

“Don’t lower your expectations to meet your performance. Raise your level of performance to meet your expectations. Expect the best of yourself, and then do what is necessary to make it a reality.”

Ralph Marston, American personal development expert

# 1 IMPROVING PERFORMANCE

What Kind of Learner Do You Want to Be?

Introducing Jennifer

Initial Assessment of Yourself as a Learner

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## What Kind of Learner Do You Want to Be?

Welcome to the start of your new learning journey! Seeing college, and life, as a series of journeys is a cliché, it’s true. And yet, college *is* in many ways a journey. This book will help you navigate the exciting and challenging road ahead. This road will not end when you graduate, of course. It will continue on to new destinations, doubtless with a few detours and rest stops along the way. The learning skills presented in this book will help you become a more confident traveler.

Some of you may have taken a cross-country trip with friends before you started college. Chances are you planned for the trip and packed according to your plans. You probably had a great adventure, and you now know more about how to plan for the next trip: how to read and navigate from a map, how much money to bring, how to negotiate disagreements among travelers, how to leave behind what is not needed, and where you might like to go next. You have increased your skills as a traveler. In other words, you have increased your foundational skills for traveling. *Foundations of Learning* will offer you a similar kind of guidebook for college and beyond. Despite good planning, there are skills you may not even know you need for college. This book will make those skills explicit and provide you with activities and reflections that will help you strengthen them.

Regardless of what career path you have chosen to follow, your main identity now is as a learner. What kind of learner do you want to be? A passive, “back seat” learner? Or an active learner who performs well and receives positive feedback from instructors? To help you meet this goal, we will explain a theory of performance that identifies factors that will affect your level of performance. Based on the Performance Model, you can evaluate yourself as a learner, and based on that determination, identify your goals for the course.

Being in this course, and in college, makes you part of a learning community. You will be given many opportunities to work with others. You will all enrich each other’s learning and the development of your skills. We have also created a learning community for this book, made up of fictional students. Their job is to help turn theory into visible practice—and to give you an overall story that may parallel your own or that may give you points of contrast with your own story.

Let’s meet Jennifer...

*“It is good to have an end to journey towards but it is the journey that matters in the end.”*

Science fiction writer  
Ursula K. Le Guin



GLOSSARY

context

learning skills

performance

rubric

self-grower



Jennifer is an eighteen-year-old first-year student who plans to major in journalism.

Her aunt is a photojournalist who works for travel magazines, and she inspired Jenn to do a lot of writing in high school. Jenn worked on the yearbook during her junior and senior years and won a few writing contests along the way. Although she did well in high school, Jenn is a bit nervous moving from a small school to a large college.

What are the stories of the people sitting next to you right now? What are their goals? What, exactly, are YOUR goals? Throughout this book, we will direct you to activities at the end of each chapter. These activities will give you opportunities to actively engage in your own learning. You must finish the activities before you return to the rest of the chapter. Activity 1.1—Building Learning Communities will help you get to know your classmates by encouraging you to explore and share your educational and life goals and expectations.



## PROCEED TO ACTIVITY 1.1 (page 25)

Just as you have goals or objectives for this course and yourself as a learner, there are also learning objectives woven through each chapter and activity in *Foundations of Learning*. These include the knowledge and skills you should gain as a result of working with the content of each chapter.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES



After you finish Chapter 1, you should be able to:

- Practice assessment through the completion of an initial self-assessment
- Identify your current level as a performer
- Gain from a syllabus the key aspects of any course
- Identify two measurable goals for this course

How can you tell if you're meeting the learning objectives? You can find out by being evaluated by an instructor or fellow student, but perhaps the best way is to take the time to reflect upon what you're doing and how you're doing it. This is called *critical reflection*.



