

Self-Appraisal Guide II

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This is a revised Self-Appraisal Guide in response to several inquiries from members of the NTEU family. As requested, new language from the National Agreement is included in addition to several more “Power Words.”

Marshall Goldsmith, founding director of the Alliance for Strategic Leadership, said that 85% of us think we are in the top 25% of our peer group. However, not that many of us can write a convincing essay-type Self-Appraisal capturing our applied knowledge as it pertains to our day-to-day duties. It is hard to write about yourself in a way that accurately depicts your problem-solving skills, initiative and a willingness to go the extra mile. Nevertheless, that is exactly what we need to do. I hope this revised Self-Appraisal Guide can assist members of NTEU in ensuring they receive a fair and objective evaluation.

Thanks again to my NTEU colleagues for their ideas and support in connection with this Guide.

Please let me know about any corrections or suggestions.

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Introduction

You work hard; you work smart — all year. You receive your annual performance appraisal. Much of your best work is not mentioned. Why is that? How could you have prevented this?

If you have been unhappy with your prior performance appraisals, or might be unhappy with your next appraisal, then do it yourself the way it should be done.

For over 20 years a trend has been developing within the Service to provide less and less written information to employees in their annual performance appraisals.

Why minimize narratives?

Why does agency management resist detailed narratives in annual appraisals?

Often managers feel that:

- They have other more important priorities.
- They lack the skills to prepare a meaningful, constructive, insightful and defensible narrative.
- They prefer the less judgmental role of “coach.”
- Due to administrative duties they no longer have the technical expertise or time to fairly evaluate the performance of employees.
- They have too many employees to evaluate.
- Performance appraisals are not useful because the real problem is too few resources are available to do what needs to be done.
- Performance appraisals are not aligned with the mission of the agency. Also, the Critical Job Elements are not aligned with agency measures of success and with the actual duties being performed, including expertise in technology, Quality Measurement metrics and an ever-increasing administrative burden on employees.

If these were the only perspectives on the question, then the solution would be simple: eliminate narratives. However, the performance appraisal system is not intended to be a convenience for agency management anymore than enhancing customer satisfaction is intended to be a convenience for agency management. Providing quality performance appraisals and quality customer service are both leadership obligations requiring a view toward the impact on end-users.

History

Since the early 1970's, NTEU has been asserting itself at the bargaining table to block agency attempts to minimize narrative content in evaluations. For several years our National Agreements have included provisions for employees to prepare their own appraisals on official time. The National Agreement, Article 12, Section 4.B.5 gives employees 4 hours of official time to prepare a self-assessment during the final 30 days of an assessment period. Also, the self-assessment is limited to two pages and, in my opinion, is presumptively correct unless a supervisor rejects the self-assessment and furnishes an explanation at a meeting with the employee and his or her steward in accordance with Article 12, Section 4.B.6.

Additionally, Article 12, Section 4.B.5 requires management to provide a tutorial on self-assessments and provide official time. As of this writing, the web version can be found on the Intranet at: <http://shr.web.irs.gov/pers/SA/contentframe.htm>. All disagreements over the amount of time needed to complete the tutorial should be referred to your NTEU steward. If some of the examples seem to have in mind the perfect employee, you are not imagining things.

Self-Appraisal

Why prepare a Self-Appraisal?

- You know more about your contributions than anyone else.
- To show that you have completed many tasks that are difficult and worthwhile.
- To give specific, concrete examples of your contributions.
- To show that you did better than your competitors.
- To identify ways in which your supervisor can assist you in doing a better job.
- To identify aspects of your job where you would like more training.
- To gain self-awareness.
- Written records of your achievements are the heart of your performance history.
- If your manager does not attach a written narrative to your appraisal, you are allowed to prepare your own in accordance with the National Agreement, Article 12, Section 4.P. (page 32).

Self-Appraisals can be done in 6 steps. Let's get started.

Step 1

So, what have you been doing lately? Maybe the most important step.

You know what you know.

This is not rocket science.

You should know more details about your job performance than anyone else. Starting today find a folder and start keeping notes and other written material about your accomplishments. If you made a suggestion, prepared a memo, or handled a problem that demonstrated the application of your skills in solving a problem — capture it in writing. If the application of your skills produced results — capture them in writing, even if they involved a collateral duty. Some jobs in the Internal Revenue Service involve a never ending series of problems that employees must solve including Revenue Agent, Revenue Officer and any job involving customer service, to name a few.

