

Annual Performance Reviews: Supervisor's Guide to Writing Effective and Impactful Performance Reviews

Your employee's performance review is a meaningful opportunity to reflect on their performance over the past year, highlight their accomplishments, thoughtfully identify areas for growth, and support them in setting clear, measurable, and actionable goals for the 2025–2026 cycle.

Performance reviews require continuous observation, analysis of employee actions, and first-hand knowledge of the employee and their work habits. Ideally, there should be ongoing conversations about performance between supervisors and direct reports throughout the year. These conversations help employees understand what they are doing well, shed light on areas for improvement, and provide an opportunity for timely correction.

While the Annual Performance Review should not be the first time employees receive feedback, it provides a **formal and comprehensive summary** of their overall performance.

To set the stage for supervisor guidance, here are key points highlighting the importance of conducting effective performance reviews:

- The Annual Performance Review is a formal record of each employee's performance. All evaluations must be accurate, objective, and thoroughly documented.
- The Annual Performance Review can/will be used to make decisions about merit increases and promotions, while also outlining areas of needed performance improvement.
- Be sure to include specific examples of effective and ineffective performance to provide clarity, support evaluations, and offer constructive feedback during the review process.

To create and conduct performance reviews that most effectively support employee development, consider the following tips:

Prepare in Advance and Revisit the Job Description

Review the employee's job description to assess where the employee exceeded expectations, which parts of the job were challenging, and which areas they could develop more. As part of the performance review cycle, supervisors/employees must review and update their job descriptions, with the finalized documents to be submitted by July 1st.

Make a Connection to the Department and Institute Goals

Mention the specific role the employee played in delivering results throughout the year. Explain the employee's achievements/challenges related to their individual/departmental goals, and include specific examples of their contributions or areas to improve.

Be Specific and Provide Examples

Provide a list of behaviors, skills, expertise, and abilities you have observed over the performance period. Elaborate on these with specific examples illustrating how they impact each performance factor.

Use the STAR Method

This is a comprehensive way to summarize your observation of how the employee approached a task, their contribution(s), and what the outcome was:

- **Situation/Task:** Describe the situation and the task, including the goal to be achieved.
- **Action:** Describe the actions taken, including what the employee organized, completed, or supervised to accomplish the objective.
- **Results:** What did the employee accomplish, leave incomplete, or not achieve?

Give Actionable and Objective Feedback

It is also crucial for your performance reviews to include a call to action. This gives your employees a better understanding of what they are explicitly doing or not doing. Actionable feedback can encourage employees to continue what they are doing well or provide them with an action to correct.

While providing actionable feedback is essential, it is equally important that the feedback remains objective.

- Subjective: "You're doing really well – keep up the good work."
- Objective: "You're doing really well—you've met all your deadlines this quarter and consistently delivered work with minimal errors."
- Subjective "I need you to do better."
- Objective: "Based on your recent performance metrics and project outcomes, there are opportunities to improve your efficiency and overall contribution. Let's identify specific areas where you can increase your impact."

Be Honest and Frame Challenges as Opportunities

Be honest about an employee's deficiencies, but be sure to frame these areas for improvement as opportunities for growth. You can use phrases such as:

- "Here's an area I'd like you to focus on,"
- "Here's what I need to see from you in the next few weeks."

Back up the Employee's Contributions/Deficiencies with Measurable Goals

Metrics clearly connect performance and results. When writing performance reviews, refer to the employee's measurable progress/achievements/challenges.

Ratings

Ensure the evaluation ratings you give reflect the employee's performance on the job.

The ratings should coincide with previous conversations you have had with the employee, other managers, and Human Resources (where applicable).

Rating Options

5	Significant overachievement of expectation.
4	Often beyond expectation.
3	Consistently fulfills expectation.
2	Inconsistent performance, with expectation only partially achieved.
1	Failure to achieve expectation.
N/A – Not Observed	Select this option if your experience has been insufficient to form an opinion regarding the question.