## The Performance Model

For a moment, think of all the things you know how to do well. Now, think about how you went from being a beginner to an accomplished performer in these areas. You integrated skills and knowledge to produce a valuable result. For example, if you have been asked to design a logo for the student newspaper, you will integrate multiple factors to perform well as an artist, even if you are not aware of them.

A group of educators from all over the country have outlined the factors that make up a theory of performance. This Performance Model consists of: identity, skills, knowledge, context, personal factors, and fixed factors. You have some control over all of these, with the exception of fixed factors. Your development and growth in the five remaining areas will continue throughout your life. Knowing that you have this control should give you a great deal of confidence to learn new things in college and in life. To continue our trip metaphor, you are in the driver’s seat.



**Table 1.1 Components that Interact to Establish Level of Performance**

<b>Identity</b>	As individuals mature in a discipline, they take on the shared identity of the professional community while elevating their own uniqueness. For a learner to perform well, he or she must have a strong identity as a member of a learning community. A student demonstrates identity as a learner when engaging in learning activities, such as attending classes and studying. A student who is majoring in psychology begins to demonstrate identity within that field by using the terminology of psychology.
<b>Skills</b>	Skills describe specific actions that are used by individuals, groups, or organizations in multiple types of performances. Within education, the focus is on those skills that are transferable across contexts and allow individuals to improve their mastery of subject matter. These are known as <i>learning skills</i> . Learners who perform well work to increase their mastery of learning skills.
<b>Knowledge</b>	Knowledge involves facts, information, concepts, theories, or principles acquired by a person or group through experience or education. You are learning about the Performance Model right now and are adding to your knowledge with every word you read.
<b>Context</b>	This component includes variables associated with the situation in which the individual or organization performs. Each time you perform as a learner, you do so within a specific context, which includes a number of variables. For example, your performance in this course has, as its context, the way you meet (in a classroom? online?), how often you meet as a class, the length of the term (a full semester? an intensive summer course?), and so on. Chapter 6 deals with context of performance in depth.
<b>Personal Factors</b>	This component includes variables associated with the personal situation of an individual. Your performance as a student depends a great deal upon your personal factors and the life situation you are in. This can be a significant challenge. To use a simple example, how well are you able to study if you’re tired because you worked late last night? Because personal factors can present a significant challenge to performing well, Chapter 7 deals with addressing personal obstacles.
<b>Fixed Factors</b>	This component includes variables unique to an individual that cannot be altered. These are the only aspect of performance that cannot be altered and include items such as the first language you learned, color-blindness, etc. While your performance as a learner is certainly affected by fixed factors, it is a mistake to assume that your performance is constrained by these factors.

## Dissecting a Performance

In order to identify the different components of performance, we need to isolate a performance. Fortunately, we have Jennifer, whose goal is to become fluent in Spanish and work as a journalist on a Spanish-language publication.

Let's examine her performance as a student striving to meet this goal...



