

# GUIDELINES FOR PERFORMANCE RATINGS AND NARRATIVES

This job aid is designed to support managers in conducting annual performance assessments by providing clear guidance on rating staff based on a variety of behaviors and skills relevant to staff positions. It also includes examples for writing a supporting narrative to ensure effective and developmental feedback.

Performance Ratings: Staff will be rated in three categories:

- Exceeds Expectations
- Achieves Expectations
- Does Not Meet Expectations

We have identified a wide range of performance behaviors to assist managers in determining the most appropriate rating for each staff member. These behaviors and skills are foundational for success in various roles within our organization.

Managers are responsible for determining an annual rating and writing a narrative summary of their employees' annual performance. This information guides the performance discussion and may be used to inform merit decisions.

## USING PERFORMANCE BEHAVIORS

**When using the chart(s) on the following pages, managers should:**

- Take time to understand the key behaviors and skills associated with the performance behaviors listed.
- Feel free to adapt them to the specific context of your team and their unique contributions.
- Compare behaviors and actual outcomes against the definitions (where relevant).
- Use your judgement to determine the rating, considering the nuances of the role and other circumstances.
- Highlight specific examples to support your rating, acknowledging individual strengths while also offering guidance for developmental opportunities.

## HELPFUL GUIDELINES

◆ **Focus on performance, not personality:** avoid letting personal preferences influence assessments. For instance, rather than labeling someone as “inconsistent performer,” provide examples where their timeliness in getting back to people or customer service outcomes fell short and suggest improvements. This ensures fairness and minimizes biases based on personal characteristics.

◆ **Be objective and balanced:** consider performance and development throughout the entire performance cycle, not just recent events. Establish standard milestones (e.g., 3 months, 6 months, 9 months) to reflect on the employee's progress and performance over time. Avoid letting isolated instances of unusually high or low performance skew the overall rating.

◆ **Address difficult messages:** performance assessments can be challenging for managers and employees. While a rating to avoid an uncomfortable conversation may be tempting, this approach isn't beneficial. Inaccurate ratings hinder employees' improvement and may pose risks to the University if personnel decisions arise in the future. Managers play a crucial role in providing constructive feedback that helps employees grow and contributes to the University's success.

## PERFORMANCE BEHAVIORS AND RATINGS

PERFORMANCE RATINGS		
<p><b>Does Not Meet Expectations</b> “inconsistent performer” “less reliable”</p> <p>Performance does not meet the expectations of the job and there are gaps that have been identified. Performance requires improvement and employee needs coaching.</p>	<p><b>Achieves Expectations</b> “strong performer” “dependable”</p> <p>Performance consistently meets expectations, and employee is fully capable in all aspects of the role. There may be some areas in which the performance exceeds the role’s expectations.</p>	<p><b>Exceeds Expectations</b> “exceptional performer” “role model”</p> <p>Performance consistently exceeds the expectations and standards required for the position. Performance results in exceptional accomplishments and significant contributions to the goals of the department and the organization.</p>
JOB KNOWLEDGE		
Does Not Meet Expectations	Achieves Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p><b>Definition:</b> Lacks the necessary understanding of job responsibilities and required skills. Frequently requires assistance and makes errors that impact work quality.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often struggles to use the company's software correctly, leading to frequent mistakes that require correction by others.</li> <li>• Is unable to complete tasks without constant supervision and guidance, resulting in delays.</li> <li>• Frequently asks basic questions about procedures that should be well understood at their level.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Demonstrates a thorough understanding of job responsibilities and required skills. Consistently applies knowledge effectively to complete tasks and solve routine problems with minimal supervision.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistently uses their expertise in a software application to troubleshoot issues for colleagues, ensuring smooth workflow and minimal downtime.</li> <li>• Completes tasks accurately and efficiently, requiring only occasional guidance on more complex issues.</li> <li>• Regularly updates their knowledge by attending training sessions and applying new skills to their work.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Exhibits exceptional understanding and mastery of job responsibilities and required skills. Proactively seeks to expand knowledge and shares expertise with others.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not only uses the software proficiently but also identifies and implements new features that improve team efficiency and conducts training sessions for colleagues.</li> <li>• Mentors new team members, providing them with comprehensive training and support to quickly bring them up to speed.</li> <li>• Stays ahead of industry trends and introduces innovative practices that significantly enhance the team's performance.</li> </ul>

