

# Ace Your Performance Review



The performance review: probably the most dreaded point in any employee's work year. And you thought you'd leave testing and grading behind when you finished school!

If you're dreading review time, a little planning and preparation can help you control anxiety and boost performance.

Here's everything you need to know to survive this ordeal and come out smelling like a rose.

## **In this guide, you'll find:**

- Performance Review 101
- Preparation and performance tips
- Handling a negative review
- Creating a "long-term plan" to ace next year's review



# Overview: What Are Performance Reviews For, Anyway?

Performance reviews: they're for reviewing performance, right?

Of course! But a good performance review does much more. By preparing for your review, you improve your chances of accomplishing key goals like:

- Making sure you and your employer are “on the same page”
- Recognizing and documenting your achievements in your employer's files
- Discovering where you're doing well
- Receiving concrete advice on how to do better
- Getting your career development needs met





# Preparing for Performance Review Day

The number-one cause for skyrocketing stress in a performance review? Fear of the unknown.

Like other aspects of your career, if you want to do well in a performance review, it pays to take the initiative. Here's how:

- 1. Know what you're being evaluated on.** Review the evaluation form and any goals set for you last year. How are you doing?
- 2. Find out what matters to your boss.** What does your boss consider "outstanding" performance? Find out -- especially if you're seeking a raise or promotion.
- 3. Summarize your best work.** Jot down specific, measurable accomplishments you've reached this year. Keep these notes handy during the performance review.
- 4. Create a "wish list."** What do you want to achieve next year? Take this list to the performance review as well, and ask your boss how you can make your wishes come true.



# What to do in Your Review

If you're entering your first-ever review or just trying to calm your nerves before this year's go-round, keep these three tips in mind:

- 1. Stay calm.** Your review is a chance to connect with your boss as a coach and mentor. It's also a chance to talk about what you love about your work and find ways to do more of it.
- 2. Be prepared.** Bring your "year in summary," your "wish list," and a copy of the evaluation form. If you have any "portfolio pieces" you can show off, bring these too!
- 3. Talk positively.** Hit the high points, and talk about the low points in terms of improvement: "When the Johnson account fell through, I learned..."





# What to Say in Your Review

Like a job interview, a performance review should be a dialogue, not a lecture. You're a member of a team, and this is your chance to sound like one.

What does your boss want to know? Try these topics:

- 1. What you love -- or don't -- about your work.** People do their best on work they love. When your boss knows what you want to do, he or she can make your passions work with the team's.
- 2. How you want to grow.** Your career develops all the time -- but in what direction? This is a great time to talk about next year's "wish list."
- 3. How your growth and the company's success fit together.** You want to shine, sure -- but so does your employer. Demonstrate a team attitude by exploring how you can grow within and for the company.
- 4. What would work better.** You're on the front lines, with a first-hand perspective on what works and what doesn't. If a specific change would improve your work, mention it!



# Negative Review? Here's How to Respond

It's normal to be surprised or even angry at a negative review. Here's how to handle them professionally and productively:

- Step back. Take a day or two to think before you respond.
- Make plans for improvement. Create a few specific goals that demonstrate your growth.
- Schedule a meeting. Talk to your boss about your plans to improve.





# Following Up

Positive or negative, a performance review should always end with follow up. Here's how:

- 1. Touch base with your boss.** At least once a quarter, schedule a quick meeting with your boss to talk about your progress.
- 2. Seek coaching and mentorship from other co-workers.** Get help from a co-worker whose strengths are your weaknesses -- and return the favor.
- 3. Keep track of your work.** Keep copies of written compliments, commendations, and awards. Use them to “build your case” for a positive performance review next year.





# Looking Forward to Next Year

The moment you walk out of your most recent performance review is the best time to start planning for your next. Add these items to your to-do list:

- **Start a file.** Put your evaluation and notes from this year's review in the file.
- **Set a deadline.** Every other Friday, review the file. When you accomplish something that applies to any of your performance goals, note it in the file.
- **Build a portfolio.** Add work, like design specs or reports, to the file.
- **Collect compliments.** Keep copies of compliments that come in memos and emails.
- **Role-play.** Ask yourself, "If I were a manager who wanted to promote this person, how would I justify the promotion to my own boss?" Use your answers to sell your performance in your annual review. And don't forget to bring your file!

