

Tips for Writing Annual Performance Evaluations

A Self-Paced Guide for Evaluators

Performance Evaluations

Evaluating the performance and potential of your employees is a vital part of the performance evaluation process. The performance evaluation is an **ongoing process**. In fact, what you do as a leader to manage performance with your employees is one of the most impactful strategies for retaining your best people. Here are some criteria to manage performance:

1. **Explain your expectations of employees**

- Give a detailed explanation of what each employee needs to do to complete the job or task satisfactorily.
- Provide these expectations for each new task assigned throughout the year.

2. **Spotlight good work**

- Provide positive feedback as soon as possible to help ensure that the behavior will repeat itself.
- Give “meaty,” brief, specific examples of what behavior you appreciate.
- Make positive notes in each employee’s file including significant dates, comments from you/key partners/other forms of recognition (i.e. copies of positive e-mails).

3. **Correct poor performance**

- Everyone wants to know when they messed up, so provide constructive feedback immediately.
- Be honest, direct, provide specific examples and focus on behavior – no personal attacks.
- Document your discussions in detail for the employee’s file (include date, time, your comments, and comments made by the employee or other key partners).

Performance Evaluation Steps

Annual performance evaluations are typically conducted between January and March. Supervisors and employees will meet to discuss performance.

Step 1 – Employee Writes Self-Assessment

Employees need to complete the self-assessment sections of the review form evaluating their own performance, significant accomplishments, goals and objectives they have achieved, strengths and developmental needs.

Step 2 – Supervisor Writes Employee Review

Managers need to complete the OU Staff Performance Evaluation Summary Report. They will evaluate the employee’s performance on each of the goals, objectives, and responsibilities that were agreed upon for the year. Leaders determine how this progress compares against the OU performance ratings outlined in this guide. Managers should seek input and approval from their supervisor for all reviews written to ensure consistency.

Step 3 – Supervisors Delivers Performance Feedback

Managers will schedule meetings to deliver performance feedback to employees. Discussion should include the manager's performance assessment, referring to consistencies and differences from the employee self-assessment. Feedback should also include performance relative to strengths and developmental needs.

Step 4 – Supervisors Delivers Compensation Impact (if applicable)

Upon approval, supervisors will receive applicable merit increase amounts for each employee. Leaders should attach each employee statement (if applicable) to the written review and then deliver to the employee during the performance review meeting.

Be sure to discuss during the feedback meeting any resulting salary action and/or incentive payment. Please ensure that each employee knows and understands their own:

- Merit Increase Amount (\$ and %)
- Incentive Payment, if applicable
- New Salary or Hourly Rate
- Incentive Plan, if applicable

Why Write Performance Evaluations?

Although ongoing feedback is given, the University provides a formal annual performance evaluation cycle. These formal review sessions are important for several reasons:

1. Allows you to evaluate and develop your people.

- Documentation reinforces that employees know what to do and how to do it. The discussions help motivate them to want to do it.

2. It informs your talent planning / management review process.

- Gives you an opportunity to take an inventory of talent on your team.
- Is an opportunity to consider who should be promoted, transferred, disciplined, or terminated?

3. Allows for reliable compensation.

- Your evaluation will result in fair, motivating compensation to the employee for the period being evaluated.
- This compensation should be tied directly to the employee's performance.

4. Allows you to mesh the employee's objectives with those of the department/college and OU.

- Improves commitment to results.

Use Communication Skills to Appraise Performance

Three primary skills are required to be effective in providing on-going feedback and in appraising performance.

1. Focus on behavior

- Feedback, written or verbal, should describe performance behaviorally and concretely.
- Give specific examples.

2. Listen actively

- Requires good observation skills. (Remember: "A great leader sees everything, overlooks a lot and corrects a little.")
- Attentive listening (good eye contact, engaging body language, head nods, etc.).
- Clarify by paraphrasing and asking questions.
- Show empathy for what the employee might be feeling.

3. Reinforce and provide constructive criticism

- Give a balanced picture – no one is all good or all bad. Discuss what you appreciate about the person. Give a specific example of how they have surprised you or disappointed you.

Let us see how good you are at determining if an example of behavior is clear or unclear. Complete the quiz at the bottom of this page.

Behavior Observation Checklist

Please indicate which of the following are specific examples of behavior observations (concrete and clear) and which are vague (too general or inferential). Jot down some notes of how you would make the vague examples specific.

