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Purpose of this Guide
This guide is created to help you, as supervisors, support the performance and development of your staff within the year-end Performance Excellence process. This includes writing the review, assigning a rating, and conducting a performance conversation. Read this as you prepare for year-end activities, or follow along in real time as you complete each phase.
What is performance? Performance combines what you do and how you do it. At Northwestern, “what” you do includes job responsibilities as well as performance goals. The “how” of your work is evaluated relative to Northwestern’s values and associated behaviors. The Performance Excellence review includes space for a career development plan, emphasizing its role in increasing performance through time. Progress on a staff member’s career development plan is not included in review and rating.

See [http://perform.northwestern.edu](http://perform.northwestern.edu) for full information on SIMple goals and Northwestern values and behaviors.
Writing the Review

1. Review Elements
The written supervisor review should contain manager observations of accomplishments, any shortfalls, and desired improvements or areas for growth.

Best practice is to begin the review with a “primary message,” backed up by specific examples. The primary message may be considered the main theme of the review. After you’ve written the primary message and filled it out with examples, add any additional observations about accomplishments, shortfalls and development/growth to round out the picture.

Primary message
• the main theme or message you want the employee to walk away with

Observed achievements
• affirm accomplishments relative to job responsibilities, goals and/or values and behaviors

Observed shortfalls
• note job responsibilities or goals that were not met, or ways in which behaviors did not meet expectations. Offer fair written commentary if the missed objectives were acceptable based on unique circumstances

Desired improvements
• what changes or growth do you hope to see in the year to come?
2. Collecting Data
What data will you need to formulate an objective review and rating? Think about how your organization keeps track of activity, progress, feedback, metrics, and communications. Assemble your data, ask staff to include specific information or documents within their self-review, or sit down in advance of the review to discuss projects and outcomes.

Other “data’ can come from those who work with this staff member, and some supervisors choose to collect feedback from these colleagues, collaborators, clients or customers, as may be appropriate.

3. Primary Message Examples

- Jane Doe has increased our team’s credibility and impact across the university by consistently exercising her excellent critical thinking and project planning skills. Project X that launched in the winter and wrapped up recently, was a success because of how Jane worked with stakeholders to think through potential roadblocks at the beginning, and solicited input on the scope of work document. Throughout the project, she planned by carefully defining/documenting roles, responsibilities, and milestones, and continually communicated with everyone to keep it on track. I see her applying this same critical thought and organizational skill to her smaller projects, which she defines and tracks carefully in our online project files. This tracking will enable our team to communicate our collective impact more thoroughly.

- Joe Galvez is an exemplary staff member who improves student experience by bringing a positive and curious attitude to all aspects of his administrative role. I have saved five email threads from the year from students thanking Joe for his help. In these emails, students mention how he welcomed their questions, asked clarifying questions himself, pointed them toward the right information and was kind and funny in the process. He is fulfilling his responsibilities and doing it in such a way that everyone around him has a great experience – it’s contagious and beneficial.

- John Smith is a leader on technical expertise within our team, and needs to increase collaboration skills so that we can achieve our collective goals. As we launched the software platform for ____, John has not consistently delivered his input in a timely manner, which has impacted project timelines (in November, etc and in January, etc).

These sample primary messages may be followed by one-two paragraphs describing additional observed accomplishments or shortfalls from the past year and the improvements or growth you would like to see in the coming year.
4. Performance Review Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary message formula options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>(Name)</em> created <em>(this impact this year)</em> by <em>(doing this)</em>. <em>(Examples using action verbs.....)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Name)</em> is <em>(this kind of contributor: a leader, an innovator)</em> who demonstrates this by <em>(describe actions)</em>. <em>(Examples using action verbs.....)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Name)</em> created <em>(This impact this year)</em> and needs development in <em>(these areas)</em> in order to grow into their role. <em>(Examples using action verbs.....)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name

---

**Impact, results created, the role played (beyond official title)**

---

How have you observed the staff member’s impact, results, or role (behavior, accomplishments, shortfalls)?
### 5. Action Verb Index

