



# PROVIDING STRUCTURE TO WRITTEN QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK: THE BOSS FRAMEWORK

[[ Facilitator Name ]]

[[ Facilitator's Academic Position ]]

[[ Division/Department and  
Institution ]]

[[ Date ]]



# DISCLOSURES

[[ The Facilitator needs to disclose her or his relevant conflicts of interest]]

# ABOUT ME

[[ Number of years as a clinical educator ]]

- [[ Clinical service ]]
- [[ Administrative roles ]]
- [[ Research/Scholarly work regarding feedback ]]

[[ Type of learners that she or he has precepted ]]

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ❑ **Recognize** the components of effective written qualitative feedback
- ❑ **Develop** statements for written feedback using the BOSS method (Brief Observation, Significance, and Suggestions)
- ❑ **Assess** the quality of written feedback based on the opinions of learners

# THE IMPORTANCE OF STRUCTURED WRITTEN FEEDBACK

Learners at all stages are interested in receiving feedback about their performances

Documentation of feedback allows learners to reflect on their continuing growth as professionals

- Oral feedback may be forgotten but written feedback allows for contemporaneous tracking of growth

Written qualitative feedback allows for fellows to “close the loop” with feedback

- It helps to answer whether feedback was incorporated into further practice

Nonspecific feedback is unlikely to change practices

- Therefore, feedback has to be structured in a way to be specific to learners

# WHAT ARE LEARNERS LOOKING FOR?

[[ Distribution of the Script Concordance Self-Assessment ]]

12 current and recent fellow physicians graded the quality of these 10 items

See how your perceptions about quality of feedback line up to theirs



# REVIEW OF ANSWERS

[[ Answers from the self-assessment reviewed ]]

[[ Participants are encouraged to discuss why they chose the answers they did ]]

# COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE WRITTEN FEEDBACK

Based on this exercise conducted at the University of Iowa, these seem to be components of effective written feedback:

Brevity (Nothing over one paragraph)

Objectivity (It can be observed)

Mutual/Cooperativity (Lack of judgmentalism)

Appropriate to the level of the learner (Not too basic, not too advanced)



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# THE BOSS-METHOD

Directed and succinct way of transmitting feedback to learners

- Piloted at the University of Iowa Division of Immunology

The BOSS Method consists of three interconnected components





# BRIEF OBSERVATION

The first component is to briefly state one's observations

- One-sentence summary of what has been observed on one or more occasions

Specificity is welcomed, but be aware that it may undercut the anonymity of comments

- “Often,” “Sometimes,” and “Frequently” may be useful when documenting multiple occasions

Observations should be as objective and neutral as possible

- Avoid words like “is,” “appears,” “seems,” “looks like,” or “believes” – these are statements
- Consider active verbs (e.g. does, says, exhibits, inspects, etc.)

When possible, consider documenting the presence of certain behaviors

- In other words, minimize statements emphasizing absence, like “Dr. ABC does not ...”

# BETWEEN JUDGMENT AND OBSERVATION

Observations are *impressions* of the learner from the perspective of the evaluator

- Think of a journalist narrating the facts

By contrast, judgments are *normative statements* expressing the opinions of an evaluator

- Think of a review on Amazon, or a YouTube comment

The line between the two is very thin, but try the following litmus tests:

- Prefix the statement with “I observed/noticed that ...”
- Use gestalt: Consider how you would react to such a comment. Is it an observation or a judgment?

# EXAMPLES

## Judgment

“Dr. XXX does not take ownership of patients”

“Dr. XXX spends too much time on the computer in the patient room”

“Dr. XXX is very knowledgeable”

Now, how would you make these into observations?

## Observation

“Follow-up calls for patients are often delayed.”

“Eye contact between Dr. XXX and patients is brief”

“Dr. XXX routinely performs literature searches to develop his knowledge base”



# SIGNIFICANCE

Unless an observation has significance to the learner, it is unlikely to be received well

- You may as well save your time and effort rather than write something insignificant

Significance is much more subjective and opinionated

- Unless it is articulated well, the evaluator and learner may be on two different wavelengths



# SIGNIFICANCE FOR LEARNERS VS. EVALUATORS

Comments should be of convincing significance to learners

- Significance should always be explained from the learner's point of view
- I.e. Why should she or he care about this comment?

Evaluators should be authentic in their statements

- Avoid hyperbole or exaggerations

There should be a clear link between the Brief observation and the significance.

Consider this litmus test:

- Prefix "That's important because ..." [If it is awkward or unconvincing, then it's likely not significant]
- Or use gestalt: is this something the learner should remember 1 month from now?

# EXAMPLES

## Significant for Evaluators

“Because family history was not documented, the visit couldn’t be billed as Level 5”

“He comes late to my clinic disrupting patient flow”

“I appreciate the details in his note”

How can we highlight significance for learners?

## Significant for Learners

“Billing is an important skill to master and fellowship is an ideal time to learn it”

“Effective time management maximizes opportunities for learning in clinic”

“Detailed documentation shows how professional a physician is”



# SUGGESTIONS

Observations must be paired with suggestions for self-improvement

Suggestions have to be realistic and somewhat measurable

- Suggestions can be very flexible but must provide direction

This may include

- Access to resources
- Encouragement of deliberative practice
- Recommendations for alternative approaches

# SUGGESTIONS FOR PROVIDING SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions must be respectful and culturally appropriate

As with Brief observations, they should not be judgmental

Suggestions are not mandates

- Avoid “needs to” or “must”
- Avoid threatening wording

Ideally, these should have been relayed to learners in person

# EXAMPLES OF SUGGESTIONS

## Less preferred suggestions

“He should continue to read to increase his knowledge base”

“She needs to stop looking at her cell phone”

“Notes must be written on time”

How would we change these to suggestions?

## Preferred types of suggestions

“The MKSAP is a good source to update medical knowledge”

“Placing cell phones on silent during the patient encounter may be helpful”

“Consider finishing notes soon after clinic, and updating labs later on”

# PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

“Dr. XXX occasionally skips nail inspection during the physical exam. This is a missed opportunity to find onychodystrophy, clubbing, and dropout – findings that can change the assessment drastically. We discussed that nails can be briefly and unobtrusively inspected during the examination of the distal interphalangeal joints.”

“Dr. ABC mentions a thorough list of differential diagnoses. This list is important in directing workup in a cost-effective manner; having too many diagnoses may lead to overdiagnosis and/or overtreatment. I recommend dedicated practice in paring down the list to the 3-5 most likely diagnoses and plans to further evaluate if the list needs to be expanded later on.”



# QUESTIONS?

[[ Participants are encouraged to ask questions, engage in discussion, and even participate in debate ]]



# TRY IT YOURSELF!

In front of you, you'll find 1-3 comments found on written qualitative feedback forms

Try to structure it in the BOSS format

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# DEBRIEF

What do you think of the structured statements compared to the unstructured ones?

How do you anticipate you would react to receiving such feedback (in unstructured and then structured formats)?

How else would you try to clearly articulate your message?

# SCRIPT CONCORDANCE POST-ACTIVITY SELF ASSESSMENT

[[ The Follow-Up Self-Assessment will be provided, along with Survey/Questionnaire  
]]



# REVIEW OF POST-ACTIVITY SELF-ASSESSMENT

How did you do?

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**FINAL THOUGHTS?**