

Managing the Probationary Period

Establishing a Foundation with your New Hire

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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What is the probationary period?

The probationary period is a part of the selection process and is like a “trial period.” It is intended to be used to determine whether the right employee has been hired for the job. During this time, you will determine if the employee’s employment should continue. Some of the factors you may look for include, but are not limited to:

- ⊕ Performance
- ⊕ Ability (to learn and perform job duties)
- ⊕ Willingness (to learn and cooperate with others)
- ⊕ Dependability
- ⊕ Attendance
- ⊕ Professional Conduct

Who does probation apply to?

The probationary period only applies to *classified* employees regardless of the number of hours an employee works and is defined as 180 calendar days continuous service from the date of initial employment at University. It does not apply to other job categories such as Administrative and Professionals (A&P), faculty, or students.

Probationary Employee’s Role

During the probationary period, new employees should learn all aspects of their position. This includes understanding and meeting the performance expectations provided by you, familiarizing themselves with how their position fits within their department and the university, and behaving in a positive and collaborative manner. Employees are also encouraged to ask supervisors for any clarification that may be needed and for feedback on their performance.



New employees eventually will need to familiarize themselves with other ancillary but important things such as:

- ⊕ parking and/or transportation options,
- ⊕ ordering/obtaining supplies,
- ⊕ mail delivery system,
- ⊕ office equipment expectations,
- ⊕ evacuation and other emergency plans,
- ⊕ receiving emergency text messages.

Explaining to the New Employee

You should explain the probationary period to your new employee. The last day of the probationary period may be computed at the time the employee is hired. You should inform the employee of the full period of probation and the anticipated ending date of the probationary period (in some instances the period might be extended due to Leave without Pay situations). You are strongly encouraged to give performance appraisal after 45, 90, and 135 days to each probationary employee to notify them whether or not their performance is meeting expectations ([Probationary Performance Appraisal Form](#)). This is an opportunity to clearly communicate expectations to new employees. From the first day throughout the probationary period, you should provide constant feedback for employees, addressing areas where employees are meeting performance standards as well as areas where employees may have a need for improvement.



Evaluation procedures for probationary employees are outlined in the Handbook of Operating Procedures, [HOP 5-2310](#). Performance evaluation and counseling are based on the concept that proper supervision is not punitive in nature. It seeks to aid the employee in self-correction and performance improvement. You are responsible for notifying an employee when their performance is below acceptable standards. You should counsel the employee as to the actions required to improve performance to an acceptable standard. You should also be reinforcing good behavior and performance by providing feedback and being specific about what the employee is doing well.

Preparations Before the New Hire Arrives

In addition to the onboarding logistics (e.g office space, access, e-mail account), one of the first things you should determine prior to the arrival of a new hire is what the first work assignment will be when the person begins employment. Having an assignment will engage the employee and help them feel like they are making an immediate contribution. It will also help the new employee navigate through the process and get a sense of your management style. As a supervisor, it will help you assess the new hire's strengths and weaknesses and provides you an opportunity to give immediate feedback and coaching. Of course timelines and other factors will need to be taken into consideration during this initial assignment until the employee has become acclimated to your department.



Another consideration to explore before the new employee arrives is whether or not to have an assigned colleague provide guidance. As supervisors, it is sometimes difficult to be available to new hires. Additionally, the work you do may be different and would make it challenging to answer questions or explain processes to your new

employee. The assigned colleague would be an added resource to help assimilate the new hire to the workplace.

Developing and setting expectations

When a new hire arrives, it is important that you meet with him/her to go over the job expectations, especially highlighting anything that may have change since the job posting. You can also elaborate upon these expectations by using the first assignment as an example. When setting performance expectations, you should attempt to use the S.M.A.R.T. criteria.

Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe specific behaviors that are required for job performance.
Measurable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide a quantitative value to allow for objective monitoring and evaluation.
Attainable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be realistic for the employee to achieve and accomplish within the stated guideline.
Relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pertain to the requirements of the current position.
Trackable/ Time-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allow for the monitoring and evaluation of current performance levels.

Part of setting expectations involves defining a way to measure performance. Once you have determined how you will measure expectations and what meeting those expectations look like, you can also provide examples of what does not meet expectations and what exceeds your expectations. These are generally tied into performance ratings.

During this meeting with your new hire, you should review the [university's policy on probation](#) with him/her and go over the probationary appraisal form. You should then provide detailed expectations of where the new hire is expected be on day 45. The meeting should conclude with regularly scheduled weekly or semimonthly check in meetings.