<b>Jennifer's Identity</b>	Jenn has decided to become a reporter for the student newspaper, so that she can begin to learn what journalists do on a day-to-day basis. She is also looking forward to the workshops journalists from local papers give for the college newspaper staff every month. When she has established a comfortable schedule, Jenn would like to volunteer at a local Spanish-language newspaper written by middle and high school students, <i>La Voz Latina</i> (The Latin Voice).
<b>Jennifer's Learning Skills</b>	Although Jennifer has studied Spanish for many years, she has not lived near to any large community of Spanish speakers. Her perceptions of individual cultures come from reading and the few Spanish speaking friends she has, mainly from Mexico. Now that Jenn has joined the Spanish-language lunch group on campus, she can meet students from all over: Spain, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Argentina, and Puerto Rico. She has begun to observe and appreciate the cultural differences among these students, including the use of idioms, the sense of personal space, and general world views. Jenn notes down her perceptions once a week, and checks them against the next week's interactions.
<b>Jennifer's Knowledge</b>	Jennifer now realizes that becoming a successful journalist means that she has a good deal to learn about the cultures, journalistic practices, history, and contemporary issues of the Spanish-speaking world. She is enrolled in a class on Current Issues in Latin America, and the instructor has an assignment on reading Latin American newspapers, either in Spanish or in English. Jenn is putting her new knowledge of current affairs to good use with her Spanish-language lunch group; the lunch group is always happy to share their opinions on these issues.
<b>Jennifer's Context</b>	When Jenn does her newspaper assignment for class, she also tries to analyze the differences in writing style and use of sources between an American and a Latin American newspaper. This is more challenging than she thought it would be, but it strengthens her plan to work on a Spanish-language newspaper here in town. Jenn is now more aware of the different contexts she has worked in as journalist: the school yearbook and the college newspaper. Working on a local paper seems to be the next step, and then, maybe writing articles in Spanish.
<b>Jennifer's Personal Factors</b>	Jenn has a good roommate, but she still finds it hard to study Spanish at home because their space is so small. She often goes to the library or the language lab. Although she worked and saved money over the summer, Jenn is considering getting a part-time job during the semester. She is debating whether a better budget or a job would be the smartest way to have a little extra money and still succeed at her academic goals.
<b>Jennifer's Fixed Factors</b>	As a native English speaker, Jenn will always have that as her language base. She may always have a bit of an American accent in Spanish. However, Jenn has a good ear for languages, and that has helped her Spanish pronunciation. She does not have a good sense of rhythm, though. She has realized she will probably never be a world-class Latin dancer, though going to dances will be part of fitting into Latino culture.

This book is specifically designed to help you as you work to improve your performance as a student. It 1) provides information and **knowledge** you need in order to perform as a learner, 2) gives you a solid foundation for **identifying** yourself as a college student and learner, 3) includes activities and assignments focused upon improving your **learning skills**, 4) contains information about your new **context**, as a college student, 5) introduces ways to help you deal with your **personal factors**.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?



### Learning Skills

While all of the components that make up your performance as a learner are important, working on and improving your learning skills is especially critical, as there is a direct correlation between your mastery of those skills and your success as a student. With that in mind, return to “How to Use this Book” (directly preceding Chapter 1) and review the list of 25 learning skills that were identified as central to *Foundations of Learning*. From that list, select five skills that you are willing to focus on, over the course of this class. List those skills below, along with a short explanation of why you have selected that skill.

Learning Skill 1 \_\_\_\_\_

*Why?* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Learning Skill 2 \_\_\_\_\_

*Why?* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Learning Skill 3 \_\_\_\_\_

*Why?* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Learning Skill 4 \_\_\_\_\_

*Why?* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Learning Skill 5 \_\_\_\_\_

*Why?* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Jennifer's Selected Learning Skills:

**Observing:** This is probably the most important skill I can work on in order to meet my goal of becoming a journalist. I can see that it's also a really important skill for a successful student.

**Exploring Context:** In order to write and report, I have to be able to understand and appreciate how pieces fit into the whole.

**Inquiring:** Another important skill for my goals. I'm not really shy, but I do need to learn how to ask the questions that matter in meaningful ways.



**Collaborating:** I'll admit that I'm not a really strong collaborator...I like to work alone. But I know that just doesn't cut it either for my role as a student OR my future role as a professional journalist. This one will be a bit of a struggle.

**Taking an Interest in Others:** I'm already a 'people watcher' so I do have a natural curiosity, but there's a difference between watching people (observing) and actually being interested. Hmm...this one could be a bit tough as well, but I'm up for the challenge.

## Levels of Performance

Performance, as the adage goes, is a “journey not a destination.” No matter where you are right now, you always have the ability to improve your performance. Your current location in this journey is your current level of performance. Table 1.2 (on the following page) characterizes five different levels of performance across four different aspects or areas of a performance.

