

A Practical Guide to Writing Performance Appraisals and Letters of Recommendation

W. Terry Dancer
Arkansas State University

Writing performance appraisals and letters of recommendation is a difficult and timely task for some. This paper provides direction to writers about choosing applicable words for those being evaluated. This is accomplished by providing a list of words useful in describing characteristics of those under consideration.

This paper considers Mentality, Presence, Disposition, Character, Knowledge, Application, and Results regarding the person under evaluation. For each characteristic noted, a list of words is provided to reflect the appropriate word/words to describe the individual. The paper also provides a template useful for getting started in the writing of performance appraisals and Letters of Recommendation.

Keywords: appraisals, letters of recommendation

INTRODUCTION

During my 46 years of teaching, I have been asked to write hundreds of letters of recommendation. For our purposes here, a letter of recommendation and a letter of reference, though arguably different in nature, are considered synonymous.

A letter of recommendation has the potential to change a person's life. It has the capacity to give the one under consideration the opportunity to enjoy a lifetime of work they enjoy and adequate lifetime earnings.

A letter of recommendation is a formal document that discusses a person's suitability for a particular role. Though similar, recommendation letters differ from standard references in that the latter are often communicated through casual conversations by email or phone. (Herrity, 2023).

Your letter of recommendation should include five items:

1. A brief introduction stating who you are, your relationship to the applicant and your personal experience or expertise.
2. An overview of the applicant's strengths as you've experienced them and as they relate to the recipient.
3. A personal story that elaborates on one to two traits the applicant possesses.
4. A closing statement that summarizes why the individual you're recommending would be a good fit for the opportunity.
5. A signature that includes your name and contact information. (Herrity, 2023).

Many employers request recommendation letters to help them decide who to hire or internally promote. Throughout the hiring process, the applicant strives to present herself in the best light. Beyond the interview

and resume, hiring managers look to recommendation letters to confirm the candidate's qualifications and to gain insight from an outside party. (Safier, 2020).

Ideally, when you're writing a letter of recommendation, it's about someone whom you feel merits praise, so all you have to do is write down your positive feedback on the candidate. The process isn't always as easy as it sounds, though. It can be challenging to write a terrific recommendation letter. Also, there are standard things that you would want to mention in your endorsement of the candidate. (Doyle, 2023).

Sometimes, the first step is the most difficult and the most important. In order to adequately write a letter of recommendation you will need to rely on a bit of detective work in addition to the personal information and background you have regarding the individual.

Ask the person for whom you are writing to supply you with a copy of the job posting and their resume or curriculum vitae (CV) before you begin composing your letter. It can also be helpful to review their cover letter to see how they themselves pitch their qualifications for the job. Also ask them to share their most marketable assets for that type of work, especially ones you may have observed in your relationship with the person you are recommending. (Doyle, 2023).

A performance review is a regulated assessment in which managers evaluate an employee's work performance to identify their strengths and weaknesses, offer feedback and assist with goal setting. Grappling with what to say at your next performance review? Choosing the right words is important to make the review as constructive as possible, not to mention motivating for your employee. (Clarke, 2022).

The performance assessment often includes both the core competencies required by the organization and also the competencies specific to the employee's job. The appraiser, often a supervisor or manager, will provide the employee with constructive, actionable feedback based on the assessment. This in turn provides the employee with the direction needed to improve and develop in their job. (Andreev, June 17, 2023).

A performance appraisal helps an organization determine the value and productivity an employee may contribute, and it also helps employees to develop in their own roles.

SELECTING THE RIGHT WORD

Have you ever had the perfect word on the tip of your tongue, only to have it slip away from you? Have you ever been writing a report and you just can't seem to find the best word or words to use? Have you ever been trying to describe someone and their performance and been unable to find just that one perfect word that best fits the situation? If any of these situations apply, this article may be just what you need.

Evaluations of your peers or students may not be one of your tasks you enjoy the most. Perhaps because of the difficulty related to the subjective as opposed to the objective nature of the evaluation process. The purpose of this paper is to give you a choice of words, one of which will probably be just the right word you need.

One of management's duties is the preparation of evaluation or performance reports for managerial personnel. Professors often have the need to evaluate the performance of peer's performance evaluation is frequently one of the most frustrating and unrewarding duties.

Perhaps more often than not, the rater finds that he/she must often deal with attributes and characteristics that do not lend themselves readily to being counted. Yet, the desire for the precision and ease of the countable is so compelling, it is frequently found that those things that can be counted assume a disproportionate importance in the appraisal system.

While the appraisal of hourly employees and their more immediate supervisors may deal in greater part with that which is quantifiable, the further the one being rated is removed from the assembly line, the less satisfactory is an appraisal system based on numbers. In the extreme, the qualities being measured become those that are easily measured, not necessarily those that are important to the decision making for which they become an important base.

