

Reach for the top

Level: Intermediate upwards

Timing: Approximately 90 minutes but can be made longer or shorter depending on the length of time allowed for free practice and extension tasks

Material needed: One copy of the student worksheets and Vocabulary record per student

Group size: Any

Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students deals with the topic of appraisals. It is based around an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* Issue 3/2011. In the article the author discusses the pros and cons of appraisals and looks at both employees' and managers' attitudes towards them, as well as the consequences for a company if they conduct appraisals in an inappropriate manner.

The tasks in the student worksheets encourage the students to learn and use new business vocabulary and functional language and also to develop and practise skills that could be useful in business situations, especially those that include appraisals.

The teacher's notes provide suggestions for teaching and learning strategies as well as ideas on how to present the tasks in the classroom, any necessary answer keys and extension tasks (to do in class or as homework).

Warmer questions

The warmer questions introduce the topic of appraisals. They will help you to find out which of the students have regular appraisals and also if any of the students are involved in conducting appraisals. This knowledge will be useful for later tasks. You could also ask if the students' companies have a different in-house term for appraisals within the company, e.g. *personal development meeting* or *yearly report*.

Key words

Looking at these key words prior to reading will help the students understand the article.

Key

1. ritual; 2. consolation; 3. evaluation; 4. trait; 5. behaviour; 6. objectives; 7. conduct; 8. eliminated; 9. promotion; 10. sue

A brief introduction

Scanning the article to find the answers to these questions will give the students a good idea of what the article is about. The task can be done communicatively by asking the students to work in pairs and then compare their answers with the whole class. After they have answered these questions together, they can quietly read the article for themselves.

Key

1. performance review and job evaluation
2. in the 1950s and 1960s
3. one-dimensional global ratings, trait-based scales, effectiveness-based evaluations
4. The Management by Objectives (MBO) method aims to help employees set goals and develop skills and to help management measure performance.
5. Constructive dismissal happens when an employee resigns from the job because of the employer's actions.

True or false?

Students should decide whether these statements are true (T) or false (F), according to the information in the article. Working alone or in pairs, they should rewrite any false sentences to make them correct.

Key

1. F; 2. T; 3. T; 4. F; 5. F; 6. T; 7. F; 8. T

Vocabulary

This task requires the student to look at how two key words from the article are used; specifically, which words they collocate with. Start by asking the students to find examples in the article, and then continue to look for further examples by using an online concordancer. This online part of task can be set as homework.

Key

appraisal:
staff appraisal; annual job appraisal; job appraisal; structured appraisal; appraisal types; type of appraisal; appraisals should be; formal appraisals; annual appraisal; real appraisals; appraisal system

feedback:

give feedback; frequent feedback; proper feedback

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Teaching and learning strategy:

Using concordancers

Concordancers are databases of language which can be utilized to aid language learning. Many are now freely available (albeit in a limited form) via the internet and can be used to search, access and analyze phrases or single words from a corpus. They are extremely helpful resources for students and teachers to see how words go together, as they give us very accurate and useful information about the way language is used.

A typical online concordancer allows you to enter a word or phrase and search for multiple examples of how that word or phrase is used in everyday speech or writing. It will bring up random examples of the word in context and even highlight words which appear to the left or the right of the word that you have searched for. Many concordancers will ask you to choose which different type of corpus you would like searched (e.g. spoken, written, business, American, British) and then provide examples from this.

There are many different concordancers and corpora available, e.g. The British National Corpus (BNC) which is a 100 million-word collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English from the later part of the 20th century, both spoken and written.

An example from the British National Corpus:

whether the **appraisal scheme** is going to be continuous, **critical appraisal** of experience an **investment appraisal** was submitted for ensure that **project appraisal** does not concentrate carries out a **detailed appraisal** of the merger the **appraisal interview** would be so easy because

<http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>

Appraisal tips

The students should decide whether the tips are for employees or for managers and write an E or an M next to them as appropriate. Encourage students to add any further tips using their own experience as a basis.

Key

1. M; 2. M; 3. E; 4. E; 5. M; 6. M; 7. E; 8. M; 9. M; 10. E;
11. M; 12. E

Me and my job

This task is designed to make students think about how they can talk positively about themselves and their work achievements in English. It should be done individually in written form.