These areas encompass most aspects of what you do through life. The area of *Knowledge* deals with activities and processes such as processing information, understanding, applying knowledge, solving problems, and conducting research. The *Social Interactions* area has to do with communicating, relating with others, managing relationships, and leadership. The area of *Attitude* includes processes such as being open to new experiences, actively engaging in life, being organized, and cultivating personal values. The fourth area, that of *Abilities*, is most generally concerned with what you actually do with the knowledge and skills that you have.

You have already demonstrated your commitment to success by enrolling in college. An important next step in your journey of performance and growth is to assess your current level of performance. Though self-assessment is never a completely comfortable process, Sir Francis Bacon had a point when he said, “Knowledge is power.” Having a clear idea of your current level of performance makes it that much easier to plan how to improve your performance and go from where you are now to where you'd really like to be.

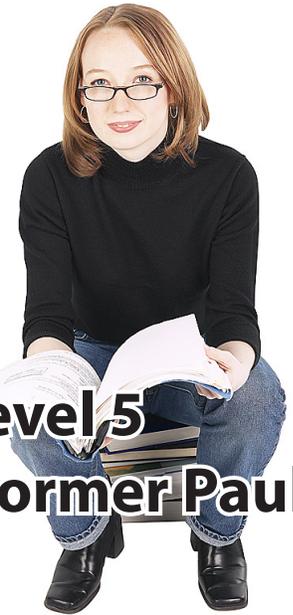
Table 1.2 on the next page is called a *rubric*. A rubric is a table that identifies characteristics of different levels of attainment using phrases to describe what each level looks like. This rubric is designed to help you determine your own level of performance.



Table 1.2 Continuum of Performance Levels

	Knowledge	Social Interactions	Attitude	Abilities
<b>Level 5</b> <i>Star Performers</i>	Can construct and modify models; valued and respected by experts in the field	Create movements and organizations that often become self-perpetuating	Control their destiny; also can control their emotions in challenging situations	Have highly developed learning and research abilities that enable them to excel
<b>Level 4</b> <i>Self-Starters</i>	Are able to add to the knowledge in their discipline	Use relationships effectively to attain success for themselves and others	Seek greater challenges and responsibilities to perform at a higher level; push the boundaries of their own performance	Able to cultivate new abilities in unfamiliar areas
<b>Level 3</b> <i>Responsive Individuals</i>	Use their problem-solving, learning, and thinking skills to improve their performance and get higher-quality results	Are positive people whom others enjoy and want to have on their teams	React to challenges with improved performance rather than complaints, feeling good about their accomplishments	Are able to learn from how other people function in a particular area
<b>Level 2</b> <i>Content Individuals</i>	Are satisfied with their modest levels of effort in gaining knowledge	Interact freely with family and friends, but do not seek more diverse contacts and more challenging relationships	Feel like a cog in the machinery, doing little more than what is asked, feeling their contributions are not very significant	Have enough critical thinking and analytic abilities to perform some problem-solving
<b>Level 1</b> <i>Static Individuals</i>	Try to minimize or avoid the effort needed to gain knowledge	Limit their social interactions to like-minded individuals who complain about what they are not getting out of life	Feel that whatever they do will have little impact, that most things are not worth the effort	Must have explicitly defined rules, procedures and policies; need to be prompted to finish something

I'm still only an undergraduate, but my decision to study pre-med is clearly the right choice. While I was doing research on community health clinics for an honors course, I got involved in organizing a local community health education initiative. I've applied for several grants for the project and it looks like the funding will come through. I've been asked to speak at a national conference on community health and while I'm a bit nervous about addressing such a large group, the important thing is that the project is getting the attention it deserves and that I can help it continue to grow.