#### Communication/People Skills
- Negotiate
- Observe
- Outline
- Participate
- Persuade
- Present
- Promote
- Propose
- Publicize
- Reconcile
- Recruit
- Refer
- Reinforce
- Report
- Resolve
- Respond
- Solicit
- Specify
- Speak
- Suggest
- Summarize
- Synthesize
- Translate
- Write

#### Data/Financial Skills
- Administer
- Adjust
- Allocate
- Analyze
- Appraise
- Assess
- Audit
- Balance
- Budget
- Calculate
- Compute
- Conserve
- Correct
- Determine
- Develop
- Estimate
- Forecast
- Manage
- Market
- Measure
- Net
- Plan
- Prepare
- Program
- Project
- Qualify
- Reconcile
- Reduce

#### Creative Skills
- Act
- Adapt
- Begin
- Combine
- Compose
- Conceptualize
- Condense
- Create
- Customize
- Design
- Develop
- Direct
- Display
- Draw
- Entertain
- Establish
- Fashion
- Formulate
- Found
- Illustrate

#### Helping Skills
- Advocate
- Aid
- Answer
- Arrange
- Assess
- Assist
- Clarify
- Coach
- Collaborate
- Contribute
- Cooperate
- Counsel
- Demonstrate
- Diagnose
- Educate
- Encourage
- Ensure
- Expedite
- Facilitate
- Familiarize
- Further
- Guide
- Help
- Insure
- Intervene
- Motivate
- Prevent
- Provide
- Refer
- Rehabilitate
- Represent
- Resolve
- Simplify
- Supply
- Support
- Volunteer

#### Management/Leadership Skills
- Administer
- Analyze
- Appoint
- Approve
- Assign
- Attain
- Authorize
- Chair
- Consider
- Consolidate
- Contract
- Control
- Convert
- Coordinate
- Decide
- Delegate
- Develop
- Direct
- Eliminate
- Emphasize
- Enforce
- Enhance
- Establish
- Execute
- Generate
- Handle
- Head
- Hire
- Host
- Improve
- Incorporate
- Increase
- Initiate
- Inspect
- Institute
- Lead
- Manage
- Merge
- Motivate
- Navigate
- Organize
- Originate
- Overhaul
- Oversee
- Plan
- Preside
Prioritize
Produce
Recommend
Reorganize
Replace
Restore
Review
Schedule
Secure
Select
Streamline
Strengthen
Supervise
Terminate

Organizational Skills
Approve
Arrange
Catalogue
Categorize
Chart
Classify
Code
Collect
Compile
Correct
Correspond
Distribute
Execute
File
Generate

Incorporate
Inspect
Log
Maintain
Monitor
Obtain
Operate
Order
Organize
Prepare
Process
Provide
Purchase
Record
Register
Reserve
Respond
Review
Route
Schedule
Submit
Supply
Standardize
Systematize
Update
Validate
Verify

Collect
Compare
Conduct
Critique
Detect
Determine
Diagnose
Evaluate
Examine
Experiment
Explore
Extract
Formulate
Gather
Inspect
Interview
Invent
Investigate
Locate
Measure
Organize
Research
Review
Search
Solve
Summarize
Survey
Systematize
Test

Claroify
Coach
Communicate
Conduct
Coordinate
Critique
Develop
Enable
Encourage
Evaluate
Explain
Facilitate
Focus
Guide
Individualize
Inform
Instill
Instruct
Motivate
Persuade
Simulate
Stimulate
Teach
Test
Train
Transmit
Tutor

Research Skills
Analyze
Clarify

Technical Skills
Adapt
Apply

Teaching Skills
Adapt
Advise

Assemble
Build
Calculate
Compute
Conserv
Construct
Convert
Debug
Design
Determine
Develop
Engineer
Fabricate
Fortify
Install
Maintain
Operate
Overhaul
Print
Program
Rectify
Regulate
Remodel
Repair
Replace
Restore
Solve
Specialize
Standardize
Study
Upgrade
Utilize

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Cognitive Bias

“Nobody would say, 'I'm voting for this guy because he's got the stronger chin,' but that, in fact, is partly what happens.”
- Daniel Kahneman, author Thinking, Fast and Slow