Establishing a feedback system

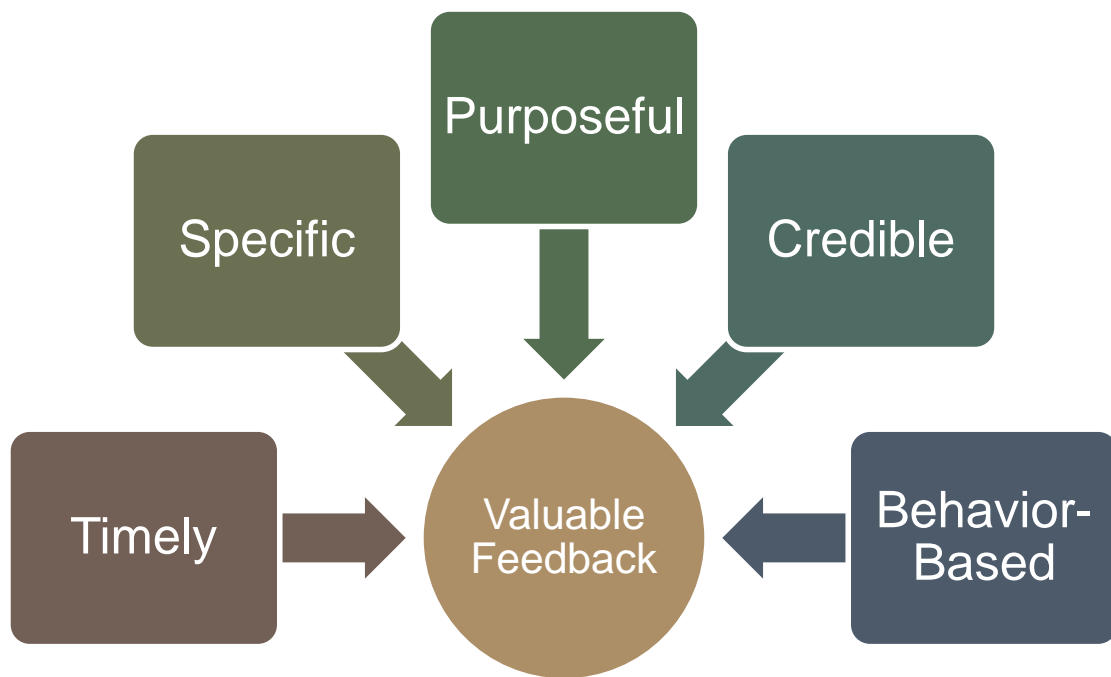
Regularly scheduled meetings can be used as one mechanism in communicating feedback. You should consider what kind of feedback system you want to establish. Most

employees want feedback. It makes them feel more connected to the organization and less inclined to leave. Feedback can be given formally or informally and be verbal, written, and kinesthetic. (See chart below for examples)

	Formal	Informal
Verbal	Regularly scheduled meeting	Constructive comment while working on something
Written	Performance appraisal	E-mail
Kinesthetic	Training demonstrating tasks	Employee shadowing

There is no ‘right way’ and each method has its pros and cons. It is recommended to use a variety of methods to appeal to different learning preferences. It also serves as a good way to reinforce expectations.

When providing feedback, make sure it’s timely, specific, purposeful, credible, and behavior based.



Timely feedback provides a new hire the opportunity to make adjustments based on the information he/she receives from you. If too much time has passed, it may be more challenging to make those changes. Untimeliness may also make your message less impactful. Providing specific examples, demonstrate you know what is going on. Tie the feedback to the business impact and make it purposeful. Make sure the information you have is credible before providing the feedback. Describe the behavior or actions that have been observed/reported to reinforce or correct behaviors.

When things are going well, give feedback to your new hire. Reasons why positive feedback is so important are:

- ☺ Enhances your employee's connection to the organization; more likely to stay
- ☺ Builds your employee's confidence
- ☺ Reinforces the behavior and actions you want
- ☺ Encourages employee to do better work
- ☺ Employee is likely to share the experience with friends/perspective employees
- ☺ Reassures employees of your guidance as a supervisor
- ☺ Employee is more likely to feel fairly compensated

Encourage your new employee to provide you with feedback as well. More on this a bit later.