**Level 5**

**Star Performer Paula**

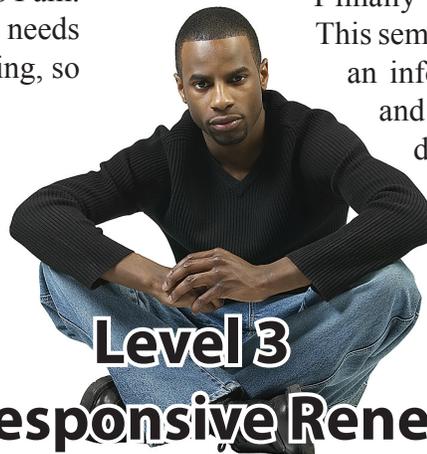
I'm meeting with a couple of other international business majors about a paper we wrote that's been accepted for *The Journal of Global Business*. Paul, my mentor, has helped put me in touch with some other people who are working on some of the same business problems I am. My research paper still needs some reference checking, so I've got to go!



**Level 4**

**Self-Starter Sam**

I finally made it to the Dean's List! This semester is a real challenge (I'm an information technology major and my economics class just doesn't make a lot of sense to me), but I've started a couple of study groups. We all enjoy getting together and not just for the pizza; it's amazing how much we learn from each other.



**Level 3**

**Responsive Rene**

I like my classes, but really can't wait for Spring Break....some friends and I are going to Florida. How cool is that?! And I figure that as long as I pull mostly C's in my classes, I'll be able to get a job after I graduate. That's what matters, right?



**Level 2**

**Content Connie**

I have a great band, an OK part-time job, and tons of friends. Who needs more than that at 18? But my parents pushed the college thing, so I'm here. Yeah, I sort of like some of my classes, when I show up. My parents are not thrilled with my grades this semester—but I'm just not that into it.



**Level 1**

**Static Steve**



# Star Performance for a Learner

Throughout the rest of this book, we will work to help you improve your performance as a learner. In the list below, you will see the characteristics of a high quality learner and which chapters will focus on each of those characteristics.

Chapter	High Quality Learners...
<b>2</b> Strengthening Identity	<i>Exhibit learner ownership, taking responsibility for the learning process and their own learning.</i> <i>Make educational, career, and personal goals and plans through a Life Vision Portfolio.</i>
<b>3</b> Reading Methodology	<i>Use the Reading Methodology to capture all the meaning as they read, including new ideas and vocabulary. They summarize, analyze, and integrate what they've read.</i>
<b>4</b> Learning to Learn	<i>Focus on improving and developing their learning skills by modeling the learning process.</i> <i>Understand their own learning styles and use them effectively to increase their level of learning.</i>
<b>5</b> Problem Solving Skills	<i>Are strong problem solvers who are able to visualize, model, transfer, and synthesize concepts.</i> <i>Demonstrate interest, motivation, and desire to seek out new information, concepts, and challenges so they can apply them to new situations and problems.</i>
<b>6</b> Context of Performance	<i>Are aware of the environment in which they are working and learning and are able to use elements of that environment to their advantage.</i> <i>Have a vision for their life and can articulate goals and objectives with measurable outcomes in various areas of their lives.</i>
<b>7</b> Addressing Personal Obstacles	<i>Are willing to take risks and experiment; they are secure in their emotions and can accept failure as a productive event on the road to success.</i> <i>Use their self-esteem and self-confidence to successfully meet new and challenging learning situations, building upon successes to improve future performance.</i>
<b>8</b> Living in the Information Age	<i>Make regular use of appropriate tools and technologies and invest in learning new ones.</i> <i>Understand how to use the Information Processing Methodology and have strong information processing skills.</i>
<b>9</b> Finding and Working with Sources	<i>Access information quickly and are able to distinguish relevant from irrelevant information.</i> <i>Understand the principles of academic honesty and correctly document all researched information.</i>
<b>10</b> Writing in College	<i>Understand how to use the Writing Methodology for college assignments.</i> <i>Clarify, validate, and assess their understanding of a concept through verbal and written means.</i>
<b>11</b> Communication and Teamwork	<i>Demonstrate strong social skills, easily interact with other people, and are valued members of productive teams.</i>
<b>12</b> Assessment for Self-Improvement	<i>Are proficient at the process of assessment and seek to continually develop their self-assessment skills.</i>