## QUALITY OF WORK

Does Not Meet Expectations	Achieves Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p><b>Definition:</b> Produces work that frequently contains errors and does not meet the required standards of accuracy and completeness. Productivity and efficiency are below expectations.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regularly submits reports with significant errors, requiring extensive revisions by others.</li> <li>• Often misses deadlines, causing delays in project timelines.</li> <li>• Work lacks attention to detail, resulting in frequent rework and corrections.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Produces work that consistently meets the required standards of accuracy and completeness. Maintains a steady level of productivity and efficiency, sometimes going beyond basic requirements.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completes their tasks accurately and on time, ensuring that all deliverables meet the expected quality standards.</li> <li>• Maintains consistent productivity, efficiently managing their workload and meeting deadlines.</li> <li>• Sometimes takes the initiative to improve processes, such as suggesting a more efficient way to handle data entry.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Consistently produces work of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds the required standards. Demonstrates outstanding productivity and efficiency, frequently going above and beyond expectations.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistently delivers high-quality work well ahead of deadlines, often identifying and implementing improvements that significantly enhance overall project outcomes.</li> <li>• Takes on additional responsibilities and completes them with exceptional accuracy and efficiency, contributing significantly to team success and setting a high standard for others.</li> <li>• Proactively seeks out and implements innovative solutions that lead to measurable improvements in productivity and quality, often recognized by peers and supervisors for their exceptional contributions.</li> </ul>

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Does Not Meet Expectations	Achieves Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p><b>Definition:</b> Has difficulty communicating clearly and effectively with colleagues and supervisors. Frequently misunderstands or misinterprets information, leading to confusion and errors.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often provides incomplete or unclear instructions, causing confusion among team members.</li> <li>• Frequently misses important details in emails, leading to misunderstandings and mistakes.</li> <li>• Rarely participates in team discussions, resulting in a lack of contribution to group decisions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Communicates clearly and effectively with colleagues and supervisors. Listens actively and responds appropriately in both written and verbal interactions.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regularly provides clear and concise updates during team meetings, ensuring everyone is informed and on the same page.</li> <li>• Listens to feedback from colleagues and supervisors and adjusts their approach based on the input received.</li> <li>• Writes well-structured and detailed emails that convey the necessary information without ambiguity.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Demonstrates exceptional communication skills that significantly enhance team collaboration and productivity. Consistently provides clear, persuasive, and impactful communication in all interactions.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistently delivers presentations that are not only clear and informative but also engaging and persuasive, leading to successful project approvals.</li> <li>• Excels in mediating conflicts within the team, using their communication skills to resolve issues and foster a positive work environment.</li> <li>• Proactively shares valuable insights and information with the team, contributing to better decision-making and overall team success.</li> </ul>

## COLLABORATION/TEAMWORK

Does Not Meet Expectations	Achieves Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p><b>Definition:</b> Has difficulty working effectively with team members. Rarely contributes to group efforts and provides limited support to others, which can impact team cohesion and productivity.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequently misses team meetings and does not participate in group discussions, causing delays in project progress.</li> <li>• Rarely offers help to colleagues, even when they are struggling with their workload.</li> <li>• Often disagrees with team decisions and does not cooperate, creating tension within the group.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Works well with team members, contributing to group efforts and supporting others. Participates in team activities and helps to achieve common goals.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively participates in team projects, offering constructive feedback and ideas that enhance the group's performance.</li> <li>• Collaborates with colleagues to complete tasks efficiently, ensuring that deadlines are met.</li> <li>• Supports team members by sharing resources and knowledge, helping to resolve issues and achieve common objectives.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Demonstrates outstanding teamwork skills that improve team cohesion and productivity. Consistently takes initiative to support and motivate team members, leading to exceptional team performance.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistently takes the lead in organizing team activities and initiatives, driving the team towards achieving goals efficiently.</li> <li>• Mentors and coaches colleagues, significantly improving their skills and performance, and contributing to the overall success of the team.</li> <li>• Proactively identifies and resolves potential conflicts within the team, ensuring smooth and effective collaboration and maintaining a positive work environment.</li> </ul>

