Narratives:
A Great Assessment Tool or Fairy Tale

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What kinds of instruction are you involved in that require narrative assessments?
WHAT FOR?

- When and why are you writing this narrative?
- Who will read it, and what will be its potential impacts?
- What are some advantages of narratives over other forms of assessment?
For MSI Problem Based Learning (PBL)

- Written at end of each semester of PBL as its only form of assessment. [No exams.]

- Used at CAPS meetings and for Dean’s letters.

- A behavioral problem identified in PBL often shows up elsewhere.

- Can contribute toward a student’s being sent forward or held back.
Advantages of Narratives

- Another evaluation tool more appropriate in certain teaching situations.
- Can assess performance behaviors that cannot be evaluated by multiple-choice exams, often related to Professionalism skills.
- Provides more meaningful content for a recommendation letter.
ABOUT WHAT?

- What is it you are writing about?
- What skills are you assessing?
What skills are being assessed in PBL?

1. Use of student’s own knowledge base
2. Knowledge acquisition/active learning
3. Critical thinking/reasoning/problem-solving
4. Teamwork and communication
BASIS FOR YOUR WORDS?

- What will your narrative be based upon, specifically?
- In other words, what actions are you taking to gather information for your narrative (how do you assess what you are assessing)?
- How can you make simple “observation” more meaningful?
How much exposure to each learner is enough?

- For PBL, the groups are small (no more than 8 students per group).
- Each faculty facilitator has fifteen 1 ½ hour sessions with their group.
- Five clinical cases are analyzed.
Gathering info

- Observation skills
  - Do you know what you are looking for?
  - Are you awake?
  - What note-worthy behaviors are you seeing?

- Make notes, notes, more notes!

- Take time for reflection on those notes to make justifiable judgments on performance

- Commitment to the effort
2. Demonstrates Knowledge Acquisition Skills

- Shows *inquisitiveness*.
- Identifies gaps in knowledge leading to basic science Learning Issues.
- Seeks and uses a variety of quality resources in finding information, and knows how to evaluate them.
- Presents Learning Issue research with proper depth and relevance, in a style that *teaches* well, using correct medical terminology.
- Complements information presented by others.
WHAT WORDS?

- What is a meaningful, behavior-based narrative, and how do you write one?
- Why are some narratives not very meaningful? What is missing and why?
Generally, ...........

- Avoid use of words like “good” and “excellent” unless accompanied by behavior-based examples.

- Avoid surprises!

  [Facilitator-student mid-term one-on-one occurs early in PBL. Key: “Suggestions for Improvement.”]
Examples of Behavior-based Evaluation

- “Great teaching style shown when she discussed alcohol metabolism, putting an excellent diagram on the board from clear, well-organized notes.”

- “Missing several sessions without excuse, he seldom spoke, hiding behind his computer. He failed to abide by a mid-term improvement plan.”
From Notes to Narrative

See Handout example