You don't know what you know.

This is not rocket science either.

It is only natural to think, “I didn't do anything special. I just did my job.” You did a lot more than just your job. You manage multiple demands on your time and energy and suffer countless interruptions. Frequently you are told to “Drop everything” to attend a meeting or a class. We are in an environment in which the Service is introducing new technology, new cultural values – especially customer satisfaction – and a new organizational structure. On a regular basis we have additional duties tacked on to our normal duties. After a year or two, we can find our duties and responsibilities have doubled. Just “doing your job” in this environment is an accomplishment. Look for your accomplishments, talk to your fellow employees and talk to your boss.

Skills versus Accomplishments

Understand the difference. For example, some folks have excellent “Meet and Deal” abilities. That is a definite asset and skill. Using your “Meet and Deal” skills to enhance customer service, employee satisfaction or performing work more accurately or efficiently is an accomplishment. You might have the nicest smile in the IRS but normally that will not get you a top rating. Make sure you track specific examples of the application of your skills to produce outcomes. More on outcomes later.

Step 2

Get your stuff together.

Here are some ideas:

- Critical Elements, Standards, Aspects and whatever else forms the basis for the evaluation.
- Position Description
- Prior year's evaluation
- Individual Development Plan, if any.
- List of all job performance related training.
- Everything in your personnel file commenting on your performance, including managerial recordations, samples of work products and complementary letters.
- List of all cases, projects, team and committee assignments you worked on during the evaluation period.
- Your copy of the union contract, especially Article 12.
- Notes and documentation from progress review.
- Determine when your appraisal period ends. See the National Agreement, Exhibit 12-1 (page 164).
- Your file from Step 1.
- The telephone number of your NTEU Steward.

Step 3

Showtime!

- Notify your immediate supervisor that you wish to use official time to prepare a self-assessment as provided in the National Agreement, Article 12, Section 4.B.5 (page 24).
- You get up to 4 hours of official time. This means 240 minutes, not some system in which any part of an hour counts as a full hour. If you are in a job with frequent interruptions, keep track of the time you spend on the self-assessment. You do not have to use the 4 hours all at once as a block.
- Sort your documentation by critical element. If one document applies to more than 1 Critical Element either make a copy or make a brief note on a separate piece of paper. Using a 5 Critical Element approach you will have 5 stacks.

If you have good records, so far this was easy.

- Identify your target Element. Bargaining unit employees have 5 critical elements: 2 for Business Results, 2 for Customer Satisfaction and 1 for Employee Satisfaction.

For example: One of the Tax Advocate jobs has a critical element for Customer Satisfaction (Application), which has a component for Presentation Skills. To get a top rating you must demonstrate that you “Consistently present information to others in a clear and understandable manner. . . .”

You want to give a few examples of how you *consistently* present information to others in a *clear* and *understandable* manner.

Write a few sentences. It’s like telling a story. If you do not have any examples, move on. Do not just say “I consistently present information to others in a clear and understandable manner.” That is simply restating the standard. Use specifics. Proceed through each Critical Element in order. Don’t worry if you do not have examples for every single phrase in your elements. Sometimes aspects do not apply to your job.

- The first round is a draft so don’t worry if it isn’t pretty. Your draft may exceed the two-page limit. At this point the goal is to get your accomplishments reduced to writing. You can edit the draft later.

Writing style

Here are some ideas.

- Keep it simple, keep it clear and keep it brief. Some marketing consultants like to say that you should assume your reading audience has the brains of a 13-year old child with a sixth-grade education. While that may not be the case in our agency, it does make a point. The federal government is spending considerable energy in promoting a “Plain English” approach to government related writing.
- If you do not know how to start, just write “On or about” and fill in the dates and tell your story.
- If you want to be a Star then write in **STARs**. Tell the **S**ituation, the **T**asks to be performed, the **A**ctions you took and the **R**esults. For example: *[Situation]* On or about February 7, 2001, in response to several inquiries regarding the interpretation of recent legislation, *[Task]* I was asked to make a presentation to a small group of tax preparers regarding a new law covering Earned Income Tax Credit. *[Actions]* I telephoned Pat Hand, the contact point for the Local Preparers’ Association (LPA), determined the information needs of the preparers and designed several handouts in addition to my oral presentation. I allowed ½ hour of the 1 hour time slot for Questions and Answers. I frequently asked my audience if they understood my points before I moved on. *[Results]* Subsequently, Pat Hand called me and thanked me and asked if I could do something like this again in the future.
- Outcomes. Just because a case resulted in No Change in tax liability or was Uncollectible does not mean the results were negative. Properly applying the tax law may often produce outcomes that do not increase the amount of money collected in the short-term. Avoid mentioning measures that are prohibited by law or regulation, such as Dollars per Hour. Using such measures in your self-appraisal will only create controversy and will detract from your success stories. One outcome that is frequently overlooked is success in preventing undesirable events. For example, keeping someone cooperative or satisfied can be a major accomplishment.
- Should you mention the rating itself? “I deserve a rating of Exceeds Fully Successful.” This is a judgment call. My preference is not because employees often underrate themselves. However, some of our members have advised me they prefer to rate themselves in the Self-Appraisal. Your choice.

