

## **Flexible Review Writing vs. Rigid Review Forms**

You can begin writing the review once the supervisor has collected ample performance documentation throughout the year, is knowledgeable about the employee's job and realizes the employee's goals. Yet the task of condensing all of this information into the rigid confines of many standard appraisal forms without using standard flat phrases seems insurmountable. There are ways, however, to flex one's writing muscles within the limits of the forms and still be able to communicate the essence of all the performance information that the supervisor has accumulated.

### **Start general/end specific.**

When only allowed space for two or three sentences under each performance factor, try the one-two-three approach. In the first sentence, give a general description of the employee's performance under each factor. Follow up with a second sentence that contains more specific information from the employee's file that supports the first sentence. Sentence three can go on to either set higher goals for the coming year, or encourage the employee to continue performing at the same level of success already achieved.

### **Vary the verbiage.**

To keep appraisal language fresh, substitute new adjectives for the tried-but-tired descriptions used on past reviews. If this does not come easily for you, a thesaurus can be of great assistance, opening up new ways of saying the same things. Using active rather than passive verbs also livens the wording of reviews. Looking at every sentence in a review that contains the verb "is" or "was," try rewriting them utilizing action verbs such as performs, utilizes, works, researches, interacts and so forth.

### **Accentuate the positive.**

Keeping in mind that the appraisal not only documents past performance but lays groundwork for the upcoming year, the review experience should be one that motivates rather than deflates the employee. To achieve this, lead off with areas where the employee performs well, then cover areas where the employee can improve. This tells employees that management not only observes their past achievements, but stands behind their future success. Shifting employee focus toward future achievement, rather than past mistakes, ensures progress for the entire team -- a positive reflection on the supervisor.

Finally, remember that not everything has to be written on the appraisal form itself. Prior to presenting the review, browse through the employee's file once again for specific examples supporting the review's verbiage. These examples can then be discussed verbally during the review meeting, even though they are not documented in the appraisal form.