As we evaluate others, our judgments may be influenced by cognitive bias. Reflect on the following biases to explore your own review and rating pitfalls. Do certain staff members, preferred characteristics, or tendencies come to mind?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bias</th>
<th>What it looks like</th>
<th>How to lessen the impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Halo effect</td>
<td>This staff member walks on water. Everything they do is wonderful.</td>
<td>Establish what “wonderful” looks like on your team. Connect your definition to results. Evaluate your staff member relative to this definition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horns effect</td>
<td>This staff member is a problem. Everything they do is annoying, sloppy or disappointing.</td>
<td>Establish what “annoying, sloppy, or disappointing” looks like on your team. Connect your definition to results. Evaluate your staff member relative to this definition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotyping/Personal biases</td>
<td>This staff member is the kind of person I prefer (race, gender, clothing, speech, appearance, work habits).</td>
<td>List out your preferences. Evaluate staff members relative to visible accomplishments and results and be especially careful to do so with staff members who do or do not match your personal preferences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation Bias</td>
<td>I believe this about a staff member, so I will seek data that aligns with my belief.</td>
<td>Argue with your own claim. Draft your primary message, and then look for data, information or input that contradicts your message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First impression or Primacy effect</td>
<td>The first project they worked on here was a flop.</td>
<td>Evaluate all accomplishments or shortfalls over this performance year (only).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recency effect</td>
<td>This staff member gave an amazing presentation last week.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spill-over effect</td>
<td>This staff member was my top performer last year, or three years ago, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lenience</td>
<td>Everyone is above average on my team.</td>
<td>Notice your review and rating preference. Try to differentiate reviews and ratings across your team according to accomplishments and results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stiffness</td>
<td>Everyone is so-so on my team.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central tendency</td>
<td>I always rate a certain way (low or high). It's just how I see the world, or how I think it should be done.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assigning a Rating

Northwestern’s rating framework has five, qualitative ratings. Supervisors are encouraged to begin by assigning an *Achieving* rating to their staff members, and then to think specifically about why they may have earned a higher or lower rating.

*Achieving* indicates solid performance. Someone who fulfilled their job responsibilities and generated results as anticipated. As you look back at the written review you have drafted, do you see evidence of impact that was a higher than expected? If significant impact is clearly demonstrated, consider an *Excelling* rating. The *Role Model* rating is meant to be used sparingly, for staff members whose work was transformational and made a profound impact. This rating may be appropriate if a staff member stepped in to lead an unexpected project, or for a staff member whose efforts created a meaningful and sustainable improvement in team or department outcomes.

*Development Needed* is a rating designed to support a primary message that identifies a specific and essential skill or behavior gap. This gap in skills or behavior must be addressed in order for this staff member to fulfill the expectations of their role. *Corrective Action* is a formal process experienced by few staff members with significant performance issues. For those already in that process, this rating is an appropriate choice.

If the staff member is new in their role, please evaluate their performance relative to the learning curve of their role. Are they progressing as expected (*Achieving*)? Faster than expected (*Excelling*)?
Conducting the Conversation

The performance conversation is an essential part of Performance Excellence and has two parts: a look back at the year’s performance (oral version of written review) and a conversation about the year ahead.

Backward Looking: How did the year go?
1. Deliver your written review, verbatim, or in summary
2. Share the assigned rating, incorporating key messages:

   **Role Model**
   - Affirm contributions, identify what they did and how they did it and the impact created that led to the staff member’s Role Model rating.
   - Emphasize that not many individuals receive this rating. “You were one of the school or unit’s highest performers this year.”
   - Manage expectations – Role Model is a special rating reserved for profound, transformational impact. Staff members may not receive this rating in years where opportunities to leverage strengths or reach stretch goals don’t come along.

   **Excelling**
   - Affirm contributions, identify what they did and how they did it and the impact created that led to the staff member’s Excelling rating.
   - This is a great rating, indicating above average performance.
   - If they ask “why not Role Model?” - Role Model indicates profound or transformational impact (often beyond scope of role or department). The difference between Excelling and Role Model may depend on what opportunities arise for an individual to take on additional responsibilities in a given year.