Writing style (*continued*)

- Verbs are the most powerful words in the English language, especially action verbs.
- Use verbs in the active voice. *I taught the class* on February 7. Not, *the class was taught* on February 7.
- See Attachment A for a list of Power Words. Use them as appropriate. The verbs should be used in the past tense since your accomplishments occurred in the past.

Step 4

Sanity Check

- Edit your work. List each critical element and component in numerical order and make sure it is easy to read. Review your work so you did not miss anything.
- Boil your accomplishments down to two pages. This takes self-discipline. You need to get to the meat in the Self-Appraisal as soon as possible. One of the most common mistakes employees make is restating CJE language without providing facts that permit a favorable conclusion about the level of performance.
- You can ask a friend or an NTEU person to take a look at the finished product. Ask for and pay attention to feedback from others. Make sure you sanitize any document you share, as appropriate. You do not need disclosure problems.
- If at all possible, your Self-Appraisal should be typed. The normal rule in business is “Do not submit any document that has a known typographical error.”

Step 5

Submit

- Make a copy for yourself.
- Timely submit it to your supervisor and note on your copy the time and date.
- If you prepared your Self-Appraisal on a computer, give your supervisor a copy of your appraisal on a 3-½" disk. Make sure nothing else is on the disk. This permits your supervisor to easily copy your accomplishments into your official appraisal.

Step 6

Déjà vu all over again

Start a file for next year. Don't put it off. Now you will have a better idea of the records you need.

Conclusion

This is not a perfect world. No kidding.

- On rare occasions your supervisor might not hold you in the same high esteem that you hold yourself. During the discussion of your annual appraisal you might not see eye-to-eye on your numerical ratings. Your interest should be in engaging in a fact based discussion. If areas are brought to your attention that need improvement, make sure you agree on a plan of action, including commitments of resources, training and developmental assignments. Ask for specific examples of what you need to do to get a higher rating.
- If you suspect that numerical scores are being awarded based on a Bell Curve or Forced Distribution in which only a predetermined number of high ratings can be awarded, go back to Step 2, get your NTEU Steward's telephone number and drop a dime. Mention the National Agreement, Article 12, Section 3.G. (page 30).

Acting Collectively

Because of the introduction of new technology, customer focus, reorganization and rising customer expectations the agency has many, many priorities. However, employee knowledge and IRS specific skills are not an all-you-can-eat buffet for management. We need resources applied to our needs as well. It is not unreasonable to expect technical support for the new technology, relevant training for new and expanded job duties and reasonable rewards and recognition for those of us at ground zero of tax administration. Going through the process of preparing a Self-Appraisal can help to surface and clarify employee needs. Share your experiences with your chapter officials.

Good Luck.

Mike Peacher

Attachment A: Power Words

Attachment B: National Agreement, Article 12, Section 4.B.

Attachment A — Power Words

Focused List — Part I

Independence	Investigative	Supportive	Creative	Admin
administered	clarified	adapted	acted	approved
analyzed	collected	advised	composed	arranged
appointed	critiqued	clarified	conceptualized	catalogued
assigned	diagnosed	coached	created	classified
attained	evaluated	communicated	customized	collected
authorized	examined	coordinated	designed	compiled
chaired	extracted	critiqued	developed	dispatched
consolidated	identified	developed	directed	executed
contracted	inspected	educated	edited	generated
coordinated	interpreted	enabled	envisioned	implemented
delegated	interviewed	encouraged	established	inspected
developed	investigated	evaluated	fashioned	monitored
directed	organized	explained	founded	operated
evaluated	recorded	facilitated	illustrated	organized
executed	reviewed	guided	initiated	prepared
improved	scrutinized	informed	inspired	processed
interviewed	studied	inspired	instituted	purchased
increased	summarized	instructed	integrated	recorded
organized	surveyed	persuaded	introduced	retrieved
planned	systematized	set goals	invented	scheduled
prioritized		stimulated	originated	screened
procured		suggested	performed	specified
produced		trained	planned	systematized
recommended			remodeled	tabulated
recruited			rejuvenated	validated
reviewed			revitalized	verified
scheduled			shaped	
strengthened			transformed	
			visualized	

