

How to Write an Effective Performance Review



It is often said that the interaction between the manager and employee determines the success of the performance review. However, the written comments are equally important.

The written comments take on greater meaning when you keep in mind that the performance review:

- Culminates the entire performance management process.
- Is a key retention tool.
- Provides information for decisions relating to pay, promotion, and training/development opportunities.
- Becomes a part of the employee's permanent personnel file.
- Sets goals and accountabilities for the next year.
- Has legal implications.

Managers want to write effective results-focused performance reviews. However, this task often takes a back seat to other more urgent responsibilities. In addition, writing reviews is time consuming.

Using these strategies will help generate meaningful comments that focus on behavior expectations and results, and will also help avoid common rating tendencies or biases, which should be set aside.

Keep in mind as you draft your comments that there are legal considerations:

- Avoid statements that contradict the "at will" nature of the employment relationship. (Don't imply ongoing employment by saying, "With your level of performance, you will have a career with us for as long as you would like.")
- Ensure feedback in evaluations is supported with specific examples and documentation. (If you logged your feedback sessions, you are in good shape.)
- Avoid references to personal situations/issues, including family, health, etc. (Don't say, "Despite the scare and time off you had due to your son's serious illness, you were able to meet most deadlines.")



For greater success, follow these tips:

- Determine the core message to send to the employee.
- Focus on:
 - Strengths.
 - Developmental needs.
 - Critical needs for improvement.
- Document the behavior and the performance results.
- Show consistency between the rating and the comments offered in the review.
- Offer only specific comments:
 - Use examples.
 - Reference previous feedback discussions.

- Don't make promises for promotions. Avoid any mention of associated time frames. (Stay away from statements like: "I can see you being promoted within the next 12 months.")
- Keep your verbal and written comments objective and job related. Be sensitive to the natural inclination to fall back on one of the tendencies noted above.
- The importance of the performance review to employee motivation and productivity and to the employer's ability to support any employment actions taken cannot be overstated. It is critical that managers provide each employee with informal feedback and, on a regular basis, conduct a thorough, well thought out, and properly documented performance evaluation. Following the guidelines set out in this two-part series may assist in evaluating and updating your organization's performance management process.

Need help with your performance review process? MRA's [Performance Management](#) team can help you!


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Some common rating tendencies are:

- **Halo Effect.** Remembering only the good. Being overly positive; letting one stronger favorable event or trait override everything else.
- **Recency.** Using information from only the last few months of the evaluation period. The more recent time frame or performance (whether positive or negative) influences the entire year's results.
- **Same as Me.** Using how you do things as the yardstick.
- **Contrast.** Comparing and contrasting one employee against another, such as using your star performer as the benchmark or standard.
- **Centrist.** Averaging the results, staying in the middle or safe zone; nothing is overly good or overly bad.

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