

# How to write up an employee for poor performance — sample

Sometimes solving an issue with an employee simply involves a manager drawing the problem to the worker's attention. An individual who routinely tries to slip in late may quickly right the ship once aware that his supervisor keeps an eye on the clock each day. Similarly, a one-to-one chat can set the stage to improve poor performance, perhaps by identifying a skill gap that needs filling.

Most managers and staff alike prefer actions such as talking, coaching, and monitoring instead of punitive measures. However, if violations of company policy continue or performance issues remain, it might be time for a written warning.

Why turn to this action if verbal warnings failed to work? Offenders often take written reprimands more seriously. They realize the manager is not "just talking" and intends to follow through on stated disciplinary action if one does not meet expectations.

Also, a formal letter or write-up typically brings the human resources department into the mix. The presence of human resources adds a greater degree of gravity. The situation no longer is only an employee's manager expressing concerns. Rather, documentation of unacceptable job performance or employee behavior becomes a part of the person's personnel file.

Very importantly, warning letters create a paper trail. If the company later finds itself up against someone claiming wrongful termination, a human resources manager can grab these reprimands from an employee file as proof of what transpired and how the organization handled matters.

## Considerations about disciplinary action

Businesses often follow a progressive discipline policy and outline it in the employee handbook. This type of notification system provides various levels of warnings that increase in severity if the employee does not change his ways. The blueprint of how violations get handled proves helpful to both managers and team members. Everyone is privy to expectations and procedures, which reduces guesswork and surprises.

Exact set-ups vary but usually start with one or more verbal warnings. Written reprimands follow if the employee has failed to take corrective action. Each of these formal warnings should outline the next consequence in the disciplinary process. (Most disciplinary policies include provisions to skip steps in certain circumstances. Cases involving theft, violence, sabotage, or sharing proprietary information commonly result in an immediate termination letter.)

## Elements common to formal warnings

Managers reaching the stage in the disciplinary process where they need to create formal written documentation usually do it through a write-up or a letter of reprimand. While the two vary in format, they have many similar components such as:

- Employee name and position
- The date
- The offense
- The policy being violated, often citing what is stated in [the employee handbook](#)
- A summary of prior action taken regarding this issue, such as verbal warnings
- Statements regarding expectations going forward and additional disciplinary action for failure to improve
- A statement letting the employee know where this written document will be filed and who within the company will be receiving a copy
- The manager's signature
- An employee signature to acknowledge receipt

At this stage, managers also may lay out a specific action plan for employee improvement. Giving an offender as clear a route as possible on how to improve makes the disciplinary process productive rather than simply punitive. Some include this information within the write-up or letter of reprimand. Others opt to complete a separate, structured document known as a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP).

## Sample write-up

Human resources typically supplies managers with a template for write-ups. This outline makes it easier for managers to know what to do. It also standardizes the procedure, which helps ensure all necessary information gets collected in a thorough, orderly manner.

What might a write-up look like? Here is an example:

### EMPLOYEE WARNING NOTICE FORM

**Employee name:** Melissa Jones

**Employee job title:** Administrative Assistant

**Manager name:** Anne Smithfield

**Date of notice:** 7/16/2022

X  **First Warning**  **Second Warning**  **Other**

**Type of Problem or Violation:**

**Tardiness**

**Absenteeism**

**Dress code violation**

**Insubordination**

**Poor work performance**

**Conduct**

**Safety**

**Other violation of company policy**

**Details of occurrence:** On July 16, Ms. Jones wore flip-flops to the office. This action violates the dress code rule of absolutely no open-toed shoes allowed. This rule is stated in the employee handbook, which Ms. Jones signed off as having read during her onboarding process. I have had two previous conversations with her (June 5 and June 27) about the need for proper office attire, especially since she often represents our company at the front desk.

**Expected improvement:** Ms. Jones needs to immediately familiarize herself with the company's dress code policy presented in the handbook. My expectation going forth is no further incidents of unacceptable attire. If she has questions, Ms. Jones should consult me or human resources for guidance. Failure to abide by the stated dress policy will result in a day's suspension without pay, as outlined in the handbook's section on consequences for repeat offenses following a written warning.

**Employee response:** I felt the shoes I wore were sufficiently dressy for work and better than the sneakers sported by some team members. I will choose closed-toe footwear in the future.

**I have read this warning notice and understand it.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Signature of employee** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Signature of manager** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date**

**Human resources will place a signed copy of this document in the employee's personnel file.**

### **Sample letter of reprimand**

Companies or managers preferring a letter format often use a letter template for ease and consistency. Handling the dress code violation in this manner might look something like this:

#### **LETTER OF REPRIMAND**

**Date:** July 16, 2022

**Recipient:** Melissa Jones, Administrative Assistant

**Sender:** Anne Smithfield, Manager of Public Relations Department

Dear Ms. Jones,

This letter of reprimand serves as a written warning for your violation of the company's dress code policy. On June 5, we had a conversation regarding the inappropriateness of wearing shirts with spaghetti straps at the office. At the time, I urged you to familiarize yourself with the dress code as stated in the employee handbook. Despite my request, on June 27 you wore cut-off shorts to the office, which led me to issue a verbal warning.

Today (July 16) you wore flip-flops to the office. As stated in the employee handbook – which you acknowledged receiving and reading during onboarding – the company does not permit open-toed footwear.

XYZ Enterprises expects all employees to dress in accordance with stated policies. As you often run the reception desk, we especially depend on you to make a good impression on guests through professional representation of our company.

Please immediately reread the company's dress code policy presented in the handbook. My expectation going forth is no further incidents of unacceptable attire. If you have questions, please consult human resources for guidance. Failure to abide by the stated dress policy will result in a day's suspension without pay, as outlined in the handbook's section on consequences for repeat offenses following a written warning.

Please acknowledge receipt and understanding of this warning letter by returning a signed copy of it to human resources by July 23.

Sincerely,

Anne Smithfield

## **Other considerations**

Finally, while templates lay a foundation, managers need awareness of their role in the written stage of the disciplinary process. To maintain professionalism and establish a good legal foundation, watch out for the following:

- Stay unbiased and consistent. You should not write up one employee for excessive absenteeism and ignore another team member with the same infraction.
- Stick with facts, not opinions. Your job is to accurately report what happened. Let the words paint a picture from which third-party readers can draw their own conclusions.
- Do not compose the letter of reprimand or write-up when angry. Give yourself time to calm down. This pause will help keep emotions and words you may later regret out of the document.
- Be certain to follow up. If a write-up calls for weekly check-ins with the employee, schedule them into your calendar. If a letter of reprimand states certain improvements must be made in the next 30 days, evaluate and follow through with consequences at the end of that time period. Sticking to what you say displays seriousness about the content. And, if the employee has improved, your praise will offer positive reinforcement.