

Professional Practice Gap Analysis Tool

A gap analysis is a valuable tool during the beginning of an educational plan to take you from “I think I know what the problem is” to planning relevant professional development activities targeted to specifically address a clearly established professional practice gap, resulting in measurable outcomes. Analyzing a professional practice gap determines the gap between a current and desired state, underlying educational need(s), relevant competencies, and activities needed to close the identified gap.

Steps to assist in completing the Professional Gap Analysis:

Step 1	Determine the Desired State , the best practice, or where you want to be. The desired state is the level that activity planners would like the learners to achieve due to the educational activity. Where do we want to be? What should learners know, be able to do, or demonstrate after participating in the activity?
Step 2	Describe the Current State , which is the current level of practice of the target audience. What is happening in practice right now? What are learners currently doing—or not doing—that reflects a gap in knowledge, skill or practice?
Step 3	<p>Summarize the Data that Validates the Professional Practice Gap, or the difference between the current and desired state. Planners should use evidence to validate and support the need for an educational activity. This evidence needs to be objective and not assumptions. This may include surveying stakeholders, reviewing quality data, direct observation, evaluations of other activities, trends in healthcare or literature, change in practice, etc. There should be analysis and not just data sources nor solely stating there is a “need” or “request” for the activity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Now ask: What is underlying reason causing the gap? Is knowledge missing? Is a skill not being performed correctly? Is there a practice issue? What pieces are missing in the target audience?
Step 4	The missing piece is the Underlying Educational Need to bridge between the current and desired state. Why do the learners need the education? The underlying need could be due to knowledge (don't know), skill (don't know how to do), and/or practice (not able to show or do in practice). This should align with the professional practice gap, evidence, competency(ies) and learning outcome(s).
Step 5	Identify established Professional Competencies that align with the identified professional practice gap, underlying educational needs (knowledge, skill, or practice). These competencies help ensure that the education being designed is grounded in recognized standards. What competency best supports what the learner needs to know, do, or demonstrate to close the gap. The competency needs to align with the educational need and supports measurable learning outcomes. Include the professional source that developed the competency(ies). A key resource is the Blaisdell Medical Library that provides access to a wide range of professional scope and standards of practice, organization guidelines, and competency frameworks.
Step 6	Develop Learning Outcomes that are specific, measurable, and attainable, written as a quantitative statement. What should the learner know, show, and/or be able to do at the end of the activity? This should be aligned to the current state, underlying educational need, competency, and assessment method. For instance, if the underlying need is knowledge, the outcome should be related to measuring a change in the learner's knowledge.
Step 7	Describe the Assessment Method , or how the activity's outcome will be measured, including how evaluation data will be obtained and analyzed. This should be aligned with the professional practice gap, underlying need, competency, and learning outcome(s). This can include short-term and/or long-term methods. For instance, you can use post-tests or discussion to assess knowledge; return demonstrations or case study analysis can assess skill; and simulation, observation in practice, or quality measure tracking can assess practice.
Step 8	Identify the appropriate Active Learning Strategies to promote learning and actively engage learners in educational activities. These strategies go beyond passive engagement to promote a deeper cognitive and behavior engagement. The active learning strategies need to align with the underlying educational need. For instance, if the underlying need is knowledge, the selected active learning strategies should be designed to facilitate the acquisition and application of that knowledge.

Note: See the next page for an example of the Professional Practice Gap Analysis Tool