## PROBLEM-SOLVING

Does Not Meet Expectations	Achieves Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p><b>Definition:</b> Struggles to identify and address routine problems. Often relies on others to find solutions and does not follow through on resolving issues.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequently overlooks recurring issues and waits for others to address them, leading to repeated disruptions in workflow.</li> <li>• Often requires assistance to solve basic problems, causing delays in task completion.</li> <li>• Fails to implement standard procedures to resolve common issues, resulting in ongoing inefficiencies.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Identifies and addresses routine problems using standard procedures. Demonstrates logical thinking and follows through on solutions.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies a recurring issue in the workflow and implements a standard procedure to prevent it from happening again.</li> <li>• Uses logical thinking to troubleshoot and resolve technical issues, ensuring minimal disruption to the team.</li> <li>• Follows established guidelines to address customer complaints, resolving them effectively and maintaining customer satisfaction.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Demonstrates exceptional problem-solving skills by identifying underlying issues and developing innovative solutions. Consistently anticipates potential problems and proactively addresses them.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies a complex issue affecting multiple departments, develops a comprehensive solution, and implements it successfully, resulting in significant improvements in efficiency.</li> <li>• Anticipates potential problems in a project and takes proactive measures to prevent them, ensuring smooth project execution.</li> <li>• Develops and implements a new system for tracking and resolving customer complaints, significantly improving response times and customer satisfaction.</li> </ul>

## DECISION-MAKING

Does Not Meet Expectations	Achieves Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p><b>Definition:</b> Struggles to make sound decisions based on available information. Often hesitates or makes decisions without considering potential outcomes, leading to negative impacts.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequently delays making decisions, causing project timelines to be missed and opportunities to be lost.</li> <li>• Makes decisions without consulting relevant data or stakeholders, resulting in poor outcomes.</li> <li>• Often changes decisions after they have been made, creating confusion and inconsistency within the team.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Makes decisions based on available information and established guidelines. Considers potential outcomes and impacts before acting.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluates the pros and cons of different vendors for a project, selects the most cost-effective option, and justifies their choice with data and analysis.</li> <li>• Makes timely decisions that align with company policies and procedures, ensuring smooth project progression.</li> <li>• Consults with team members and gathers necessary information before making decisions that affect the group.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Demonstrates exceptional decision-making skills by consistently making well-informed decisions that lead to significant positive outcomes. Anticipates potential challenges and proactively addresses them with innovative solutions.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makes decisions that lead to significant cost savings and improved efficiency for the organization, such as negotiating better terms with suppliers.</li> <li>• Anticipates potential risks in a project and implements proactive measures to mitigate them, ensuring successful project completion without major setbacks.</li> <li>• Consistently makes decisions that align with long-term organizational goals, such as identifying new market opportunities that contribute to sustained growth and success.</li> </ul>