Attachment A — Power Words

Focused List — Part II

Systems Work	Communications	Analytical	Assisted	Successes
assembled	addressed	Allocated	aided	accelerated
built	arbitrated	Analyzed	assessed	accommodated
calculated	arranged	appraised	assisted	accomplished
computed	authored	audited	clarified	achieved
converted	collaborated	balanced	coached	boosted
designed	communicated	budgeted	contributed	expanded
devised	convinced	calculated	counseled	expedited
engineered	corresponded	computed	demonstrated	founded
maintained	developed	consolidated	diagnosed	improved
operated	directed	developed	educated	innovated
overhauled	drafted	figured	expedited	launched
pioneered	edited	forecasted	facilitated	minimized
programmed	enlisted	managed	familiarized	moderated
refined	formulated	marketed	guided	pioneered
remodeled	influenced	measured	motivated	procured
repaired	interpreted	planned	rehabilitated	rectified
restored	lectured	projected	represented	reduced
revamped	mediated	queried	scheduled	remedied
solved	moderated	reconciled	suggested	resolved
streamlined	negotiated	recorded	supplemented	restored
upgraded	persuaded	researched	verified	spearheaded
	promoted	resolved		streamlined
	publicized	solved		strengthened
	reconciled	substantiated		transformed
	recruited	summarized		
	rectified	validated		
	remedied	valued		
	spoke			
	translated			
	wrote			

Attachment A — Power Words

Comprehensive List 350 Power Words — Part I

accelerated	audited	compared	cultivated	effected
accommodated	authored	compiled	customized	eliminated
accomplished	authorized	completed	cut	enabled
achieved	awarded	composed	dealt	encouraged
acquired	balanced	computed	decided	endorsed
acted	boosted	conceived	defined	engineered
adapted	bought	conceptualized	delegated	enlarged
addressed	briefed	concluded	delivered	enlisted
administered	broadened	condensed	demonstrated	ensured
advised	brought	conducted	described	entered
aided	budgeted	considered	designed	envisioned
allocated	built	consolidated	determined	established
analyzed	calculated	constructed	developed	estimated
answered	catalogued	consulted	devised	evaluated
anticipated	caused	continued	diagnosed	examined
applied	centralized	contracted	directed	executed
appointed	chaired	contributed	discovered	expanded
appraised	changed	controlled	discussed	expedited
approved	clarified	converted	dispatched	experienced
arranged	classified	convinced	distributed	experimented
assembled	closed	coordinated	documented	explained
assessed	coached	corrected	doubled	explored
assigned	collaborated	corresponded	drafted	expressed
assisted	collected	counseled	drove	extended
assumed	combined	counted	earned	extracted
assured	commented	created	edited	facilitated
attained	communicated	critiqued	educated	familiarized

Attachment A — Power Words

Comprehensive List 350 Power Words — Part II

fashioned	innovated	measured	prepared	redesigned
figured	inspected	mediated	presented	reduced
filed	inspired	met	prioritized	refined
filled	installed	minimized	processed	rehabilitated
focused	instituted	moderated	procured	reinforced
forecasted	instructed	modified	produced	rejuvenated
formulated	integrated	monitored	programmed	related
found	interpreted	motivated	projected	remedied
founded	interviewed	moved	promoted	reorganized
gathered	introduced	named	proposed	repaired
generated	invented	navigated	provided	replaced
graded	investigated	negotiated	publicized	replied
granted	involved	observed	published	reported
guided	issued	opened	purchased	represented
halved	joined	operated	pursued	researched
handled	kept	ordered	queried	resolved
helped	launched	organized	questioned	responded
identified	learned	originated	raised	restored
illustrated	lectured	overhauled	ranked	retrieved
implemented	led	oversaw	rated	revamped
improved	listed	participated	realized	reviewed
incorporated	listened	peachered	received	revised
increased	logged	perceived	recommended	revitalized
indexed	made	performed	reconciled	saved
influenced	maintained	persuaded	recorded	scheduled
informed	managed	pioneered	recruited	screened
initiated	matched	planned	rectified	scrutinized

