2016 Feedback Comments: Frequently Asked Questions

What do item-level comments look like in 2016?

Based on the voice of the customer:
• Comments have three elements: a "nugget" or **main point expressed in the first sentence**, one or two **examples**, and the **relevance** of the strength or opportunity for improvement (OFI) to the applicant. Except for the first sentence containing the "nugget," **the elements don't have to be in a particular order.**
• Comments are **no longer than 75 words or 500 characters** of text
• Each comment is **preceded by a numerical Criteria item reference**.

In writing comments,
• Step back and write a single thought/conclusion that makes clear why the comment is relevant to the applicant based on your observations/evidence.
• Include examples, but don't simply list the evidence or tell applicants what they already know (such as long descriptions of approaches and results). Applicants discard these pieces of the comment.

In other words, **Customer Focus => Relevance, Importance => Synthesize, Summarize, Prioritize.**

Where can I find examples of these comments?
All examiners received materials and samples during training. Many of these materials, as well as other samples and e-learning modules, are available in The Partnership for Excellence's Examiner Learning Resource Center. **http://www.thepartnershipforexcellence.org/resources_training.html**

Do the Comment Guidelines still apply?
Yes.

How can I include enough Criteria language in these shorter comments?
In a feedback report, each comment will be preceded by a Criteria item reference, so comments need less of the Criteria language. Use your judgment, and include only as much as is necessary.

How can I include all of the applicant's examples in these shorter comments?
Include one or two of the most important or relevant examples, summarize them, or use figure numbers to summarize, depending on the point you want to make to the applicant.

How can I include all the evaluation factors I see in the application?
Ask yourself, "What's the strength or OFI that the applicant needs to hear? What factor or factors are relevant to that strength or OFI?" In other words, *focus the comment on the factor(s) that are most important to the applicant* (e.g., if the important element of the comment is deployment, there is no need to add text on approach, learning, and integration).

How can I support the scoring range if I don't address all the evaluation factors (e.g., if the application shows deployment, but it doesn't rise to the top of the "around six" comments to include)?
Base the score on the entire body of evidence the team has found. Comments address the most important strengths and OFIs from that evidence. Even if the comments don't address an evaluation factor, the description of the scoring range covers all of the factors.

How can I include all the evidence I've documented?
The customer for your comments is the applicant. Therefore, consider the relevance and importance of examples to your point and include one or two pieces of evidence, as well as cross-references to the application. In contrast, the customers for the evidence you collect are your teammates and the Panel of Judges. Use the evidence column (in Independent Review) and the rationale field (in Consensus Review) to share all your evidence with them.

How can I show all the multiple requirements the applicant has responded to?
The guidance is to write "around six" comments for each item. Therefore, you'll need to prioritize the strengths and OFIs and write comments on the six or so that are the most important for the applicant to know about.

How do I show the relevance of a Strength?
Tying a strength comment to a very important Key Factor will often show the relevance. Strength comments highlight what you consider a role-model practice or role-model results, or a process or results you feel the applicant should continue or build on based on its key factors and the Criteria.

Isn't it prescriptive to point to a tie between a Strength and a Key Factor?
Examiners are empowered by law to conduct an "intensive evaluation" of the evidence presented by an organization. Using your judgment to make connections among the Criteria, the applicant's processes or results, and the applicant's key factors is within the boundaries of this evaluation.

In writing an OFI, how can I give the applicant credit for the part of an approach or the few results that are strong?
Applicants have told us that they discard "although" and "while" statements at the beginning of OFIs. For a low-scoring applicant, consider moving these "althoughs" and "whiles" to stand-alone strengths. For a more mature applicant, these phrases may not be important enough to stand alone as strength comments. If that is the case, delete them, or include the information in another way if it is essential to the point.

How do I write the "nugget" for "what" questions in the Criteria?
Try to tie your response to a Key Factor that shows the relevance to the applicant, or write about how, for example, the missing "what" might affect a key factor or process.

What are some guidelines for Key Themes?
Applicants have told us that they don't need a laundry list of examples in a key theme. Therefore, strip out language that parrots the application, and consider synthesizing and summarizing key theme content to make the key themes easy to understand. Apply the relevance/importance criterion in choosing examples to include.

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