U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Supervisor's Quick Guide to Rating an Employee's Performance

A performance rating should reflect an employee's actual accomplishments and contributions during the appraisal period. The rating should be based on evidence related to the performance requirements, not assumptions, reputation, tenure, or personality. Objective ratings strengthen accountability, improve employee trust, support organizational performance, and help ensure consistency across the workforce.

Start with the Performance Plan

Before evaluating performance:

- Review each critical element and performance standard.
- Focus on the requirements established at the beginning of the appraisal period.
- Evaluate performance against documented standards, not personal preferences or comparisons with other employees.
- Ensure the employee had a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate performance during the rating period.

Review Measurable Results

The strongest performance results rely on evidence. Consider measurable outcomes such as:

- Work products completed
- Timeliness of deliverables
- Accuracy rates
- Customer service metrics
- Compliance measures
- Project outcomes

Assess Alignment with Organizational Goals

When evaluating performance, consider how accomplishments supported:

- Agency strategic goals
- Organizational priorities
- Mission outcomes

Questions to Consider:

- How did the employee's work advance organizational goals?
- Did the employee contribute to mission success?
- Did the employee help improve program performance?

Consider the Entire Rating Period

Avoid placing excessive weight on recent events. Review performance across the entire appraisal period by considering:

- Employee self-assessments
- Work products
- Progress reviews
- Customer feedback
- Performance discussions
- Awards and recognition
- Documented accomplishments

Avoid Common Rating Errors

Halo Effect
Allowing one strength to influence all ratings.

Horn Effect
Allowing one weakness to negatively affect all ratings.

Similarity Bias
Favoring employees who share similar backgrounds, work styles, or viewpoints.

Leniency or Severity Bias
Rating everyone too high or too low regardless of actual performance.

Recency Bias
Overemphasizing recent accomplishments or mistakes.

Questions to Ask Yourself Before Assigning a Preliminary Rating

- Have I reviewed the entire appraisal period?
- Am I evaluating performance against documented standards?
- Have I considered measurable results?
- Have I assessed quality, timeliness, and impact?
- Have I considered alignment with organizational goals?

- Have I avoided common rating biases?
- Can I clearly explain and document my rating decision?
- Have I reviewed my agency's rating calibration factors for higher-level calibration?

Final Thought

The goal of performance management is not simply to assign ratings—it is to accurately assess performance, recognize contributions, support accountability, and improve organizational results. Objective ratings are grounded in documented expectations, measurable evidence, demonstrated impact, and fair evaluation of individual performance across the entire appraisal period. Employees are always evaluated against established performance standards before calibration begins, and calibration should not be a factor when rating an individual employee's performance.