All too frequently reliance is placed upon some prepackaged, scale-based evaluation system that attempts to provide a universal measurement device. Unfortunately, such tools are usually produced out-of-house by someone who knows neither the individual rater nor the nature of the performance for which

he is being evaluated. And in all probability, neither does the author of the evaluation tool know the person charged with the responsibility of doing the evaluation. It performs its function, as do most universal panaceas, rather poorly.

Managerial appraisal is concerned, among other things, with promotion decisions and succession planning. While much of this appraisal may be objective and based on the manager's performance, or more accurately the performance of the unit and/or subordinates of the manager, the concerns noted above require an evaluation of characteristics not so easily quantified.

What is desired is a system that will identify specific behaviors and/or characteristics that should be reinforced or discontinued. As Arthur W. Alexander, vice-president and director of personnel at Schlumberger Ltd. Said, "we've tried to whittle away at the third-grade report-card evaluation of 'work and plays well with others,' but we still do not have the best forms. The next form would be a blank sheet of paper."

Those charged with the selection of managers "best qualified" for advancement and/or increased responsibility must eventually determine the relative merit of each individual under consideration. Often the decision maker finds himself faced with the necessity of determining an "order of relative merit" within a group of individual selectees who vary but to a limited and difficult-to-estimate degree. It is at this time a complete and comprehensive "WORD PICTURE" becomes essential.

The terms which follow represent an effort to help in outlining a personality by classifying certain traits such as manner, presence, character, disposition, mentality, knowledge, application, and result, in order to provide a meaningful evaluation. It should be understood that this is not intended to be a separation or division of a personality into its constituent parts. It is rather an attempt to simplify the task of the evaluator by offering a list of descriptive words, drawing attention to personality qualities.

MENTALITY

Mentality is the sum of mental faculties or powers; cast or habit of mind; intellectual, possession of intellectual force; the ability to use mental equipment.

Able	Immature	Original thinker
Academic	Impractical	Perspicacious
Agile minded	Inane	Practical
Analytical	Independent thinker	Quicker thinker
Astute	Inept	Quick-witted
Average	Ingenious	Second rate
Balanced	Judicial	Sharp
Bright	Keen	Simple minded
Brilliant	Level headed	Simpleton
Calculating	Logical	Sound
Careful	Long headed	Stupid
Clever	Mediocre	Theoretical
Creative	Medium	Third rate
Discerning	Normal	Undistinguished
Dull	Obtuse	Unimaginative
Far sighted	One track mind	Unwise

(<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/mentality>)

PRESENCE

Presence represents outward qualities; the mental impression that one produces in others, often compounded of minor personality traits which make a definite and precise impression.

Attractive	Foppish	Sober
Careless	Immaculate	Spruce
Colorless	Impressive	Tidy
Dapper	Neat	Unattractive
Dignified	Odd	Undignified
Distinguished	Pompous	Undistinguished
Eccentric	Severe	Unimpressive
Egotistical	Slovenly	Untidy

(<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/presence>)

DISPOSITION

Disposition represents outward qualities generally denoting possession of inward mental or emotional traits. Natural or prevailing temper, mood, or humor.

Adaptable	Good-natured	Nervous
Animated	Good-tempered	Obstinate
Arrogant	Gullible	Obstructionist
Calm	Helpful	Pacific
Carefree	Hot-tempered	Placid
Cheerful	Ill-tempered	Quiet
Conceited	Impetuous	Resentful
Considerate	Impotent	Retiring
Cool cooperative	Impulsive	Serious
Emotional	Indifferent	Spirited
Evasive	Indulgent	Spiritless
Excitable	Insidious	Submissive
Fault-finding	Lenient	Supercilious
Forbearing	Irritating	Tactful
Generous	Meek	Truculent
Gloomy	Mild	
Good-humored	Morose	

(<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/disposition>)

CHARACTER

Character is the unique combination of inward qualities and traits that constitute the essential essence, substance, frame, and fabric that is the individual.

Altruistic	Hypocritical	Simple minded
Arbitrary	Idealistic	Shallow
Audacious	Individualistic	Sincere
Biased	Irresolute	Stable
Bigoted	Intolerant	Superficial
Broad minded	Just	Thoughtful
Cautious	Loyal	Time saving
Courageous	Narrow minded	Timid
Dependent	Ordinary	Tolerant
Dominating	Open minded	Trustworthy
Earnest	Opinionated	Unbiased
Faithful	Resolute	Unselfish

Fickle	Selfish	Unstable
Firm	Self-controlled	Unswerving
Flaccid	Self-reliant	Unsteady
Formalist	Self-sacrificing	Untrustworthy
Imaginative	Sensualistic	Versatile

(<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/character>)

KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is the subject matter an individual possesses, and not necessarily his ability to use it; not to be confused with intelligence or wisdom.

