Tracking Performance Accomplishments and Writing Self-Assessments

What is a self-assessment?
A self-assessment is an employee's opportunity to provide a narrative description of their major accomplishments related to the performance elements and associated performance standards in their performance plan. In a self-assessment, the employee can describe their major contributions and how they accomplished or did not accomplish their performance expectations. Additionally, accomplishments may include other achievements or recognition achieved during the performance year and training and developmental needs. *Note: The rating is based on the <u>substance</u> of the contribution, <u>not how well the contribution is described</u>.* Providing the self-assessment does not negate the supervisor's responsibility to provide a narrative of an employee's accomplishments to support the end of year rating.

Suggestions for writing the self-assessment:
1. If you have difficulty identifying your accomplishments or special strengths for a self-assessment, <u>think about what makes you proud in your work</u>. Often these things- calming anxious visitors, solving systems problems, mentoring new employees, coaching or counseling others, writing reports-will help you identify your accomplishments.

2. <u>Use the **STAR** method</u>. In self-assessments, you must write convincingly about your accomplishments, strengths, and skills-that is, to write about yourself as a "star" performer. To do that successfully, use the **STAR** method. This method involves briefly describing a situation (S) and task (T), the action (A) you took to accomplish it, and the results (R) you achieved. Be sure to consider actions which fall into these categories when deciding upon your **STAR** actions: the degree of difficulty, one of a kind, first-time, high-visibility, large volume of work, deadlines, competing priorities, innovation required, scope and impact for the work you performed.

    Example 1:
    When I started as a branch manager, annual employee turnover was 25 percent. I implemented an employee satisfaction survey and suggestion program, established coaching plans for supervisors, and instituted a weekly staff meeting. As a result of these efforts, the employee turnover rate is now 10 percent.

    Example 2
    My challenge was to train staff in the new software by the opening of business on Monday, about 3 work days. I designed, planned, and managed around-the-clock training using classroom instructors, online learning, and targeted job aids. On Monday morning, 96 percent of employees reporting to work had been trained on the new system.

3. <u>Use specific examples</u>. Specific examples add credibility. Although words like outstanding, dependable, and creative are positive, they do not always paint a convincing picture. Instead of stating that you "always maintain good customer relations," cite customer-satisfaction surveys, letters of communication, and the absence of any customer complaints about you.

4. <u>Use numbers or metrics whenever possible</u>. Numbers are concrete. They communicate a clear picture. By contrast, a "large staff" may be 20 or 200. If you are in charge of a large staff, budget, or region, use numbers to show how large it is. Alternatively, state specifically how long you have managed it.

5. <u>Do not exaggerate or lie</u>, even a tiny bit. Your self-assessment should make you feel proud and help you speak confidently in a performance discussion. Exaggerations or misstatements will not give you confidence, in addition to their obvious ethical implications.

6. <u>Use the word "I."</u> Many people have been taught in business or technical writing classes not to use the pronoun "I." In some instances that may be useful advice, but in a self-assessment it does not make sense. Feel free to write, "I hired 200 interns" or "I wrote the final draft." If you participated in a successful group effort, you are still justified in using "I": "With my team members, I won the Corporate Communications award in 2004." Vary your sentence structure if you find that you have too many sentences beginning with "I." Change "I reduced turnaround time by 20 percent within a year" to "Within a year; I reduced turnaround time by 20 percent."

7. <u>Give relevant information</u>. Most self-assessments include specific categories: mission support, program management, teamwork, communication, customer service, problem solving, and so on. Be sure that the examples you give match the category; otherwise, they lose power. Be factual, specific and concise. The self-assessment does not need to be very long. Summarize and highlight your important contributions. (As a guideline – write a maximum of two pages per performance element.)

8. <u>Explain value</u>. Be sure to tie results to organizational goals. For example, as the new ethics coordinator at your organization, you may have conducted 40 ethics briefings in your first three months. The number sounds impressive, but what does it mean? Is there a correlation between your briefings and a reduction in violations or incidents? Whenever possible, translate your hard work into results your reader will value. Consider "negative data" to illustrate your effectiveness-information such as the absence of on-the-job violations, lawsuits, and grievances.

9. <u>Enlist the help of friend</u>. When you have drafted your self-assessment, ask a friend to review it and answer these types of questions:

- Are my examples specific?
- Have I described my strengths accurately?
- Is every statement clear?
- Does every statement sound believable?
- Is all the content pertinent?
- Have I missed any relevant strengths or accomplishments?

Guidelines for writing the self-assessment:
- Restate your performance elements.
- Highlight the most significant achievements related to the element for the rating cycle. Remember the self-assessment does not need to be lengthy but highlight what mattered most during the rating cycle.
- Make the connection between what was done and why it matters to the organization.
- Cite instances where your actions/performance/conduct exemplified or exceeded the performance standards.
- Note the challenges you faced and how you responded to those challenges. Overcoming challenges is an important part of the overall performance rating. Challenges may be technical or interpersonal in nature. They may also involve the ability to succeed despite limited resources or difficult circumstances.