   **Achieving**
   - Achieving is a very good rating and means you are a strong performer. It does not mean average and/or middle of the road.
   - Highlight strengths and significant accomplishments.
   - Discuss ways the staff member may seize more opportunities to make a contribution within the scope of their current role.

**Development Needed**
• Identify gaps in staff member accomplishments, skills and/or behaviors and their impact on the organization.
• Provide a positive message about the opportunity to close the gap, meeting the expectations for the role.
• Put the staff member in the driver's seat for closing gaps, with your help and support.

3. Ask reflective questions
   • What went well from your perspective?
   • What could have gone better?
   • What barriers to success have you experienced?

Forward Looking: What’s next?
This section of the conversation may include preliminary goal-setting, and provide an opportunity to discuss short- and long-term career goals. Questions for this part of the conversation could include:
   • Based on this discussion, what goals would you like to set for next year?
   • How do you prefer to receive ongoing performance feedback?
   • What training or experiences interest you?
   • Where do you see yourself in 2 years? 5 years?
   • If you could add one new responsibility or project, what would it be?

Common Mistakes
• Leaving too little time
• Accepting interruptions
• Lack of privacy
• Not owning the message
• Talking without listening
• Using “always” or “never”
• Repeating yourself

Best Practices for Process
Once a review is drafted and a rating assigned, best practice is to share drafts with your immediate supervisor and solicit input. In some schools or units, a formal calibration process will be employed. Releasing the review to the staff member may happen before or after the performance conversation, as recommended by your school or unit. Northwestern’s recommendation is to separate the review and rating conversation from the merit conversation. A typical flow may look like this:
APPENDIX
Year-end in myHR Learn
Reviewing & Rating Annual Performance Plans

For Supervisors
Review and recognize a staff member’s individual performance, develop enrichment opportunities for staff, and identify those who may need assistance.

Overview
• Review your staff members’ annual plan and add final feedback.
• Assign a rating (Role Model, Excelling, Achieving, Development Needed, Corrective Action).
• When finished, click SAVE. When you are ready for the staff member to finalize the review and rating, click RELEASE TO EMPLOYEE.

Detailed Instructions
From the myHR Learn Home page...
1. Scroll down to the Reviews section. Select “Current Review” and “Reviews I Own.”
2. Click Open next to the name of the staff member.
3. Read the staff member’s comments. Click the plus sign to open Job Responsibilities, Goals, Development Plan, and Northwestern Values.
4. Read the staff member’s Self-Review. Click to open and read accomplishments and final comments. Open attachments to view any supporting documentation.
5. Provide your review in Supervisor Review (Required). Click to open, enter comments, and SAVE.
6. Assign a rating. Hover over the radio buttons to see labels. Click the appropriate one and SAVE. When ready, click RELEASE TO EMPLOYEE. Note! The plan is available for the staff member to finalize.

Not ready to release to employee?
• If your unit conducts a calibration step, or releases ratings at a specific time, click SAVE. Then exit.
• If you want your staff to make changes to the review, click SAVE, then click “More actions” and “Reopen review.” Notify the staff member that the review was re-opened.
myHR Learn Year-End Workflow

myHR Learn creates a seamless year-end summary experience for both staff and supervisors.

1. Open your review
2. Summarize your performance in the “Self-Review” field
3. Add attachments as appropriate
4. Edit and complete comments to share with your supervisor

- Job Responsibilities
- Goals
- Development Plan
- Northwestern Values

5. Save and submit the form

6. This forwards your feedback on to your supervisor so they can begin their own review

7. They’ll provide feedback and a rating

8. Then your supervisor will release your review back to you

9. Acknowledge that you’ve received and read the review. Then you’re ready to click “Finalize”

10. By finalizing, you complete and submit your year-end summary in myHR Learn.

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Ratings Definitions and Guidelines

- The vast majority of Northwestern staff want to be here and make meaningful contributions. Every staff member has room to improve, and benefits from knowing where they stand.
- Ratings are based on annual performance. No one should be evaluated based on prior years’ performance.
- Ratings should be a summary of feedback provided throughout the year.
- New hires or staff members new to their role should be rated against their expected progress in learning the role, not against being fully capable in the role.
- Ratings should accurately reflect a staff member’s contribution. They should not be used as a punishment, a way to avoid conflict, or as a substitute for other rewards.
- Expectations should increase every year. Doing the same things the same way without focusing on continuously improving should not merit the same rating year after year. This is true even for staff whose core responsibilities remain largely the same year-to-year.

