



What is Performance Support?

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Learning Objective: The student will be able to distinguish the difference between performance support and training.

Performance support is a tool or other resource, from print to technology, that provides just the right amount of task guidance, support and productivity precisely when you need it. Examples include, but are not limited to, checklists, Electronic Performance Support Systems, databases, a reference table or even something as simple as a recipe.

All performance support definitions focus on tools and resources, with the emphasis on application and the timing “at the moment of need.” You don’t use performance support to learn a task, but rather, you use it to support performing the task.

Although the concept of “tool” is important in understanding performance support, we cannot consider all tools as performance support. Professor of Educational Technology at San Diego State University, Allison Rossett, stated that “to qualify, the object (tool) must house valued information, processes, or perspectives that target a task or need.”¹ A computer would not be performance support, but a software application might be. A hammer would not be performance support, but a laminated card that advises what type of nail to use for a particular job might be as well.

Performance support is different from training, but the two work best when used hand in hand. Training provides very well-planned instruction with specifically defined objectives, structure and activities to enable people to master skills and knowledge. Training requires stopping work to participate and then returning to work to apply what was learned. On the other hand, performance support helps get work done to accomplish tasks directly. Learning is incidental. With performance support, workers use the solution within the process of work.

A system that combines instruction and support is most desirable of all, especially when much is expected from the learner. Consider pilots: They go through an immense amount of training, and no one person can remember all that is required, no matter the length and quality of his or her training. To do all that they must do, they now turn to performance support: a pre-takeoff checklist. When you enter a plane preparing for flight and the cockpit door is still open, what do you see? You see the pilot and co-pilot going through their checklists of preflight activities. What they have to do is far too voluminous to memorize, so they use a performance support tool in the form of a checklist. You can use similar tools to improve your performance as well.

For more information on performance support and Allison Rossett’s views on the subject, click this link: <http://www.allisonrossett.com/tag/performance-support/>.

¹ Rossett, A. and Shafer, L. (2007). *Job Aids and Performance Support: Moving from Knowledge in the Classroom to Knowledge Everywhere*, 1st ed., Pfeiffer.