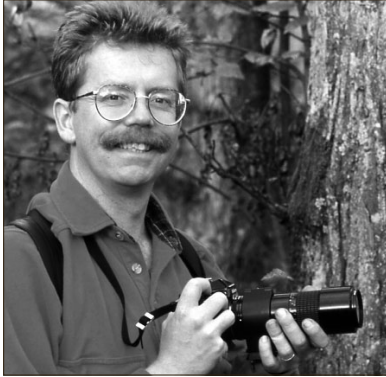


# The Best Evaluation Takes Place In BARS



**Will Husby**

Well, sure, it's natural to retire to one after a program evaluation, and I expect some evaluations do take place inside them, but the BARS I'm speaking of is a practical way of constructing rating scales used in evaluations.

In a recent IC on-line discussion (see the front inside cover of this issue of *Interpscan* for instruction on how to join) among BC section members, Rick Kool put forward the evaluation tool Ann Finlayson and I developed some years back.

He used it as an example of behavioural indicators related to best practices.

Of course all evaluation relates to best practice, but many evaluations rely on what Rick calls, "the great, good, crummy model of interpretation evaluation". This is Criteria Referenced Assessment (CRA), consisting of a series of characteristics (best practice elements) such as use of goals and objectives in the planning stages, presentation skills and encouragement of people to interact with the resources being interpreted. CRAs are usually rated on a subjective numerical ranking scale, e.g. 1-3 where 1 = great, 2 = good and 3 = crummy.

The problem with this popular model is that "great," "good" and "crummy" are open to interpretation—that is, the bias and/or level of interpretive know-how of the evaluator. And as a tool to assist interpreters improve their performance, it rates a 3 (crummy)—very

little information of value is communicated by a numerical score. Because the levels are not defined, the evaluations can vary greatly. Perhaps we've all had the experience of being evaluated by someone with far less experience or training than we have, or even with some particular point of view or even an axe to grind. This can transform the evaluation experience into an ordeal.

BARS is a way to greatly limit the bias between evaluators and even between evaluations by the same evaluator over time and to provide more detailed feedback to those being evaluated.

BARS is short for Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scale. The method looks similar to CRAs, but each point on the scale is clearly defined and uses specific examples. The examples make such a difference! Suddenly the evaluation relates to reality, to what actually took place during the planning stages and to what the evaluator observes during

**BARS Example 1: Superhero Candidates**

Performance Factors	Performance Degrees				
	Far Exceeds Admission Requirements	Exceeds Admission Requirements	Meets Admission Requirements	Needs Some Improvement	Does Not Meet Minimum Admission Requirements
<b>Quality</b>	Leaps tall buildings with a single bound	Needs running start to leap tall buildings	Can leap over short buildings only	Crashes into buildings when jumping them	Does not even recognize buildings
<b>Timelines</b>	Is faster than a speeding bullet	Is as fast as a speeding bullet	Not quite as fast as a speeding bullet	Almost as fast as a speeding bullet	Wounds self when attempting to shoot
<b>Initiative</b>	Is stronger than a locomotive	Is stronger than a bull elephant	Is stronger than a bull	Shoots the bull	Smells like a bull
<b>Adaptability</b>	Walks on water consistently	Walks on water in emergencies	Washes with water	Drinks water	Passes water when excited
<b>Communication Skills</b>	Talks with God	Talks with angels	Talks with himself	Argues with himself	Loses arguments with himself

## BARS Example 2: A Sample from the BC Parks Program Evaluation Tool.

### 3.5.1 Presenter's Encouragement of Audience Questions (check one)

- 1. The interpreter **did not encourage** audience questions, nor ask questions of the audience that they could answer, and did not give them a chance to touch, hear, smell or see objects being interpreted.
- 2. The interpreter **seldom encouraged** audience questions, asked few questions that the audience could answer, and gave them few chances to touch, hear, smell or see objects being interpreted.
- 3. The interpreter **often encouraged** audience questions, asked pertinent questions that the audience could answer, and gave them many chances to touch, hear, smell or see objects being interpreted.

the program. It is suitable for both experienced and inexperienced evaluators. It does require more paper, however.

Ideally, the evaluation criteria and BARS rating scales of an evaluation will be based on an agency's key performance indicators—the results that the agency has identified as showing that its mandate has been achieved. These can be broad, such as increasing the visitors appreciation of the landscape, to narrow, such as the reduction off-trail hiking in alpine areas.

Ever since I came across a US National Parks Service BARS-based interpreter evaluation form in the mid 1990s, I have been a big fan of Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scales in many forms of evaluation. Interestingly, a well put-together BARS-based evaluation tool can

have an educational component. When we designed the BC Parks Program Evaluation Tool, we realized that many of the evaluators would be park managers who had little background in heritage interpretation. We worked hard to develop BARS that clearly illustrated performance in incremental digress from good practice, to partial good practice, to unacceptable performance. We hoped that these descriptions would assist managers develop a better understanding of the skills and procedures needed to deliver high-quality interpretive services.

It appears that the US National Association for Interpretation liked our efforts. They awarded our team a third place award for training products in 1999 for our work.

Will Husby's company is EcoLeaders Interpretation and Environmental Education, which he runs with his partner Sue Ellen Fast. He specializes in interpretation planning, evaluation and training products.

Will is also assistant editor of *Interpscan*. He's responsible for the design, layout and production of the journal. Many of the photos you see in these pages have been taken by his camera and touched up on his suite of Macintosh computers. Contact him at: [whusby@shaw.ca](mailto:whusby@shaw.ca)