Accomplished	Intellectual	Unconversant
Crass	Learned	Uninformed
Cultivated	Lettered	Unlearned
Dabbler	Polled	Unlettered
Dense	Scholarly	Unscholarly
Enlightened	Shallow	Well grounded
Erudite	Scattered	Well informed
Half scholar	Thick	Well read
Ignorant	Unheralded	Widely read

(<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/knowledge>)

APPLICATION

Application is constituted of many factors which manifest themselves in the manner in which one attacks and carries through his responsibilities.

Careless	Industrious	Resourceful
Casual	Lax	Slow
Deliberate	Lazy	Sluggish
Diligent	Methodical	Steady
Dogmatic	Negligent	Thorough
Easygoing	Painstaking	Tireless
Energetic	Persistent	Unimaginative
Enthusiastic	Precise	Unreasonable
Excitable	Procrastinating	Resourceful
Gold brick	Punctilious	Untiring
Intermittent	Rapid	Willing
Indolent	Reasonable	

(<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/application>)

RESULTS

Results represents that which is achieved by effort or labor; consequences, effects, conclusions, accomplishments.

Accurate	Inaccurate	Satisfactory
Adequate	Ineffectual	Second rate
Below par	Inefficient	Successful
Capable	Moderated	Superior

Certain	Ordinary	Sure
Commonplace	Outstanding	Tolerable
Decisive	Passable	Undistinguished
Dependable	Poor	Unfailing
Effectual	Positive	Unmistakable
Efficient	Presentable	Unquestionable
Exacting	Problematic	Unreliable
Excellent	Questionable	Unsatisfactory
Fair	Quick	Worthless
Faulty	Reliable	
Good	Sound	

(<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/results>)

SUMMARY

These lists are not, nor are they intended to be, exhaustive. Neither are the characteristics enumerated all that may be essential for adequate performance appraisal. It is, rather, the authors’ hope that those presented may stimulate the raters thinking and imagination to so utilize his “blank piece of paper” as to develop and present an accurate, complete, and compelling “WORD PICTURE” of the described individual and his accomplishments and potential.

SAMPLE WORK

Date:
 From:
 To: XYZ

Re: Letter of Recommendation for XXXX.

I am writing this to show my support for the Internship application from XXXX. She was in my Intermediate II class in the fall of 2022 and my Cost Accounting class as an Honors option in the fall 2022. The result of her Cost Accounting Honors Option was an excellent paper on Online Program Management companies in Academia. XXXX made A in both my classes.

I have known XXXX for about one year. She demonstrated a desire and ability to complete all her work in a timely manner.

Her manner is sharp and logical; Her presence is impressive; Her disposition is good-natured and adaptable; her character is open-minded and thoughtful; her knowledge is accomplished; her application is resourceful; and her results are positive and sure.

XXXX has achieved and maintained a 4.0 GPA in accounting and a 3.83 overall GPA. I would place XXXX in the top 1% of the over 12,000 students I’ve taught at ASU.

Sincerely yours,

 Dr. XXXXXXXXX
 Etc.

REFERENCES

- Andreev, I. (2023, June 17). *Performance Appraisal*. Retrieved from <https://www.valamis.com/hub/performance-appraisal>
- Clarke, V. (2022, May 13). *21 Engaging performance Review Examples (+ tips from an HR Manager)*. Retrieved from: <https://venngage.com/blog/performance-review-examples/>
- Dictionary. (n.d.). *Application Definition & Meaning*. Retrieved from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/application>
- Dictionary. (n.d.). *Character Definition & Meaning*. Retrieved from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/character>.
- Dictionary. (n.d.). *Disposition Definition & Meaning*. Retrieved from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/disposition>
- Dictionary. (n.d.). *Knowledge Definition & Meaning*. Retrieved from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/knowledge>
- Dictionary. (n.d.). *Mentality Definition & Meaning*. Retrieved from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/mentality>
- Dictionary. (n.d.). *Results Definition & Meaning*. Retrieved from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/results>
- Doyle, A. (2022, March 17). *How to write a letter of recommendation (with Examples)*. Retrieved from <https://www.thebalancemoney.com/recommendation-letter-template-2062919>
- Herrity, J. (2023, March 16). *How to write a letter of Recommendation (with example)*. Retrieved from <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/how-to-write-a-letter-of-recommendation-with-examples>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Presence Definition & Meaning*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/presence>
- Safier, R. (2020, January 11). *9 sample excellent recommendation letters for your job*. Retrieved from <https://blog.prepscholar.com/9-letter-of-recommendation-samples>