or even a few minutes from your favourite soap.
 - Watch it closely, then stop and think about what you have seen and heard, and try to answer the questions on the worksheet on pages 6–8 and 6–9.
 - Once you have answered these questions, replay the tape. You can check the accuracy of your answers and now that you have stopped to consider your reaction you may see more of the ways in which the speaker influenced you.
 - Use the review section to comment on anything new you have learnt, the things you missed first time and any change in your impression of the individual.
2. Take an opportunity to watch someone who is communicating to a group of which you are a part. It could be a briefing at work, a presentation, a sales pitch, a speech or even a sermon.
 - Observe closely without making any notes. Then work through the questions on the worksheet on pages 6–8 and 6–9.
 - If there is a written record of what was said, compare it with what you remember. You could also compare the impression you received with others in the group.
 - Use the review section to comment on anything new you have learnt, the things you missed first time and any change in your impression of the individual.

Noting impressions – worksheet

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Name Time and place

Subject

How do you feel about the person you have observed?

Do you trust him/her? Do you believe what he/she is telling you?

Note down what you can remember about what was said.



Noting impressions – worksheet

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Note as many specific items as you can remember which helped you to form your impressions.

For example: non-verbal – eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, tension or relaxation, fidgeting and so on
verbal – particular words/phrases, dramatic examples, pictorial images, tone, pace and volume

Review

Gathering data

Observe a discussion between colleagues. It may be a casual social chat or a business discussion. You could also carry out the exercise during a meeting whilst a topic is being discussed in which you aren't involved.

Focus on one of the participants and use the worksheet on pages 6–11 and 6–12 as the discussion progresses to note the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of your subject, and the progress of the discussion.

Try to work out what impression the person you are studying is having on the other person involved in the conversation and see if you can spot the reasons for that impression.

If possible, compare your impressions of the discussion with those of the participants afterwards. In particular, check if you were right about the impression your subject had on the other person.

Don't forget to try to be invisible!

TIP

If you sit in a meeting observing what is going on and making notes you will be engaged in fairly normal behaviour. However, in most other situations you will probably have to tell the participants what you are doing or they will start to draw conclusions about your odd behaviour! As long as they are comfortable about it carry on, but be warned – they will probably want to know what you thought, so be ready to practise your feedback skills! (See Unit 9 *Feedback and review*.)

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1. How comfortable do they appear to be about dealing with the topic of conversation?
2. Does the individual display any unhelpful behaviour (for example, fiddling, frowning, yawning)?
3. Who speaks the most/least?
4. Is the individual really listening to the other person? How do you know?
5. Are any issues ignored or dismissed by the individual?

6. Does the body language suggest rapport between the two participants?
Can you give examples?

7. Is appropriate eye contact maintained during the discussion?

8. Is the discussion kept on track? If so, by which of them?

9. How are silences dealt with? Is there any sign of discomfort?

10. How are decisions agreed on?

11. What is the general overall atmosphere of the discussion?



This exercise gives you an opportunity to practise gathering observed evidence against occupational standards. Pages 6–15 to 6–18 give you copies of *elements* of two NVQs for which observation is an appropriate way to gather evidence. Select the one(s) that you can observe easily and practise using them in workplace situations. The forms have been laid out to allow you to say if you feel the individual has met each of the *performance criteria*, and to jot down the kinds of words/actions/behaviour the individual used. There is an example based on the Holiday NVQ on page 6–14.

Customer service Level 2 Unit 4: Solve problems for customers

(A direct contact between a colleague and a customer or even a problem phone call could provide the opportunity for this one. Again you could even catch an example during a TV documentary set in the world of work or in a 'soap' since most soaps seem to have scenes between customers and shopkeepers or service providers!)

Administration Level 2 Unit 4: Create and maintain effective working relationships

(Watching almost anyone in any situation where they come into contact with colleagues. Or even one of those TV documentaries about the world of work ... or your favourite soap!)

Try out different approaches to making your observation notes. Some people like to take notes of the activity directly on to the record of observation form. Others find that confusing and difficult – especially when they are dealing with a complicated activity which doesn't unfold in the same order as the *performance criteria*. You can end up spending the whole time turning backwards and forwards from sheet to sheet and missing all the action! An alternative is to take notes of the event as it occurs and then directly afterwards fill in a record of observation to check out the coverage of the *performance criteria*.

A personal example: One of the qualifications I assess regularly is the NVQ4 in Business Counselling. A single observation will produce evidence for eight different elements spread through three different units and not necessarily in the same order. Needless to say I write notes and then fill in record sheets immediately afterwards!



