

For Managers: Preparing an Effective Performance Evaluation

A performance appraisal is both an evaluative and developmental tool. Done well, it strengthens trust, supports employee growth, and advances institutional goals. Nothing discussed in an annual review should be a surprise, because a supervisor should be checking in frequently with employees and providing timely feedback.

1. Anchor the Evaluation in Expectations

Base your assessment on:

- The employee's position description and agreed-upon goals
- Any material changes to responsibilities during the review period
- Avoid relying on informal impressions alone. Written expectations should guide your evaluation

2. Evaluate Outcomes, Not Personality

Focus on observable behaviors and results:

- What was achieved and how
- The quality, timeliness, and impact of the work
- Contributions to students, colleagues, and the institution
- Avoid character judgments or vague language. Specific examples increase clarity and credibility

3. Use Evidence Consistently

Support ratings and comments with:

- Work products, metrics, or deliverables
- Documented feedback from relevant stakeholders
- Prior check-ins or goal-tracking notes
- Consistency across employees performing similar work is critical for fairness and equity

4. Mitigate Common Rating Biases

Be mindful of frequent appraisal pitfalls, including:

- Recency bias: Overweighting recent events
- Halo or horn effects: Allowing one strength or weakness to dominate the evaluation
- Leniency or severity bias: Rating everyone too high or too low
- Review performance across the full cycle and calibrate where possible

5. Integrate the Employee's Self-Appraisal Thoughtfully

- Use the self-appraisal as a data point, not a verdict
- Note areas of alignment and divergence
- Seek to understand context the employee provides
- Address discrepancies respectfully and directly
- This comparison often leads to more productive dialogue

6. Address Development Clearly and Constructively

When improvement is needed:

- Be specific about gaps and expectations
- Explain why the issue matters
- Focus on behaviors that can be changed
- Pair feedback with practical next steps or support whenever feasible.
- Discuss these ratings with your supervisor prior to delivering to employee
- Preparation with HR may be warranted.

7. Take Time to Look Ahead

- An effective appraisal sets direction
- Identify priorities and goals for the next period
- Discuss skill development and career interests
- Clarify how success will be measured
- Employees are more engaged when they see a clear path forward

8. Prepare for the Conversation, Not Just the Form

- The written appraisal should support a meaningful discussion
- Plan key messages in advance
- Employee Relations can assist with preparing messaging and tone
- Allow time for dialogue and questions
- Turn cell phones to silent
- Do your best to avoid having to reschedule appraisal meetings
- Listen actively and document agreed-upon next steps
- How the appraisal is delivered matters as much as what is written