

IEP Present Levels & Goal Quality Review Guide

A Rubric-Based Guide for Reviewing PLAAFP Statements and Annual Goals

Purpose: Research consistently finds that IEP goal quality is one of the strongest predictors of student progress and legal defensibility. This guide gives reviewers (special education directors, coaches, and teachers engaged in peer review) a structured rubric — adapted from the SMART framework and the National Center on Educational Outcomes' quality indicators — for evaluating whether Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) and annual goals meet evidence-based quality standards.

1. PLAAFP Quality Indicators

Indicator	Look For	Common Weakness
Data-based	Specific, current assessment/progress-monitoring data (scores, rates, dates)	Vague language ("struggles with reading") with no data cited
Baseline established	A quantifiable starting point tied directly to each proposed goal	No clear baseline, or baseline doesn't match the goal being written
Functional impact stated	Explicit link between the disability and access to/progress in general curriculum	Diagnosis restated without describing classroom impact
Strengths included	Student strengths and interests, not only deficits	Deficit-only framing
Parent input reflected	Parent concerns/priorities documented in the student's own words where possible	No parent input section or generic boilerplate

2. Annual Goal Quality Rubric (SMART-Aligned)

Criterion	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard
Specific	Names the exact skill/behavior in observable terms	"Will improve reading" with no target skill named
Measurable	States a clear metric (% ,wpm, trials, frequency) and measurement method	No metric, or metric that can't be scored consistently
Attainable / Ambitious	Baseline-to-target growth is realistic yet meaningfully ambitious given data/trend	Target far exceeds typical growth rate with no rationale, or target is trivial
Relevant	Directly traceable to a PLAAFP need	Goal doesn't connect to any documented need
Time-bound	States the timeframe (e.g., "by the next annual review") and review schedule	No timeframe stated
Generalization	Specifies setting/materials/conditions for skill use	Goal only testable in one artificial context

3. Reviewer Workflow

- Step 1 — Read the PLAAFP first, independent of the goals; note every need it identifies.
- Step 2 — Match each annual goal to a PLAAFP need. Flag any PLAAFP need with no corresponding goal, and any goal with no PLAAFP basis.
- Step 3 — Score each goal against the SMART rubric above using a 0–2 scale per criterion (0 = absent, 1 = partial, 2 = fully meets).
- Step 4 — Check progress-monitoring alignment: does the stated method (e.g., curriculum-based measurement, work samples, behavior tally) match how progress will actually be reported to parents?
- Step 5 — Check for standards alignment: does the goal reflect grade-level content standards with appropriate scaffolds, rather than a below-grade-level skill sequence by default?
- Step 6 — Provide written feedback using specific language ("add a measurable baseline") rather than general praise/criticism.

4. Sample Goal Rewrite

Before: "Student will improve in math." After: "By the next annual IEP review, when given 10 two-step word problems involving addition and subtraction within 100, Student will correctly solve 8/10 problems independently, as measured by weekly curriculum-based probes, improving from a baseline of 3/10."

Evidence Base & Sources

- National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) — Quality Indicators for IEP Goals and Present Levels.
- IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University — modules on writing measurable IEP goals and progress monitoring (SMART framework).
- Yell, M. L., & Bateman, D. (2017). Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District: FAPE and the U.S. Supreme Court. Reflects the "appropriately ambitious" standard from Endrew F. v. Douglas County RE-1, 580 U.S. 386 (2017).
- Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) — standards for individualized, standards-based IEP goal writing.
- 34 CFR §300.320 (Definition and required content of an IEP).

This resource synthesizes federal statute, regulation, and peer-reviewed / technical-assistance-center guidance current as of publication. It is an instructional tool, not legal advice; consult your district's legal counsel and current state regulations for compliance decisions.