	CLEAR	UNCLEAR
1. You are poorly organized.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. You need to improve your productivity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Your work area is cluttered with multiple stacks of papers and reports.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. You need to work more independently.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. You need to take responsibility. In the XYZ problem, for example, you should have called the store right away rather than forwarding the email to others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Everyone describes you as highly professional.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. You learn fast.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. You deliver good customer service.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Your processes data entry are up-to-date and meeting company standards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. You need better attention to details like typos and spelling in your email communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Behavior Observation Answers

1. **(Unclear) You are poorly organized.** What does organized mean/look like? For example, “you don’t use a to-do list” or “you turned in your assignment late.”
2. **(Unclear) You need to improve your productivity.** What would you like to see different? “You procrastinate on projects; you need to set a goal of three things that you will do to move the task forward.”
3. **(Clear) Your work area is cluttered with many stacks of papers and reports.**
4. **(Unclear) You need to work more independently.** “You come into my office at least four times a day asking for advice. I need you to come with a suggestion of what you’d like to see done before asking my opinion.”
5. **(Unclear) You need to take responsibility.** In the XYZ problem, for example, you should have called your supervisor right away rather than forwarding the email to others.
6. **(Unclear) Everyone describes you as highly professional.** What does professional mean? “You show up at meetings on time and remain calm under stressful conditions.”
7. **(Unclear) You learn fast.** “When you had to learn how to use the new system you were able to learn its functionality in one week.”
8. **(Unclear) You deliver good customer service.** Be more specific; “last week you dealt with an angry customer and resolved their problem quickly.”
9. **(Clear) Your processes for data entry are up-to-date and meeting our standards.**
10. **(Clear) You need better attention to details like typos and spelling in your email communication.**

Preparing to Write Evaluations

Information to Gather

- Goals and objectives set earlier in the year; this should serve as a standard against which performance is measured
- OU Performance Evaluation Summary Report
- Employee’s self-assessment
- Notes you have made in the employee’s file (if applicable)
- Written communication from your employee
- Forms of recognition (i.e., positive e-mails from others, etc.)
- Feedback from the employee’s key business partners

Questions to Ask Yourself

On your employee's performance:

- What were his/her major accomplishments? What impact did he/she have?
- What made him/her so successful?
- What goals and objectives were not achieved? Why?
- What could he/she change to improve his/her performance?

On your employee's development:

- Have they completed the appropriate training for their position?
- In what ways has he/she grown or developed?
- What aspects of their job does he/she like best/least? Why?
- What areas of the job highlight his/her strengths; where are his/her opportunities?
- What has he/she done to promote their professional development?

Tips for Writing Evaluations

Allow yourself quality time to write each evaluation. Keep in mind the evaluation is a high-level summary of overall performance, not a detailed list of all work completed. Limit comments to the most essential and significant information to best help your employee understand your performance assessment. If you have formal goals and objectives focus on assessing achievements towards meeting these commitments. Avoid focusing on achievements that are not of equal or greater impact than the goals and objectives accomplished.

1. **Use examples of observed behavior or results achieved. (Make sure all your examples are representative of the period being evaluated.)**

Like this: Internal and external customer service is a top priority as exemplified by your commitment to resolve customer complaints immediately.

2. **Describe how the employee achieved results.**

Like this: Your attendance at departmental and college-wide meetings have created increased rapport with other departments.

Not like this: You have developed excellent teamwork and rapport with other departments.

3. **Give a balanced picture.**

Give them credit for contributions made and extra effort displayed. Feel free to thank them as well. Discuss goals not accomplished and your expectations for their completion with timeframes.

4. **Limit descriptions of events/activities to observable behavior or results.**

Like this: You contributed to the achievement of the conference goals through weekly monitoring of deadlines and looking for operational efficiencies in our registration procedures.

Not like this: This department had an excellent year in exceeding their conference goals. I believe you had a significant impact on this performance.

5. **Comments should be clear, concise and objective.**

Like this: Implementation and personalization of the recruiting program led to a 20% increase in new hires as compared to last year.

Not like this: The new recruiting program, along with your own ideas on hiring, had a great affect on hiring this year.

6. Pay attention to detail, check for accuracy and quality.

Like this: You identified five partnership opportunities within a six-week period that helped to achieve a 6% increase in student enrollment for the year.

Not like this: You identified five partnership opportunities within a six-week period that helped to achieve a 60% increase in student enrollment for the year.

7. Be aware of grammar, sentence structure and punctuation.

Like this: You and Mary demonstrated great partnership in reporting and presenting our financial performance information.

Not like this: In terms of partnership, you and she did a great job on putting together the performance information.

Tips for Rating Performance

Rate employees based on

- Individual performance rather than as a group (unless you have specific “team” scoring directions).
- All the performance criteria.
- The total period being evaluated vs. something that happened recently (either good or bad).
- Fact vs. assumptions about the behavior.
- Objective perspective – do not be influenced by employees who have values, backgrounds that are similar or different to your own.