Extension task

As an (optional) extension to the previous task, students can use their answers, along with the 'Tips for managers' in task 6, to role-play an appraisal scenario. In pairs, students should ask questions first to find out about each other's jobs in order to ask relevant questions.

Vocabulary record

Here students should be encouraged to record all the new and useful vocabulary they have learned during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

Related topics on onestopenglish

For follow-up lessons on the same or related topics go to the following lesson plans in the Business section on onestopenglish:

Business tasks: Progress and achievement:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-tasks/progress-and-achievement/157298.article>

Business tasks: Ability and skill:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-tasks/ability-and-skill/156899.article>

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1 Warmer questions

- Do employees in your company have regular appraisals? If yes, how often are the appraisals, who conducts them and where are they conducted?
- When did you last have an appraisal?
- Have you ever had to carry out an appraisal?

2 Key words

Write the key words next to their meanings below and then find them in the article to read them in context.

conduct	sue	objectives	evaluation	eliminated
behaviour	ritual	consolation	promotion	trait

- something that you do regularly and always in the same way _____
- something that makes you feel less unhappy or disappointed _____
- an examination or careful judgement about someone's work performance _____
- a particular quality in someone's character _____
- the way that someone acts _____
- things that you plan to achieve, especially in business or work _____
- to carry out something in an organized way _____
- got rid of _____
- a move to a higher level in a company _____
- to make a legal claim against someone, usually to get money from them because they have done something bad to you _____

3 Find the information

Scan the article to find the following information.

- two other terms for job appraisals _____
- when structured appraisals became a regular way of evaluating employees _____
- three different types of appraisals _____

- what the MBO method aims to do _____

- what constructive dismissal is _____

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by Margaret Davis

Staff appraisals have become a ritual. A career coach talks to Margaret Davis about the opportunities these meetings open up for employees and supervisors.

- 1 Would you rather: a) go to the dentist, or b) have your annual job appraisal? If you said a), you are not alone. Many people dislike this workplace ritual, and some are so panicked by the idea that they have nightmares. If there's any consolation to be had, it's that bosses often don't enjoy the procedure either.
- 2 Yet a job appraisal (also known as a "performance review" or "job evaluation") doesn't have to be a negative experience for either side. The key is preparation, according to career experts.
- 3 Employers have always evaluated employees, primarily by continuing to employ and pay them. Structured appraisals, however, are a more recent invention, dating back to the 1950s and 1960s. Over the years, they have become increasingly complex, particularly in large companies.
- 4 There are a number of different appraisal types. One-dimensional global ratings, which categorize employees as poor, fair, good or excellent, are the simplest form. Trait-based scales, on the other hand, are multidimensional, including qualities such as dependability, loyalty and self-confidence.
- 5 Effectiveness-based evaluations are perhaps the most complex. These ratings are based on employees' contributions to the company, not on their behaviour. In some companies, this means using the Management by Objectives (MBO) method to help employees set goals and develop skills and to help management measure performance. In this type of appraisal, employees and managers normally agree on the final wording of the evaluation.
- 6 Critics of job appraisals describe them as too subjective and complain that managers often don't get the training they need to conduct them. "Employees all come with their own characteristics, strong suits and imperfections," writes Samuel Culbert in *The Wall Street Journal*. "And yet in a performance review, employees are supposed to be measured along some predetermined checklist."
- 7 Although it's hard to imagine that star *Financial Times* columnist Lucy Kellaway ever got a bad performance review or perhaps missed a promotion, she too thinks that appraisals should be eliminated. Instead, Kellaway writes, managers should give feedback more often. "They might even start saying 'that's good' and 'that's not so good' at the only helpful time to say such things: when they have just happened. This sort of thing is called managing, and the beauty of it is that it makes formal appraisals quite unnecessary."

But is it really a case of "either/or"? Career expert Denise Taylor believes that appraisals and frequent feedback can coexist. "My background is working in large organizations. I've had appraisals all my working career, and I've always found them incredibly helpful. It's the only way that you can get proper feedback about how you are doing as an employee, and you can use that to be better at your job and to help you to better prepare for future promotions within the company," Taylor explains. She recommends, however, that employees should have regular meetings with their managers to check on their progress, rather than waiting for the annual appraisal.