Few staff (5%) are **Role Models**. This rating is reserved for those few staff who made a profound impact this year.
- Consistently went way beyond core job responsibilities.
- Exceeded all expectations and goals, making a profound impact on school/unit and University beyond what was planned.
- Demonstrated Northwestern Values in an exemplary way and modeled the values for others.
- Ready for expanded or new responsibilities.
- **Not recommended for new hires or new to role.**

Some staff (25-30%) are **Excelling** and made a significant impact this year.
- Went above and beyond core job responsibilities.
- Exceeded expectations and goals, making a significant impact on school/unit beyond what was planned.
- Demonstrated Northwestern Values in an exemplary way.
- May be ready for new or expanded responsibilities.
- For new hires or new to role: progressed significantly faster than expected.

Many staff (55-65%) are **Achieving** and made a solid impact this year.
- Fulfilled core job responsibilities.
- Achieved goals, making a solid impact on school/unit.
- Demonstrated Northwestern Values consistently.
- Showed personal growth.
- For new hires or new to role: progressed as expected.

Few staff (5-10%) made a limited impact this year, and there is **Development Needed** in one or more areas under review. This rating is appropriate when one or more of the following statements apply:
- Did not consistently fulfill core job responsibilities.
- Did not consistently meet expectations and goals.
- Did not consistently demonstrate Northwestern Values.
- Did not show much personal growth.
- For new hires or new to role: progressed slower than expected.

Very few staff are in a formal **Corrective Action** process.
- Failed to improve despite ongoing efforts to address performance issues.
Northwestern Values and Behaviors

We strive for **Excellence**, taking pride in what we do. This looks like:

- Taking ownership and doing what is needed without having to be asked.
- Taking responsibility for outcomes, even when things don’t turn out right.
- Bringing forward options and solutions, not just identifying problems.
- Doing what you say you will do, when you say you will do it, working through circumstances with determination.
- Producing quality work that is both accurate and insightful.
- Providing valuable and helpful service to customers, making things easier for them.
- Working efficiently, and using University resources responsibly.
- Being a good steward, always working toward a better and more sustainable future.

We learn through **Discovery**, growing all the time. This looks like:

- Developing your professional skills, being curious and willing to learn.
- Generating ideas and finding new ways to contribute.
- Making improvements to the way work gets done, even when things may not be your direct responsibility.
- Being open to and soliciting feedback, and applying that learning to the way you work.

We engage in **Collaboration**, achieving success together. This looks like:

- Building strong working relationships and a positive work environment.
- Keeping others informed and involved.
- Finding and using the strengths of others, across the University.
- Being a great team member, pulling your weight and making space for others to shine.
- Recognizing the contributions of others.
- Helping others develop through candid and constructive feedback.

We embrace our **Diversity**, fostering a vibrant community. This looks like:

- Treating everyone with courtesy and respect, creating a welcoming community for all.
- Being respectfully curious about people’s experiences.
- Seeking diverse perspectives from others.
- Reaching out to be inclusive of others.
- Confronting people or situations that inhibit diversity.
- Increasing diversity, through hiring, development, and engagement.

We act with **Integrity**, building safety and trust. This looks like:

- Acting ethically, and seeking guidance when the ethics of a situation are not clear.
- Being transparent, open, and honest.
- Holding others accountable for unethical behavior.
- Acting with University’s best interest at heart.
- Honoring University policies and regulatory requirements.
- Doing whatever is necessary to create a safe environment for all. Going beyond minimal standards to assure the intentions of our initiatives are realized.