## ACTIVITY 1.1



### Building Learning Communities

**Learning skills:** *attending, recording, taking an interest in others*

#### WHY



In this course you will become accustomed to working in teams or learning communities. In this environment, each team member has a certain role with responsibilities that promote the learning of the entire team. Getting to know your classmates, who will be learning partners for future activities, is a first step towards team building and developing teamwork skills. Social skills (which include teamwork skills) will benefit you in other courses you take in college as well as in social, community, and workplace settings.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES



1. Get to know your classmates and begin the process of team building.
2. Share some of your educational goals with others.

#### PERFORMANCE CRITERIA



*Criterion:* know your classmates better

*Attributes:*

- a. know the names of at least two people you didn't know before
- b. articulate two important pieces of information about two people you didn't know before

#### PLAN



1. Pick a partner who is someone you do not already know.
2. Before talking with your partner, individually answer the first four questions on the Interview Response Form found on the next page. Put your responses in the appropriate space.
3. Write down three more questions that you would like to ask your partner (space has been provided). Include your own responses to these questions.
4. Interview your partner using the questions on the Interview Response Form.
5. Document your partner's responses in the appropriate space.
6. Introduce your partner to another pair of students in the class.

#### EXERCISES



As a class, decide on what information from the interviews should be put into a class directory. Compile the information using a word processor. Distribute copies of the directory to all class members.

## Interview Response Form

1. Why did you choose to attend this school?

*Your response:*

*Your partner's response:*

2. Why are you taking this course?

*Your response:*

*Your partner's response:*

3. What do you expect to gain from this course?

*Your response:*

*Your partner's response:*

4. What are your top two educational goals at this time?

*Your response:*

*Your partner's response:*

***In order to complete questions 5 through 7, you will need to develop three additional questions that you'd like to ask your partner. Add those questions below, as well as your responses.***

5.

*Your response:*

*Your partner's response:*

6.

*Your response:*

*Your partner's response:*

7.

*Your response:*

*Your partner's response:*



## ACTIVITY 1.2



### Analyzing a Course Syllabus

**Learning skills:** *clarifying expectations, inquiring, prioritizing*

#### WHY



A well-written syllabus provides you with important information about a course including learning objectives, benefits to the student, content to be covered, important dates, and the basis for determining your grade. The syllabus involves an understood agreement between you and the instructor about what you will be expected to learn, the processes utilized to help you learn, and how you will be evaluated. By reading and analyzing the syllabus for a course, you know what to expect and where to concentrate your efforts to gain the most from that course.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES



1. Get a complete picture of this course including what the instructor expects from you.
2. Determine what you want from this course and how you are going to get it.

#### PERFORMANCE CRITERIA



*Criterion #1:* the inquiry questions produced concerning the syllabus

*Attributes:*

- a. formulation of at least three questions
- b. the answers to the formulated questions cannot be found in the syllabus
- c. answers to the questions are relevant to this course and have significant value to other students

*Criterion #2:* a plan of action for the course

*Attributes:*

- a. includes clear obtainable goals to achieve from the course
- b. includes tasks and associated hourly efforts required to meet goals
- c. lists the top five priorities for success

#### PLAN



1. Obtain a copy of the syllabus for this course (either as provided by your instructor, or use the sample syllabus available on the course resources website).
2. Answer the Critical Thinking Questions.
3. Write three questions that you would like answered about this course.
4. After your instructor decides how to address these questions (either through an in-class discussion or a consulting session), record the answers to the questions.
5. Write a plan of action for being a successful student in this course.



5. How will your grade be determined in this course?

6. What are the four most important things you believe a successful student must do to learn the most and to earn the best possible grade in this course?

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Inquiry questions about the syllabus

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Plan of action for the course

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