Teaching a Medical Student on a Clerkship, Selective or Elective? Narrative comments are essential in the evaluation process and offer important points of feedback contributing to the professional development of the student physician. Evaluations must provide a clear and forthright picture of the student. Be honest and fair, as these comments may be used in their entirety in the student's Medical School Performance Evaluation.

Many faculty have grown used to writing summative narrative comments that consist of a single sentence or phrase, like the following: “Student did an excellent job.” “Student was consistent and performed as expected.” Instead, it is more helpful to the student as feedback, and to those trying to get a sense of the student from written comments, if the written comments address some key performance categories.

How has this student performed in 5 key performance categories?

• History & Physical Exam
• Clinical/Research Decision-Making (assessment, reasoning & communication)
• Medical and Scientific Knowledge
• Compassion and Humanism
• Professionalism

In each area, does the student meet or exceed expectations or fall short? Describe areas that the student should work on to improve their performance.

The following show two examples that provide helpful feedback and useful written evaluative comments—one for a student who meets most expectations and one for a student who does not:

Met expectations in all areas. Conducts thorough H&Ps with well-focused questions; detailing as appropriate to obtain needed information. Concise well-organized patient presentations include all pertinent H&P data. Good analysis and assessment with justified care plan. Knowledge level appropriate for training. Raised good questions and found up-to-date journal or text resources on own. Good ability to relate pharmacology to normal/abnormal physiologic function. Capable of contributing more to team by increasing participation in discussions. Demonstrates good rapport with patients; takes time to listen attentively. On time for rounding and conferences; completes work in a timely fashion.

OR

Follow-up with focused questions would help hone your H&P. Presentations, though accurate, could use more supporting detail on critical problems. Additional reading on your patient’s key problems would help you and the team gain insight into the etiology and pathophysiology of the patient’s disorder. This would provide you with opportunities to participate and contribute to the team. Being available to start rounds on time is a way of demonstrating respect for colleagues. Although efficiency is valued, especially in the clinic, care must be taken not to appear too “cool” or brusque with both patients and colleagues; always be sure to respect the personal boundaries of others.