Attachment A — Power Words

Comprehensive List 350 Power Words — Part III

selected	summarized	treated
served	summonsed	trimmed
serviced	superseded	tripled
set (goals)	supervised	turned
set up	supplemented	tutored
shaped	supported	uncovered
shared	surpassed	understood
showed	surveyed	unified
simplified	sympathized	unraveled
sorted	systematized	updated
sought	tabulated	upgraded
sparked	tackled	used
spearheaded	targeted	utilized
specified	taught	validated
spoke	terminated	valued
started	tested	verbalized
stimulated	took	verified
streamlined	toured	visited
strengthened	traced	visualized
stressed	tracked	weighed
stretched	traded	widened
structured	trained	won
studied	transcribed	worked
submitted	transferred	wrote
substantiated	transformed	
substituted	translated	
succeeded	transported	
suggested	traveled	

B.

1. The Employer has determined that annual ratings/annual ratings of record will be prepared and recommended by employees' immediate supervisors (those who are immediately responsible for the employees' work and who assign, review and evaluate the employees' work).
2. Ratings of record will be prepared within thirty (30) days of the end of the quarter in which the appraisal is due. Upon request, the Employer will provide the local affected chapter a list showing the names and locations of the employees whose annual ratings are overdue by more than sixty (60) days.
3. The Employer has determined that all other performance appraisals will be made by the employees' immediate supervisors (those who are immediately responsible for the employees' work and who assign, review and evaluate the employees' work). However, in a competitive action, if the immediate supervisor is to be considered for a vacant position for which the employee is also being considered, the appraisal will be made by the next higher level manager. In the event that the immediate supervisor is an acting manager, that is, a bargaining unit employee who has been designated to act as a supervisor, but who has not been in a managerial capacity sixty (60) days or more, the appraisal will be made by the next higher level manager.
4. Annual ratings/annual ratings of record when used will reflect the employee's performance for the full annual appraisal period unless the information necessary to make such an appraisal is not available. The employee's annual appraisal will not reflect performance between the end of the month in which the employee's appraisal cycle ended and when the appraisal was given to the employee. Ratings for periods of time which are less than the full annual appraisal period will be so noted. However, annual ratings/annual ratings of record must be postponed or delayed as required in 5 CFR 430 and 531.
5. During the final thirty (30) days of an employee's annual appraisal period (or as otherwise agreed upon), the employee may prepare a written self-assessment (on a form to be provided by the employer) to submit for their supervisor's consideration.

An employee who chooses to prepare such assessment shall be granted a reasonable amount of official time, not to exceed four (4) hours to do so, and shall submit that self-assessment to his or her immediate supervisor

by no later than the last workday of his or her annual appraisal cycle. This self-assessment will be limited to two(2) pages in length. Employees who wish to do self-assessments will be given appropriate guidance on how to write self-assessments.

- (a) By no later than October 1, 2002, the Employer will develop a Web-based tutorial (as well as a comparable paper-based version for employees who do not have access to the Employer's Intranet) to help employees prepare self-assessments of their performance.
 - (b) Employees will be afforded a one-time opportunity to complete the tutorial on official time, at an appropriate time to be determined by their immediate manager. However, employees may take the tutorial any number of times on their own time.
6. If the supervisor rejects an employee's self-assessment, the supervisor will meet with the employee and explain his or her reason.
 7. In addition to the appraisals that are due based on the above requirements, an employee may request another appraisal be prepared if it has been more than 90 days since his or her last annual appraisal. If the supervisor determines that the current appraisal is no longer valid and indicative of the employee's current performance, the supervisor may, at his or her discretion, prepare a new appraisal; however, the supervisor's determination not to prepare a new appraisal is not grievable.

C.

Performance appraisals will be made in a fair and objective manner. They will measure actual work performance in relation to the performance requirements of the positions to which employees are assigned and will be based on a reasonable and representative sample of the employee's work.

D.

An employee will be advised each time an appraisal is used in a personnel action, and the employee will be provided a copy upon request.

E.

Performance appraisals will provide for the uniform treatment of all employees in a Division with identical elements and standards and with similar working conditions, with particular attention to employees performing the same job in the same work unit. Emphasis on the work unit does not lessen the Employer's obligation to provide uniformity at the Divisional level.