Title of Activity: Example

Identify the professional practice gap by clearly describing both the desired state and the current state of practice, supported by validating evidence				
Desired State (or best practice)	Current State (current practice, target audience)	Data that Validates Professional Practice Gap and Current State (gap is the difference between desired and current state)		
Staff nurses promptly recognize signs of patient deterioration and effectively escalate care using structured communication tools (e.g., SBAR), leading to timely activation of rapid response teams and improved patient outcomes.	Staff nurses inconsistently recognize or respond to clinical deterioration, leading to delays in escalation of care and avoidable patient harm events such as unplanned ICU transfers or code blues.	<p>Performance Metrics: A retrospective chart review revealed that only 54% of rapid response team activations on medical-surgical units were initiated by bedside nurses, with the remainder coming from charge nurses or physicians after delays in escalation.</p> <p>Incident Reports: Over a 3-month period, 12 incident reports cited missed or delayed recognition of deterioration in patients with abnormal vital signs prior to code blue events.</p> <p>Survey Results: In a recent internal survey of 75 medical-surgical RNs, 68% reported low confidence in using SBAR to escalate concerns to providers, and **62% stated they were unsure when to activate the rapid response team.</p>		
<p>After identifying the professional practice gap, determine the underlying reason for the gap. Is it due to something learners do not know (knowledge deficit), do not know how to do (skill deficit), or are not able to perform effectively in practice (practice deficit)? Once the underlying educational need is identified—whether it pertains to knowledge, skill, and/or practice—complete the corresponding columns related to that type of educational need. The backwards planning process (also known as backwards design) is a helpful framework for aligning all elements of the educational activity. This includes determining educational need, identifying relevant competencies, developing measurable learning outcomes, selecting appropriate assessment methods, and choosing active learning strategies that directly address the professional practice gap before developing content.</p>				
Underlying Educational Need (Identified by the professional practice gap—knowledge, skills, and/or practice. Select the need identified by the gap)	Competency (Established professional competencies that align with the practice gap and educational need. Source must be cited)	Learning Outcomes (Specific, measurable, and attainable statements that describe expected changes in learners. Must align with the practice gap, educational need, and competency)	Assessment Methods (Used to measure change in knowledge, skill, and/or practice. Must align with the practice gap, educational need, and learning outcomes. Each outcome requires a corresponding assessment method)	Active Learning Strategies (Strategies that actively engage learners and promote meaningful learning. Must align with the underlying educational need.)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Knowledge Describe the knowledge need: Staff nurses on inpatient adult medical-surgical units demonstrate a knowledge deficit in recognizing early signs of patient deterioration.	Competency Statement: Analyzes assessment data to identify patterns, trends, and situations that impact the person's health and wellness. Source: American Nurses' Association. (2021). Nursing : scope and standards of practice (Fourth Edition edition). American Nurses Association Location: ANA Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice, Standard 1 – Assessment	By the end of the activity, 90% of participants will accurately identify at least three early clinical indicators of patient deterioration from a provided case scenario.	Formative: Participants will review and analyze case studies and complete a short knowledge quiz identifying key deterioration indicators (e.g., abnormal vital signs, mental status changes, lab trends).	Discussion Case Study Analysis Socratic Questioning Quizzing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Skill Describe the skill need: Staff nurses exhibit a skill deficit in effectively communicating changes in patient condition using structured tools such as SBAR.	Competency Statement: Communicates changes in person's condition to the interprofessional team. Source: American Nurses' Association. (2021). Nursing : scope and standards of practice (Fourth Edition edition). American Nurses Association. Location: ANA Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice, Standard 1 – Assessment	By the end of the activity, 90% of participants will accurately identify and report changes in patient condition using the SBAR tool in a simulated scenario.	Formative: Participants will demonstrate appropriate use of the SBAR tool and ability to escalate concerns in response to changes in patient condition.	Simulation
<input type="checkbox"/> Practice Describe the practice need:	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<p>Use the information from your completed gap analysis to fill out the corresponding sections of the planning form. Ensure the professional practice gap, educational need (knowledge, skill, and/or practice), competencies and supporting evidence are clearly and consistently reflected throughout the planning document.</p>				

Gap Analysis

Required for ANCC Courses

Suggested for all courses. **For more information on GAP ANALYSIS, including definitions and examples, see informational worksheet at end of planning form**

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<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge Describe the knowledge need:				
<input type="checkbox"/> Skill Describe the skill need:				
<input type="checkbox"/> Practice Describe the practice need:				
<p>Use the information from your completed gap analysis to fill out the corresponding sections of the planning form. Ensure the professional practice gap, educational need (knowledge, skill, and/or practice), competencies and supporting evidence are clearly and consistently reflected throughout the planning document.</p>				