

Tips for Writing Narrative Comments and Examples

“Written feedback should contain focused, coherent phrases that help reflection on current and future clinical performance.”

Ref: Harvey, Radomski & O'Connor (see reference below)

1. **The narrative should be organized.**
2. **Match narrative to items on evaluation form and syllabus objectives.**
3. **Do not give a grade as part of your narrative. For example, “John performed at the honors level in all respects during his time with me.”**
4. **Don't feel that all areas/domains on the evaluation form have to be addressed but try to become aware of areas/ domains you may have a tendency to not address.**
5. **Stories or specific examples are helpful.**

John was excellent at helping to educate our patients. I observed him explain the terms HDL and LDL to a patient and was impressed with his ability to explain these concepts clearly without using medical jargon. He even prepared a handout on this topic for patients that I now place in my waiting room.

6. **Have a strategy.**
 - A. Address areas/domains on evaluation form systematically
 - B. Give examples/stories
 - C. Think about the RIME model of student roles (Reporter, Interpreter, Manager, Educator) as a source of ideas for comments.
 - D. Helpful for student if suggestions for improvement can be used on next clerkship.
 - E. Be aware that some of your comments might be used in Dean's letter.

7. **Example Narrative for Strengths**

John displayed excellence in clinical reasoning, medical knowledge, teamwork, patient communication, and using feedback. He gave concise, organized and accurate oral presentations. He did an excellent job of explaining the clinical reasoning that supported his recommendations for next steps with patients. His fund of knowledge was solid and he was well acquainted with e-resources such as DynaMed and Up-To-Date which he used regularly to help us make evidence-based decisions. I directly observed him doing H&Ps on patients and watched him grow in his ability to be accurate and efficient while still showing a caring attitude. He was a team player with my staff and was always willing to stay and help them beyond normal hours. He was always professional, kind, and courteous to patients. Several patients told me how much they liked him. John was very good at accepting feedback and using that information for constantly improving which is something I don't see in all students.

8. **Examples for What Student Needs to Improve**

The only suggestion I can make for improvement is that I would like to see John reduce the number of possibilities he includes in his differentials. While his thoroughness can be appreciated, it sometimes reduces his ability to think about what actions to take in a timely manner.

I believe that John needs to expand his problem list and differentials. This is best done by listening to the patient to obtain a complete problem list and then to think carefully about the anatomy and physiology relative to the chief complaint and to never eliminate something unless it has been actually eliminated.

9. Example Narrative for Dean's Letter of Evaluation (Speak to what residency directors value)

John is professional in every way. His great communication skills and appropriate confidence and skills when taking histories and examining patients engendered patient trust in him. I often had patients tell me what a great doctor they thought he would be. I was always comfortable that I could trust him to be thorough and to check with me when he was unsure of something. He was very good at paying attention to detail without losing sight of the big picture. He always was courteous to my health care team and he was truly a team member who was willing to do whatever was needed regardless of the level of the task. effective

10. Example Narrative that Tells a Story

John displays patient centered skills more than any student I have taught. On numerous occasions I have seen him talk with patients about choices they can make to enhance their health. He never seems to be judgmental about patient decisions which I admit to not doing so well myself. John's body language and eye contact when talking to patients about sensitive topics is excellent and somehow his ability to just listen to the patient's story is something, I can learn from him. Recently, I observed him with an elderly patient who had some bad health habits and needed to get some tests done. When I had worked with the same patient in the past, I was unable to convince him the tests were important and necessary. Instead of trying to "convince the patient" John just listened to him and affirmed his feelings and fears. Instead of pushing the patient he just sort of nudged him. The patient decided to get the tests that were indicated, and I am happy to report the patient is now moving forward to better health and he and I both feel better, thanks to John.

Selected References.

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