Managers should remain factual and try not to let their personal feelings influence their appraisals. Comments not intended to be made public may lead to legal action, according to Laytons Solicitors, a London firm specializing in employment law. They quote real appraisals, such as one that describes an employee who "works well under constant supervision and cornered like a rat in a trap", or another that says "this employee should go far – and the sooner he starts, the better". While such comments are amusing to an outsider, they could cause an employee to sue because of constructive dismissal, which happens when an employee resigns from the job because of the employer's actions.

Sometimes, the best way to learn is by looking at someone else's (bad) example. In 2007, the *Financial Times* cancelled its plans to operate an appraisal system that would have placed staff in the categories of "outperformers", "steady performers" and "underperformers". "After a healthy debate around the office about the suggested idea of people being fitted into categories, it was decided that it would no longer be pursued," said the newspaper's National Union of Journalists representative, Peter Chapman. "The feeling was that categorizing people into bands simply doesn't work," Chapman told the *Guardian*. Samuel Culbert also stresses the need to treat employees as individuals: "It's the boss's responsibility to find a way to work well with an imperfect individual, not to convince the individual that there are critical flaws that need immediate correcting."



Canadian journalist MARGARET DAVIS edits the Careers and Global Business sections of *Business Spotlight*.

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4 True or false?

Are these sentences true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. For many employees, appraisals can be avoided by going to the dentist.
2. Bosses often don't like conducting appraisals any more than employees like having them.
3. Managers often haven't had any training on how to conduct appraisals.
4. Lucy Kellaway thinks that appraisals should be conducted more frequently.
5. Denise Taylor thinks that appraisals are a waste of time.
6. Managers should not let their emotions influence them when they conduct appraisals.
7. The *Financial Times* currently uses an appraisal system that places employees into categories.
8. Samuel Culbert thinks that managers should find a way to work well with their employees rather than criticizing them.

5 Vocabulary

Highlight where the word *appraisal* appears in the article. Which words come before and after it? Write them into the boxes below.

<input type="text"/>	appraisal	<input type="text"/>
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Do the same for the word *feedback*.

<input type="text"/>	feedback	<input type="text"/>
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Can you think of any other words that go with *appraisal* and *feedback*? Use a concordancer to help you.

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6 Appraisal tips

Decide whether these appraisal tips are for employees (E) or for managers (M).

1. Stay factual and start and end on a positive note. M
2. Don't do all the talking. Ask the employee to tell you how he or she feels about the job.
3. Update your job description to include any new tasks since your last appraisal.
4. Give concrete examples. Don't say, "This has been a fantastic year for me." Do say, "I brought in six new clients and boosted sales by 20 per cent."
5. Be prepared that employees may react negatively, even to constructive criticism. Stay calm and collected.
6. Together with your employee, plan for improving the way you work together. Tie this plan to specific goals for the company.
7. Don't overreact to a negative appraisal – and don't respond too quickly. Ask for a day to think it over and then talk to your boss about what you can do to improve your performance.
8. Plan one to one and a half hours per appraisal. Don't hold appraisals too close together: it's exhausting. If possible, have just one appraisal a day.
9. Be specific. Don't say, "You don't seem terribly motivated." Do say, "Your sales are down by 10 per cent this quarter."
10. Throughout the year, keep a record of tasks and achievements so that you will be able to mention relevant ones when you talk to your boss.
11. Spend just 30 per cent of the review talking about what happened last year and 70 per cent on what you and your employee want to do in future.
12. If you get a new boss, a new job or if your company changes owners, you need to be aware that criteria for appraisals are also likely to change. Find out before the meeting what your managers are looking for so there will be no surprises during the appraisal itself.

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7 You and your job

With help from the tips in the 'Tips for employees' box, think of six things you have achieved or accomplished in the past 12 months at work. Write these into sentences in preparation for your next appraisal.

A large rectangular area with rounded corners, containing 25 horizontal dotted lines for writing.

8 Extension task

Using the sentences from task 7 and the tips for managers from task 6, role-play an appraisal scenario with your partner. Decide who is going to play the part of the manager, who will conduct the appraisal. As a manager, you should find out about your partner's company and job first so that you can ask relevant questions.

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Vocabulary record: Appraisals

verb	noun	adjective (+ opposite)	adverb (+ opposite)
evaluate			
	feedback		
		dismissive	
			appraisingly

Vocabulary record