Watching for results – example

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The Holiday NVQ

Unit 1 Element 1.1 Choose and book holiday

Performance criteria		Record of observation	Yes/No
1.1.1	Establish group/individual holiday requirements	Janet asked the family for preferences – made sure that James (age 6) understood what the ideas really meant for him. Answered Clare's questions (age 10). Encouraged Bill to admit he is not keen on large campsites but wants peace and	Yes
1.1.2	Select a holiday providing the requested features in the required format within agreed constraints	After lots of brochures Janet came up with two options – a campsite in Brittany – near the Ferry port, small and fairly quiet but with sports facilities and	Yes
1.1.3	Book the holiday	Janet booked by phone and confirmed by sending the booking form and deposit. Over the phone she clarified details which weren't quite clear from the brochure like the fact that	Yes

Range

Format Hotel, Bed and Breakfast, Self-Catering, Caravan, Camping,
 Touring, disabled access

Features Beach, sports facilities, mountain walking, art and architecture,
 regional cuisine, shopping

Duration Annual holiday (minimum ten days), Short break

Booking Telephone, face to face, in writing

Constraints Budget, free time available

Knowledge

i Payment options

ii Legal and insurance requirements

iii Likelihood of overcrowding

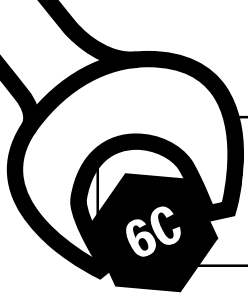
iv Journey time

v Local language, currency

vi Health requirements



Signed Richar (Assessor) Date..... 15th



Watching for results

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Customer service Level 2 Unit 4: Solve problems for customers

Element 4.1

Gather information on customer problems

Performance criteria		Record of evidence	Yes/No
4.1.1	Customers' perceptions of <i>problems</i> are accurately identified and sensitively acknowledged		
4.1.2	Customers' <i>problems</i> are clearly summarised using perceptions and <i>information</i> gained from them		
4.1.3	Colleagues are consulted for <i>information</i> relating to <i>problems</i> affecting customers		
4.1.4	Recurring <i>problems</i> or complaints are recorded and passed to those who are in a position to influence them		

Range

Problems affecting customers		Information	
Availability of products or services		Originates inside the organisation	
Quality of products or services		Originates outside the organisation	
Use of products or services		Routinely generated	
Organisation systems and procedures		Non-routinely generated	
Individual personnel			

Signed(Assessor) Date.....

continued ...





Watching for results

... continued

Customer service Level 2 Unit 4: Solve problems for customers

Element 4.2

Propose solutions for customers

Performance criteria		Record of evidence	Yes/No
4.2.1	Assistance is sought from <i>colleagues</i> for solutions to <i>customer problems</i>		
4.2.2	<i>Current organisational procedures</i> are examined for solutions to <i>customer problems</i>		
4.2.3	Alternative products or services are proposed to solve <i>customer problems</i>		
4.2.4	Additional products or services are proposed to solve <i>customer problems</i>		
4.2.5	Proposals are understood and appreciated by customers		

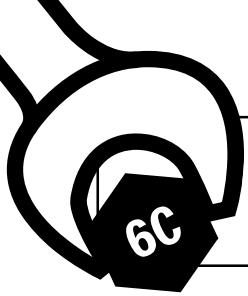
Range

Problems affecting customers		Colleagues	
Availability of products or services		Managers	
Quality of products or services		Other staff within the organisation	
Use of products or services		Organisational procedures	
Organisation systems and procedures		Formal	
Individual personnel		Informal	



6-16 Signed(Assessor) Date.....

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Watching for results

... continued

Customer service Level 2 Unit 4: Solve problems for customers

Element 4.3

Take action to deliver solutions

Performance criteria		Record of evidence	Yes/No
4.3.1	Procedures are promptly activated to deliver solutions to customers		
4.3.2	Service delivery is monitored and problems arising are passed to the appropriate authority		
4.3.3	Solutions for customers are executed in collaboration with others		
4.3.4	Action is taken within own area of authority to prevent shortfalls in the delivery of products or services		
4.3.5	Action is taken to alert colleagues to potential shortfalls in the delivery of products or services		

Range

Procedures		Colleagues	
Standard		Managers	
		Other staff within the organisation	
Shortfalls		Monitoring methods	
Personal		Formal	
Originating in own department		Informal	

Signed(Assessor) Date.....

continued ...





Watching for results

... continued

Administration Level 2

Unit 4: Create and maintain effective working relationships

Element 4.1

Establish and maintain working relationships with other members of staff

Performance criteria		Record of evidence	Yes/No
4.1.1	Appropriate opportunities are taken to discuss work-related matters with relevant <i>staff</i>		
4.1.2	Essential information is passed to appropriate <i>staff</i> promptly and accurately		
4.1.3	Effective working relationships are maintained with individuals and teams		
4.1.4	Commitments to others are met within agreed time-scales		
4.1.5	Methods of communication and support are suited to the needs of other <i>staff</i>		

Range

Staff	
Line managers	Immediate colleagues
Other members of staff with related work activities	



Planning your observations

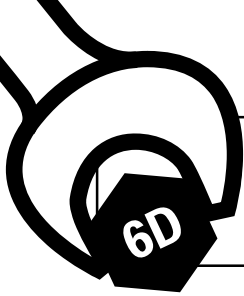
Now you need to consider the best way to carry out observations with the qualification you are going to be assessing. There are three areas of consideration:

- the requirements and complexity of the standards
- the environment in which you would be working
- your own preferences.

