

## 10 Quick Tips for Writing Performance Appraisals

Well-written performance appraisals or reviews are one of a manager's most effective tools for managing by objective and for developing performance. Use these ten tips for writing appraisals to significantly increase your team's effectiveness and perceived value within your organization:

1. **Increase your employees' comfort level with performance appraisals.** At the beginning of each review period, explain the appraisal process, rating system, and appraisal form to your employees. Agree on performance objectives and measurements for the upcoming review period.
2. **Take full advantage of performance appraisals.** Start thinking about appraisals as an opportunity to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of your team. Use them to
  - Clarify team and individual responsibilities and priorities so that everyone stays focused on activities that produce desired results.
  - Summarize continuing on-the-job discussions to reinforce their significance.
  - Document performance of the entire review period; recognize team and individual accomplishments and contributions.
  - Measure performance based on mutually-understood, job-relevant criteria.
  - Identify and suggest actions to improve results.
  - Appraise each individual's potential for more responsibility.
3. **In addition to keeping your own records, encourage your employees to keep ongoing records:** updates to team and individual objectives when Company objectives change, progress reports, commendations, descriptions of results achieved with special assignments, documentation of ongoing coaching discussions and of feedback from other business areas. Having the employee's input will let you know what the employee considers important (that is, how well you are communicating priorities) and will help ensure an accurate, fair appraisal.
4. **Use examples, facts, and accomplishments drawn from these ongoing records to present a factual, complete summary of employees' results.** Specific wording keeps employees focused on objectives, proves ratings, and gives employees something concrete to "latch on to" to improve or maintain performance. Finally, specific, accurate wording protects the Company in the unlikely event of legal proceedings.
5. **Use objective (factual) wording so that you concentrate on observed behaviors rather than on personality traits or "attitude."** Instead of "Laura has a bad attitude," write "Laura's customer interactions meet two of Customer Service's 'Five Criteria for Excellence.' Improvement areas are 'focus,' 'courtesy,' and 'listening.'" Use objective wording to write credible performance appraisals that reinforce desired behaviors.
6. **Help employees achieve their full potential through recognition and encouragement. Use constructive wording to cite accomplishments and suggest improvements.** Be thorough and honest, but be careful to consider the effect of negatively worded comments on employees. Comment on only a few development areas--those that are critical to your team's success and those that you have discussed previously with the employee. Translate those areas into improvement suggestions.

7. **Use benefit wording to reinforce desired behavior and motivate employees.** Remind your employees and your next level manager of the value and significance of your employees' actions.
8. **Use performance appraisals to summarize the year's performance and your discussions with your employees, not to introduce development areas for the first time.** Include no "surprises." Feedback to an employee has its most significant impact immediately after a specific behavior has occurred. Always deal at once with unsatisfactory performance, especially serious conduct violations.
9. **When writing action plans for development needs:**
  - **Keep an immediate or short-term focus.**
  - **Link the plan and any training you recommend to team business objectives.**
  - **Write clearly stated and task-related action plans.**
10. **Avoid picayune comments that trivialize the whole appraisal.** Keep the performance appraisal focused on significant accomplishments and critical improvement areas that are tied to your team's business objectives.

**About the authors:** The Writing Center, Inc., provides business and technical writing training and consultation worldwide, including a seminar "Writing Effective Performance Appraisals/Reviews." For more information, contact Carol S. Klein or Sandra S. Nutting, The Writing Center, Inc., 129 Willowbrook Lane, West Chester, PA 19382-3300. Telephone: 610-436-4600 E-mail: [writing@writingcenter.com](mailto:writing@writingcenter.com).