



ARDENT WORKSHOP

AN ARDENT WORKSHOP PRODUCT

Behavior, Not Personality

Ten review sentences managers write, and the version that holds up.

Free from Ardent Workshop · 10 of 24 rewrites



YOU KNOW THE RATING. THIS IS THE PARAGRAPH.

ardentworkshop.com

One rule, ten sentences

Each of these is a sentence that turns up in real performance reviews every cycle. The left column rates a **person**. The right column rates what they **did** — and it is the one that survives the employee asking “such as?”, that HR can act on, and that still means something when a different manager reads the file next year.

WHY THE LEFT COLUMN FAILS

It cannot be checked — either a count is right or it is not, but a verdict is neither. It cannot be acted on: nobody can stop being “sloppy” on instruction, but anybody can add a check to one field of one form. It does not survive the year: a stranger reading the file next spring learns something from a count and nothing at all from an adjective. And it puts the employee's identity on the table — a person can accept that their work had a fault; being told what they are gets defended, and the rest of the conversation is lost.

Written the usual way	Written so it holds up	Why the second one works
Has a great attitude.	Took on [TASK] in [MONTH] when it was nobody's job, and told me what would have to move to fit it.	Attitude is not observable and not improvable on instruction. A named act plus the trade-off named out loud is both.
Detail-oriented.	Caught [ERROR] in [ARTIFACT] before it reached [WHO] , which avoided [CONSEQUENCE] .	Tells the employee exactly which habit earned the rating, so they can keep doing it.
Needs to be more proactive.	[PROBLEM] was visible from [DATE] and was raised by [SOMEONE ELSE] on [DATE] . I want it flagged to me within [WINDOW] of you seeing it.	Replaces an adjective with a timing rule, which is something a person can comply with tomorrow.
A real team player.	Unblocked [WHO] on [DATE] by [WHAT] , which recovered [TIME] on their work rather than this person's.	Moves the sentence onto somebody else's result, which is what the competency is actually about.
Not a good culture fit.	In [SITUATION] on [DATE] , [WHAT WAS SAID OR DONE] , and the effect on [WHO] was [WHAT] . What I need instead is [SPECIFIC BEHAVIOR] .	"Culture fit" is where bias can hide unexamined, and it is applied unevenly. If the concern is real there is a behavior underneath it — write that, or drop it.

Written the usual way	Written so it holds up	Why the second one works
Should speak up more in meetings.	[INFORMATION] was known here on [DATE] and reached the decision on [DATE] . Raise it in the room or send it to me in writing — whichever you prefer — within [WINDOW] .	The original rates extroversion. The rewrite rates whether information traveled, and offers a route that does not require performing in a room.
Sometimes misses deadlines.	[NUMBER] of [NUMBER] committed dates moved; in [NUMBER] of those I heard about the slip after the due date rather than before.	"Sometimes" is unarguable and therefore useless. The before-or-after split names the behavior that actually needs to change.
Great potential.	For [NEXT ROLE] this needs [SPECIFIC CAPABILITY] . The evidence so far is [WHAT EXISTS] ; the untested part is [WHAT] , and [ASSIGNMENT] would test it by [DATE] .	"Potential" quietly rewards whoever most resembles the people already senior. A named capability and a test that settles it does not.
Difficult to work with.	The substance of the disagreement in [SITUATION] was reasonable; the handling — [WHAT SPECIFICALLY] — cost [WHAT] . That is the part I am asking to change.	Splits the legitimate from the damaging. "Difficult" is a label that studies of review language consistently find is applied unevenly, and it will not survive scrutiny.
Customer-focused.	Told [CUSTOMER] on [DATE] that [WHAT] was not possible, offered [ALTERNATIVE] , and [WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ACCOUNT] .	An accurate no delivered early is the hardest behavior in the competency, and it never appears in a list of review phrases.

THE BRACKETS ARE THE POINT Everything in **[SQUARE BRACKETS]** is a fact you have to go and get: a count, a date, a named artifact, or a consequence somebody else felt. If you cannot fill one, you do not have the evidence for that sentence — and the honest move is a different sentence, not a vaguer one.

A five-second test, and where to stop

Put the sentence in the mouth of the employee's own manager next year, describing somebody they have never met. If it still tells them something — a count, a date, an artifact, a consequence — keep it. If it evaporates, it was never carrying anything.

The words that mean you have stopped describing work

The word	What it is really rating
Attitude, professionalism	A personality, filtered through whether you enjoy their company
Culture fit	Resemblance to the people already here — where bias can hide unexamined
Confident, assertive, quiet	Temperament, and often just extroversion
Potential	How much this person reminds you of somebody senior
Hard-working, dedicated	Hours and visibility, which reward whoever answers email at night
Difficult, abrasive, emotional	Judgments that studies of review language find applied unevenly

What the full bank adds

In the paid bank	What it does
189 phrases, rating-locked	Nine competencies at three rating levels, structurally different at each — with a note on every band saying what its language has to do.
An evidence line under every one	The specific count, date, artifact or consequence that phrase obliges you to produce, and where each usually already exists.
The other 14 rewrites	Including "exceeded all expectations", "lacks confidence", "resistant to change" and "a safe pair of hands".
A summary-paragraph builder (75 lines)	Claim, evidence, impact, growth edge, forward commitment — five slots at three ratings, so a paragraph cannot omit the evidence or the date.
54 phrases for the rest of the cycle	Goals and development, the employee's own self-review, upward and peer feedback, calibration notes that hold a rating in the room, and promotion write-ups.
Nine print-and-fill worksheets	The evidence to gather before you choose a phrase — the step that decides whether the review can be evidenced at all.
A spreadsheet that assembles it	Dropdowns in, finished paragraph out, and a check column that tells you when a bracket is still unfilled.

THE FULL PERFORMANCE-REVIEW PHRASING & FEEDBACK WORDING BANK

243 phrases, 75 summary-paragraph slot lines, four PDF books, fifteen copy-paste text files, nine print-and-fill worksheets in US Letter and A4, and the Review Builder spreadsheet. Files you own — no seat, no per-employee fee.

[See the full wording bank >](#)

ardentworkshop.com/products/performance-review-phrasing-and-feedback-wording-bank/

More Team & Talent tools at ardentworkshop.com. Free to use — please don't resell or redistribute it.

A note on what this is. Wording and general management guidance — **not legal advice, and not HR advice for your organization.** Take proper advice before you write any review that will support dismissal, demotion, a formal warning or a pay decision, or that touches a protected characteristic, a disability or accommodation request, leave, or a complaint the employee has raised.