The standards: check through for the following information

		Notes/Comments
Is observation REQUIRED for any of the units or elements?*	Yes/No	
Is one observation likely to produce evidence for several elements or units at once?*	Yes/No	
Is evidence likely to cross over between the observed units and any other units?*	Yes/No	
Are there areas where observation is not REQUIRED but might be the most effective way to collect the evidence?	Yes/No	
Are the situations being observed likely to unfold in the same order as the performance criteria?	Yes/No	

(*The data sheets from Tool 2B *Digging for data* will be helpful here.)



Planning your observations

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You are trying to build a picture of the amount of observation required and how complicated it is likely to be. If you are going to be carrying out an observation which is likely to follow the sequence of the *performance criteria* and will only be producing evidence for one or two elements then working directly onto forms like the ones provided in Tool 14D *Record of evidence/observation* in Unit 14 may be easiest. If it is likely that the job will be more complicated you will probably need to go for the note-taking approach.

The environment: consider the following questions.

	Notes/Comments
How noisy is it?	
How technical is it?	
Will I be sitting or standing?	
How intense is it?	

The first two questions are intended to uncover whether you are likely to observe in a situation where you may need to spend some time after the observation checking out exactly what was happening – either because you can see everything but not hear everything or because some of the exchanges need explanation.

The question about sitting or standing is concerned with how easy it will be to flip back and forth between several different sheets.

The final question is to do with invisibility. If you are observing someone taking part in a meeting or working in a fairly busy environment then it is fairly easy to slip into the background. If you are sitting in on a one-to-one interview of some kind then you have to work much harder at being invisible – and flicking backwards and forwards looking for the right box to note your comments in could be disturbing and intrusive.



Planning your observations

... continued

The answers to standards and environment may have already led you to the conclusion that there is only one way to carry out your observations successfully. If not, then you can also consider which approach is going to suit you the best.

Your preferences

If you have carried out Tool 6C *Watching for results* you have had a useful trial run of the process of making records of observation. Does one method feel more comfortable or likely to produce better quality evidence?

You may decide that you should start with the note-taking approach but you could swap over once you become more familiar with the standards you assess.

Once you have worked through this exercise discuss your conclusions with your internal verifier and, if possible, with more experienced assessors. You may also want to discuss what paperwork the centre produces for records of observation (if any). In Unit 14 *Standard forms* there is a blank version of the kind of *Record of evidence* form used which could be adapted to the standards you are assessing (see Tool 14D *Record of evidence/observation* on page 14–9).

The important thing about this exercise is to arrive at the method that is going to allow you to produce good evidence for your candidate – real data which will convince any external verifier that this candidate really is competent!

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TIP

In addition to records of observation like the ones you have used in Tool 6C *Watching for results* it is sometimes helpful to have a summary of the particular *unit* you are observing available whilst you are carrying out your observations – just to remind you what you are looking for! It is especially useful if you use the note-taking approach. Most printed copies of *standards* will have a *unit* summary like the one for the *Holiday NVQ* on page 2–8 of Unit 2 *Understanding the qualification*. Some *standards* are also printed with a brief description of each of the units like the example below.

Example:

Administration Level 2

Unit 4: Create and maintain effective working relationships

This unit is about the candidate's ability to develop and maintain harmonious and productive working relationships with other staff, individually or in teams. It is also about their ability to receive visitors to the workplace and deal with them in response to their needs or to route them to other relevant staff.

Element 4.1 Establish and maintain working relationships with other members of staff

Element 4.2 Receive and assist visitors

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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

The NVQ Assessor Toolkit is a Toolkit designed to allow the assessor to build the necessary knowledge and understanding to tackle the assessor role competently. The tools provide materials for individual study and reference.

The first section concentrates on the basic knowledge the assessor needs. It looks first at the basics of National Vocational Qualifications and occupational standards, explaining the terminology and underlying principles. It turns next to the individual area the assessor will be working in, providing materials and exercises to support them in exploring and understanding the standards. It then looks at issues of learning and coping with change in order to help the assessor understand the needs of candidates better. Finally it explores the role of the assessor and provides an opportunity for individuals to assess their skills and potential.

The second section consists of a series of segments looking at the skills and issues involved in assessment. These are designed to be used by individuals as developmental material as they tackle the assessor's role. They are approximately in the order in which they are likely to arise but can be selected from as needs and issues occur. They will enable the assessor to prepare for each situation, and will also provide practical tools to help the assessor carry out each of the tasks.

The third section is a self-assessment exercise which serves as the basis for an ongoing self-development plan – intended to help new assessors to continue the development of the skills and knowledge required for this complex task.

The last section is for reference and includes a glossary of all the technical terms, a series of useful forms and an invaluable HELP guide to remind assessors of the key points at every stage of their task.

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