Suggestions for Tracking Accomplishments:
1. Maintain an ongoing record, or journal, of major achievements throughout the appraisal cycle. By documenting major achievements as they occur, you have ready access to the information needed to complete the self-assessment. Create a system to capture accomplishments such as:
   - Email folder
   - Word document
   - Notes on planner or calendar
   - File folder for each performance element

2. Document progress on a regular basis (for example-weekly) and maintain copies of important work products for your file.
   - Reports
   - Training
   - Metrics
   - Correspondence including thanks from customers or supervisors

Remember, completing a self-assessment is not a requirement, but is your opportunity for you to provide your supervisor information about the performance goals and accomplishments you achieved, the challenges you faced, and the training and development you desire.

Possible Accomplishments:
Which of the following did you accomplish?

Accomplish more with the same
Accomplish more with other
Accomplish the same thing with less
Create something from scratch
Develop a new process
Do what could not be done
Enlarge a market
Enlarge capacity
Establish a new procedure
Find a cheaper solution
Find a new market
Find a new opportunity
Find an easier solution
Foresee a need
Foresee a problem
Foresee an opportunity
Improve customer relations
Improve customer satisfaction
Improve employee relations
Improve labor/management relations
Improve maintainability
Improve quality
Improve reliability
Improve teamwork
Increase market share
Increase profits
Increase sales
Make fewer bad things happen
Make more good things happen
Make things easier
Make things smoother
Overcome obstacles
Prevent a problem
Protect against a hazard
Provide new resources
Receive an award
Reduce costs
Reduce errors
Reduce losses
Save the day
Solve a chronic problem
Speed things up

Action Verbs for Writing a Self-Assessment:

Accelerated Accomplished Achieved Acted Activated Adapted Addressed Adjusted Administered Advanced Advertised Advised Advocated Aided Allocated Analyzed Answered Applied Appraised Approved Arbitrated Arranged Ascertained Assembled Assessed Assigned Assisted Attained Augmented Authorized Awarded

Balanced Began Boosted Briefed Budgeted Built

Calculated Captured Cataloged Centralized Chaired Charted Checked Clarified Classified Coached Collaborated Collected Combined Communicated Compared Compiled Completed Composed Computed Conceived Conceptualized Condensed Conducted Conferred Conserved Consolidated Constructed Consulted Contacted Continued Contributed Controlled Converted Conveyed Convinced Coordinated Corresponded Counseled Created Critiqued Cultivated Customized

Debugged Decided Defined Delegated Delivered Demonstrated Designated Designed Detected Determined Developed Devised Diagnosed Directed Discovered Dispensed Displayed Dissected Distributed Diverted Documented Drafted

Earned Edited Educated Effected Eliminated Emphasized Employed Encouraged Enforced Engineered Enhanced Enlarged Enlisted Ensured Entertained Established Estimated Evaluated Examined Executed Expanded Expedited Experimented Explained Explored Expressed Extended Extracted

Fabricated Facilitated Fashioned Finalized Fixed Focused Forecasted Formed Formulated Fostered Found Fulfilled Furnished

Gained Gathered Generated Governed Grossed Guided

Handled Headed Heightened Helped Hired Honed Hosted Hypothesized Identified Illustrated Imagined Implemented Improved Improvised Incorporated Increased Indexed Influenced Informed Initiated Innovated Inspected Inspired Installed Instituted Integrated Interacted Interpreted Interviewed Introduced Invented Inventoried Investigated Involved Issued

Joined Judged

Kept

Launched Learned Lectured Led Lifted Listened Located Logged

Maintained Managed Manipulated Marketed Maximized Measured Mediated Merged Mobilized Modified Monitored Motivated

Navigated Negotiated Netted

Action Verbs for Writing a Self-Assessment (continued):

Observed Obtained Opened Operated Ordered Orchestrated Organized Originated Outlined Overcame Overhauled Oversaw

Participated Performed Persuaded Photographed Pinpointed Piloted Pioneered Placed Planned Played Predicted Prepared Prescribed Presented Presided Prevented Printed Prioritized Processed Produced Programmed Projected Promoted Proofread Proposed Protected Proved Provided Publicized Purchased

Qualified Questioned

Raised Ran Rated Reached Realized Reasoned Received Recommended Reconciled Recorded Recruited Reduced Referred Regulated Rehabilitated Related Remodeled Rendered Reorganized Repaired Replaced Reported Represented Researched Reshaped Resolved Responded Restored Retrieved Reviewed Revised Revitalized Routed

Saved Scheduled Screened Searched Secured Selected Separated Served Shaped Shared Simplified Simulated Sketched Sold Solved Sorted Spearheaded Specialized Specified Spoke Sponsored Staffed Standardized Started Streamlined Strengthened Structured Studied Suggested Summarized Supervised Supplied Supported Surpassed Surveyed Sustained Synthesized Systematized

Targeted Taught Terminated Tested Tightened Totaled Tracked Traded Trained Transcribed Transformed Transmitted Translated Traveled Tutored

Uncovered Undertook Unified United Updated Upgraded Used Utilized

Validated Verbalized Verified Vitalized Volunteered

Weighed Widened Won Worked Wrote

USDA

Departmental Administration
Office of Human Capital Management
Departmental Human Resources Division