

# Setting Targets and Benchmarks

How to decide, before you collect data, what success looks like

A target (or benchmark) is the level of performance that tells you an outcome has been met. Berea's report template asks for one in **Part B** for every measure, and **Part C** asks whether you met it. Setting it **before** you collect data is what makes the result meaningful.

## Anatomy of a good target

Most strong targets have two parts:

1. **A performance standard:** what counts as acceptable work (for example, a score of 3 or higher on a 4-point rubric).
2. **A proportion:** how many need to reach that standard (for example, 80% of students).

**Example:** At least **80%** of capstone papers will score **3 (competent) or higher** on the rubric's argument criterion.

## More examples

| Measure                      | Target                                                                          |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Rubric-scored senior project | At least 75% of projects score "proficient" or higher on each rubric criterion. |
| Embedded exam questions      | Students answer at least 70% of the SLO-linked questions correctly, on average. |
| Workshop pre/post test       | At least 70% of participants improve their score from pre-test to post-test.    |
| User satisfaction survey     | At least 85% of respondents rate the service as satisfactory or better.         |
| Turnaround time              | At least 90% of routine requests are completed within five business days.       |

## How to pick the number

- **Start from a baseline.** If you have past results, set a target a little above where you've been.
- **Use professional judgment.** What level would faculty or staff in your area consider acceptable for a graduate or a well-run service?
- **Look outward.** Disciplinary standards, licensure cutoffs, or peer data can anchor a target.
- **Aim for informative, not easy.** A target everyone always meets won't tell you where to improve. One no one could meet won't either.

## Common pitfalls

- **Targets of 100%.** These are almost never realistic, and missing them says little.
- **Averages only.** "The average score will be 3.0" can hide a group of students well below standard. A proportion shows that group.
- **Moving the target after the fact.** If the target turns out to be wrong, keep it for this report, explain in Part C, and revise it next time.
- **No target at all.** Without one, the review rubric has nothing to judge the findings against.

Missing a target isn't failure. It's the most useful result an assessment can produce, because it points to where an action plan (Part D) could help.

*Created in collaboration with Claude AI.*