## ADAPTABILITY/FLEXIBILITY

Does Not Meet Expectations	Achieves Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p><b>Definition:</b> Struggles to adjust to changes in work assignments, schedules, and priorities. Often resists new methods and has difficulty managing unexpected challenges.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequently expresses frustration and reluctance when asked to take on new tasks or responsibilities.</li> <li>• Has difficulty adjusting to changes in project timelines, leading to missed deadlines and decreased productivity.</li> <li>• Often requires additional support and guidance to manage unexpected challenges, impacting team progress.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Adjusts to changes in work assignments, schedules, and priorities with minimal disruption. Shows willingness to learn new methods and take on different tasks as needed.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willingly takes on new tasks and responsibilities, quickly learning the necessary skills to perform effectively.</li> <li>• Adapts to changes in project timelines and priorities, ensuring that deadlines are met without compromising quality.</li> <li>• Remains calm and composed when faced with unexpected challenges, finding effective solutions and maintaining productivity.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Demonstrates outstanding adaptability and flexibility. Proactively seeks out and embraces change, leading to innovative solutions and improved team performance.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistently volunteers for challenging assignments and successfully navigates complex changes, setting an example for others.</li> <li>• Identifies opportunities for improvement during periods of change and implements innovative solutions that enhance team efficiency.</li> <li>• Supports and mentors colleagues through transitions, helping them adapt quickly and effectively to new situations.</li> </ul>

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Does Not Meet Expectations	Achieves Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<p><b>Definition:</b> Frequently does not take responsibility for actions and decisions, leading to negative impacts on projects and/or team dynamics.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often does not own up to their errors and neglects to correct them.</li> <li>• Often misses deadlines and does not take responsibility for the delays, impacting the team's progress.</li> <li>• Fails to follow through on commitments, leaving tasks incomplete and causing disruptions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Consistently takes responsibility for actions and decisions. Fulfills commitments and meets deadlines, contributing positively to team and project outcomes.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistently meets project deadlines and delivers quality work on time.</li> <li>• Takes responsibility for mistakes, promptly addressing and correcting them.</li> <li>• Follows through on commitments, ensuring tasks are completed as promised.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Consistently ensures commitments are met and proactively addresses issues. Fosters a culture of accountability by setting a high standard that inspires others to follow suit.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistently meets and often exceeds project deadlines, delivering high-quality work ahead of schedule.</li> <li>• Proactively identifies potential issues and resolves them before they impact the team.</li> <li>• Supports colleagues by taking on additional responsibilities when needed, ensuring team success.</li> </ul>

## GUIDELINES FOR WRITING THE PERFORMANCE NARRATIVE

- ◆ **Be concise:** Three to five paragraphs are sufficient, and bullet lists are acceptable. Provide an executive summary of the employee's self-appraisal, your assessment and the impact of their development efforts on team success. Include potential development activities to prepare for the goal-setting conversation in the new performance cycle.
- ◆ **Support the rating:** Provide specific examples that justify the rating given. This is particularly important to differentiate ratings other than "Achieves Expectations." Use the narrative to "tell the story" and to provide insight into the rationale for the rating.
- ◆ **Demonstrate care:** Understand your employees' strengths, growth areas, and preferences. Provide honest and balanced feedback. Remember, the goal is to support professional growth while maintaining a fair and objective performance assessment.

## EXAMPLES

### **Exceeds Expectations:**

#### Poorly Written:

Sarah consistently exceeds expectations in her role in the admissions office, making exceptional contributions to departmental and university goals. She streamlines processes, enhances efficiency, and maintains high-quality standards. Sarah's exemplary communication skills and leadership qualities drive team cohesion and success. She's a valuable asset to our team, poised to continue exceeding expectations.

#### Why is this poorly written

This statement is too general and lacks specific details that justify the rating. It also projects into the future rather than focusing on assessing past performance.

#### Well Written:

Sarah has consistently demonstrated exceptional performance in her role within the admissions office. Throughout this performance cycle, her dedication and commitment to excellence have resulted in significant accomplishments and contributions to the goals of the department and the University as a whole. Sarah has consistently exceeded all performance and behavioral expectations set for her position.

One notable accomplishment where Sarah has excelled is her work to streamline and improve the admissions process by implementing several new strategies. As a result, the department has processed applications 3% more quickly while maintaining a high-quality standard.

