

Performance Review Procedure

SOP · US · Updated 2026-07-13 · Square brackets are placeholders to replace with your own details.

A performance review procedure is the written process for how managers evaluate employee performance: the cadence of reviews, the criteria they score against, how the conversation runs, what gets documented, and what happens next — including the path to a performance improvement plan when performance falls short.

The procedure matters for a reason beyond development: the review file is the employer's evidence. When a termination or demotion is challenged, the first documents anyone reads are the reviews — and the classic own goal is a file of inflated "meets expectations" ratings for someone dismissed for poor performance. A review procedure is as much about documentation discipline as about the meeting itself.

This template gives you the full procedure: cycle and cadence, preparation, the review conversation, rating and calibration, the documentation rules that keep the file honest, and the handoff to a PIP.

Purpose and scope

This procedure sets out how [Your company] plans, conducts, and records performance reviews. It applies to all employees after [introductory period], and to every manager who conducts a review. Nothing in this procedure changes the at-will nature of employment: reviews, ratings, and goals create no contract and no promise of continued employment or compensation.

Roles and responsibilities

- Managers: prepare, conduct, and document reviews for their direct reports on schedule, and raise performance problems when they happen — not at review time.
- [HR/name/role]: owns this procedure, runs the calendar, calibrates ratings across teams, and reviews documentation before anything goes in a personnel file.
- Employees: complete the self-assessment, attend prepared, and raise disagreement through the channel in this procedure rather than by refusing to participate.
- [Name/role]: files completed reviews and tracks that every scheduled review actually happened — a review cycle with gaps is a consistency problem waiting to be discovered.

Review cycle and cadence

Formal reviews happen [annually / semiannually] in [month(s)], with informal check-ins [quarterly / monthly] so nothing in the formal review is ever a surprise. New hires get a review at the end of the [introductory period], and an off-cycle review can be triggered by [role change, sustained underperformance, or return from extended leave — never by an employee's protected activity].

The criteria are set in advance: performance against the job description's essential functions and the [number] goals agreed at the last review, using the rating scale at [reference]. Same scale, same criteria, for everyone in comparable roles.

Preparing for the review

1. Pull the job description, last review, and agreed goals — the review measures against these, not against a manager's recollection of them.
2. Collect specific examples from the whole period, positive and negative, from [notes, metrics, project records] — recency bias is the most common preparation failure.
3. Draft the rating against the published criteria, and write the narrative first: if the examples do not support the rating, change the rating, not the examples.
4. Send the self-assessment to the employee [X days] before the meeting and book [45–60 minutes] in private.
5. Calibrate draft ratings with [HR/name/role] across the team before any meeting happens, so the same performance gets the same rating regardless of who the manager is.

Conducting the review

1. Open with the purpose and the rating — do not bury the conclusion behind twenty minutes of pleasantries.
2. Walk through the examples behind each rating, specific and behavioral: what happened, when, and its effect — "the [project] delivery in [month]" rather than "attitude".
3. Hear the employee's side in full, and correct anything factual you got wrong before the review is finalized — a review that survives challenge is one that absorbed the employee's evidence.
4. Agree [2–4] measurable goals and any development or training commitments for the next period, each with a date.
5. Name what happens next if performance concerns were raised — including, where warranted, that a performance improvement plan will follow under the PIP procedure.
6. Close with signatures: the employee's signature acknowledges receipt, not agreement, and a refusal to sign is simply noted with a witness — the review stands either way.

Documentation discipline

- Write every review as if it will be read aloud in a deposition — because the ones that matter will be.
- Rate honestly: an inflated review to avoid an awkward conversation becomes the exhibit that contradicts the termination it preceded.
- Describe behavior and results, never personality or anything touching a protected characteristic — and never count legally protected absences (FMLA leave where it applies, state-protected sick leave, jury duty) against an employee's rating.
- Match narrative to rating: a "needs improvement" score over a paragraph of praise reads as either carelessness or pretext.
- Finalize within [X days] of the meeting and file the signed review at [system/location] — an unfiled review protects no one.

After the review

Outcomes flow three ways. Goals and development commitments go into the next period's check-ins. Compensation recommendations, where applicable, feed the [separate compensation process] — this procedure decides ratings, not pay. And where the review documents sustained underperformance, the manager starts a performance improvement plan under the PIP procedure within [X days], so the review's findings become a concrete plan rather than a filed complaint.

An employee who disagrees with a review may submit a written response within [X days], which is filed with the review, and may raise concerns with [HR/name/role]. No one is penalized for disagreeing through this channel.

Records and review

Completed reviews, self-assessments, and written responses are kept in the personnel file at [system/location] for [period]; access follows [policy] and any state personnel-file access law that applies. [Name/role] audits each cycle for completion and rating consistency across teams and protected groups.

This procedure is reviewed [frequency, e.g. annually] and after any dispute that exposes a weakness in it. Owner: [name/role]. Next review due: [date].

How to use this template

1. Set a cadence you will actually keep — a semiannual cycle that happens beats an elaborate quarterly one that quietly stops.
2. Publish the rating scale and criteria before the cycle starts, and calibrate across managers so the same work earns the same rating.
3. Train managers on documentation discipline first: honest ratings, behavioral examples, and nothing about protected characteristics or protected leave.
4. Wire the PIP handoff into the calendar — a "needs improvement" rating with no follow-up plan is a finding that goes nowhere.
5. Audit each cycle for gaps and rating patterns by team and demographic; consistency problems are far cheaper to find yourself.

Official guidance

- › [EEOC — Employers](#)
- › [EEOC — Retaliation](#)
- › [EEOC — Prohibited employment policies/practices](#)

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