Performance Categories

Performance Rating

Description

Employee performs **beyond** normal work requirements.

Performance over a sustained period of time is clearly and consistently exceptional; continually exceeds all expectations of what is required or should be accomplished. Both results and how they are achieved are exceptional.

Work performance **meets** normal work requirements. The employee completes tasks as assigned.

Fully meets and sometimes exceeds position requirements. Demonstrates, full understanding of all required functions.

Work performance **needs improvement**. Employee is having performance problems.

Requirements and responsibilities of the position are usually handled competently. Sometimes meets the job expectations but consistently at this time.

Unsatisfactory work performance.

Does not meet job requirements. May be on the Positive Discipline Process.

Considerations for Performance Ratings

In assessing performance, you are encouraged to look beyond objective results. Consider the information listed below:

- Actual performance relative to goals and objectives
- The specifics of the performance category definitions (take into consideration the employee's self-assessment and any notes you made)
- Input from key business partners
- Performance throughout the entire review period (include notes you've made in the employee's file, both positive and negative, as well as recognition received)
- In any situation where Unsatisfactory is considered, leaders should partner with HR before the review is administered.

Using "Needs Improvement" or "Meets" Rating with Employees New in Position

Talking points for leaders

Explanation

Acknowledge to employee that this may feel like a difficult rating because as their leader you think highly of them, which is why you put them in their job to begin with.

Feedback

The employee's focus has been on learning the job, getting to know the business and the key players. During this learning curve period, it would be difficult to perform at an outstanding level.

Clarifying Expectations

Once a level of proficiency is established and expectations are met more consistently, the employee may likely be evaluated as effective at the next review. Restate the key expectations for the employee in order for them to meet performance expectations.

Tips for Delivering the Evaluation

1. Set a date to meet with your employee. Schedule enough time to allow for feedback and discussion. Ensure that you will not be disturbed during the meeting.
2. Set aside 15 minutes prior to your meeting to review the appraisal, comments and prepare for the discussion.
3. Initiate and lead the conversation. Tell the employee you will be doing most of the talking, but the employee should ask questions and share his/her reactions throughout.
4. Some guidelines for giving feedback are:
 - Speak directly to the person using "you" and "I".
 - Be specific – give examples, do not use generalities.
 - Do not overload with too much feedback at one time.
 - Focus on behavior the employee has power to change.
 - Be non-judgmental – do not try to figure out why people do what they do.
 - Request change, do not demand it.
 - Check out your message – be sure the employee understood your message the way it was intended.

5. **Follow this structure using the completed review form to talk from:**
- Share that you have taken his/her self-assessment into account.
 - Start by giving the performance evaluation rating; (if applicable share the amount of increase)
 - Walk the employee through the specific backup for the rating (accomplishments and objectives not attained).
 - Discuss strengths, opportunities and his/her comments
 - Address differences of opinion.
 - Finally, state that you want to spend some time discussing how you can work together more effectively.
 - Ensure that the review is signed and dated.

If a employee refuses to sign the review, tell him/her that signing the review does not signify agreement with the review, it merely indicates the employee has received the information. If the employee still refuses, contact HR.

Potential Employee Reactions

It is helpful to consider how a employee might respond and be prepared for his/her reaction. Following are a few examples:

Employee Who Disagrees With Feedback

- Do not get into a debate about specific examples.
"These are just illustrations of a common pattern I saw — not the whole reason I said that. Don't get hung up on any one example; think about the general pattern."
- Make a note of the disagreement.
"Okay, I'm recording your disagreement right on the report here."
- Try to be persuasive, but not too forceful.
*"Well, you have to decide whether this feedback fits for you or not — but this is what I saw. My only motive was to be helpful to you in your development."
*"Have you ever gotten feedback like this before (in reviews for example)?"
*"Well, rather than writing it off entirely, I'd go back and check it out. Ask your others you trust whether they have ever seen this in you. Sometimes we have blind spots. . ."***

Quiet Employee

- Be sure to start by asking for the employee's reaction to the feedback.
- Show your sincere interest in the employee. Use lots of nonverbal encouragement — smile, head nodding and "mmm-hmmm" when she/he does talk.
- Ask open-ended questions ("How does this fit with how you see yourself?" "How does it fit with what you've heard during reviews?"). Be sure to be silent long enough to give the employee time to think and respond. Keep in mind, silence often means, "I am thinking about what you said."
- Observe the employee closely for any change in expression or other non-verbal indication that she/he is paying particular attention to something. Then ask about that.
*"Was this a surprise?"
*"You look puzzled about that . . ."**