Sarah's exceptional communication skills played a key role in fostering positive relationships with prospective students and their families. Her receiving an average rating of 5/5 on customer service surveys reflects these efforts. Her efforts make our applicants feel valued and supported throughout the admissions process.

Also, Sarah has taken on leadership roles in various departmental initiatives, which have provided her with professional development opportunities that have contributed to the admissions office's overall success. Her collaborative spirit and ability to inspire others have been invaluable in driving team cohesion and achieving departmental goals.

In summary, Sarah is a true asset to our team and has demonstrated her consistent commitment to exceeding expectations.

### **Achieves Expectations:**

#### Poorly written:

Justin has done well in his role within the admissions office. He seems to understand what he's supposed to do most of the time and has achieved expectations that were set with him for this performance cycle.

Justin pays attention to details and is highly accurate. He processes the applicant materials on time and provides quality customer service to prospective students and their families. People like him, which is good for the University.

He has attended some training sessions, demonstrating that he's trying to improve. Overall, Justin's doing fine and is a valued admissions team member.

#### Why this is poorly written

The summary lacks a description of how the employee's performance has impacted key results for the team. While customer service is praised, no specific behaviors contributing to this outcome are mentioned. Specifics about his professional development activities and areas of focus are also missing.

#### Well written:

Justin has consistently proven to be fully capable in all aspects of his role within the admissions office. Throughout this performance cycle, he has demonstrated a solid understanding of his responsibilities. He has consistently achieved or exceeded the performance expectations set for his position.

One area where Justin has excelled is in his attention to detail and accuracy. He consistently ensures that materials are processed correctly and promptly, contributing to the overall efficiency of the admissions process. His thoroughness and dedication to quality are a good example to others within the department.

Justin's strong interpersonal skills are an asset to the admissions office. He communicates effectively with prospective students and their families, addressing any questions or concerns they may have and guides the admissions process. His professionalism and approachability have helped to create a positive impression of the University.

Additionally, Justin has made the most of his professional development opportunities this year. He has also taken on new challenges in supporting the team's efforts to master new software tools, by sharing his working knowledge with fellow staff and student employees. This has helped the team to shorten our learning time and improve our productivity. He actively participates in departmental training sessions and workshops, demonstrating his commitment to continuous improvement. Overall, Justin's performance has consistently met expectations and has made valuable contributions to the admissions office. He is a reliable and dedicated member of the team.

### **Does Not Meet Expectations:**

#### Poorly written:

Emily's performance in the admissions office has been disappointing. She seems unable to manage her time effectively, which causes problems for everyone else. Her communication skills could be better, and she often comes across as disorganized and unprofessional. Emily seems to have a bad attitude and doesn't take feedback well. She needs to shape up if she wants to succeed in this role.

Why this is poorly written

Comments are limited to judgments and opinions about Emily's performance and behavior. No specific examples are provided.

Well written:

Emily's performance within the admissions office has not met the expectations of the role, and there are several areas where improvement is needed. Performance gaps that require attention and development have been identified throughout the review period.

One area of concern is Emily's time management skills. She frequently struggles to prioritize tasks effectively, resulting in delays in processing applicant materials and missed deadlines. This has negatively impacted the admissions process's overall efficiency and has put undue pressure on other team members to pick up the slack.

Emily's communication skills have also been lacking, particularly in her interactions with prospective students and their families. She is often unprepared to assist because she needs to have the required documents. She also demonstrates impatience in how she answers questions, which has led to several complaints from applicants about the quality of service they have received.

Furthermore, Emily has resisted feedback and has been reluctant to take responsibility for her performance shortcomings. Despite repeated attempts to address these issues through coaching and mentoring, her overall performance has yet to improve.

To succeed in her role, Emily must take proactive steps to address these performance gaps and demonstrate a greater willingness to learn and grow. This may involve seeking additional training opportunities or working closely with her supervisor to develop a personalized improvement plan.