Schedule for the first week

Of course, it is important for a new employee to understand the mission of your



department and how their role fits within the organization but it's also important to make them feel welcomed. Take your new employee on a tour around the department introducing them while also showing them things such as equipment (copier/fax, etc.), mail room, break room, restrooms, and conference area. If time or resources permit, take him or her to lunch. You can also see if colleagues might want to go to lunch with the new employee during the first week. Be sure to let your new employee know ahead of time if you set up

those types of plans. If the new employee will be working with clients or anyone outside the department, it is also a good idea to schedule a welcome meeting. Having a schedule for your new hire the first week of work is helpful.

Take time to discuss other departmental procedures or processes during the first week such as:

- ✓ work schedule, including breaks and lunch periods
- ✓ call-in procedures for sick, tardiness, or other absences
- ✓ dress codes/standards
- ✓ teleworking, overtime, or any other agreements
- ✓ appropriate conduct (professionalism, customer service, team work, etc)

Checking in with the New Employee

Regularly scheduled meetings are not only a good time to evaluate and inform the new hire of where they stand, it is also an opportunity to find additional information that may be helpful in the new hires' success. For example, here are some questions you can ask:

- ❖ Is it what you expected when you were hired? Any surprises? What?
- ❖ Has the training been helpful? Is there any additional training, supplies or materials you feel you need?
- ❖ Are you receiving enough feedback from me regarding your job performance?

For a chart of questions by milestones, see “5 Supervisor’s Check-in Questions for New Hires” at the end of this packet. The chart contains tips to improve the onboarding process, establish a rapport with your new hire, and identify areas that may need further clarification.

Probationary Employee Appraisal

In preparation for the appraisal, you should gather documentation and be prepared to provide examples to support your evaluation of the performance. Being specific is essential. Decide what kind of message you want to send to the employee. Determine if the feedback you intend on providing is going to be reinforcing or correcting. This will set the tone for the meeting and provide the new hire with your assessment of their performance thus far. Both types of feedback should include the business impact. The chart below demonstrates the difference between reinforcing and correcting examples.

Reinforcing	Correcting
“Name, I want to commend you on your valued performance. Specifically, I have observed (be specific and provide examples)... This supports the unit goal of	“Name, there is something that is concerning me which is (be specific, provide examples, provide dates). I need to talk to you about it.”
“You are performing your (state job function) well. Continue your strong performance by (be specific and provide examples)...”	“As you know, you are expected to (clarify the job expectation, give dates when discussed). When (provide examples) happens again, you should...”
“By taking the extra steps of (give example), you ensure that the customer’s needs are met.”	“When you are late to work, there is no one here to answer a customer’s call.”

When setting up the meeting, let the new hire know what the topic will be so he or she can prepare and send a copy of the performance appraisal ahead of time so they have time to digest the feedback. Once in the meeting, start the conversation with an open statement based on a shared goal like the mission of the department. If the conversation is going to be corrective, it is important to relay that you wish for the new hire to succeed and part of the goal is to identify and provide them resources in attempt to achieve that objective. Listen to the new hire and then work together to seek a solution. If the conversation becomes tense or defensive, try to steer back on the specific topic and remain calm and

objective. If it becomes really intense, agree to end the meeting but set up another time to reconvene. Consider discussing the situation with your department HR contact or [Strategic Workforce Solutions](#) (SWS) consultant to explore how to improve the next meeting.

Employee Successfully Completes the Probationary Period

If you decide to keep the employee on staff beyond the probationary period, then on the last working day of the probationary period, congratulations are in order. Perhaps a letter to the employee thanking them for their great start, signed by you and department head. Also know that the employee may also begin applying to other jobs within the university and your responsibility is to encourage development and growth. Once the employee has passed the probationary period, they will no longer be considered probationary even upon transfer or promotion to another department as long as there is no break in service. Another reward for your employee of completing the probationary period is that they can begin to submit request to use annual leave because he or she has satisfied six months of continuous state employment. Employees who transfer from other state agencies with no break in service and have six month of continuous state employment, can actually use their accruals when they first start.



Continue to meet regularly with your employee providing feedback and reinforcing positive behavior. This is only the beginning of your journey together. Explore development opportunities with your employee that he or she may be interested in and learn what motivates him or her. Your employee's success is also a reflection of your leadership.

Terminating an Employee before the end of the Probationary Period

As mentioned at the beginning of this document, the probationary period is considered part of the selection process. You may terminate the employment of your probationary employee at any time during the probationary period if they are judged not to be competent or otherwise not qualified. Your judgment should be in concurrence with the department head.

You are expected to have notified the employee on multiple occasions that they were not meeting standards, what improvements were needed, and the consequences for not improving. Termination of the employee should be considered only after the employee has not improved to an acceptable level following such notification and counseling. Ideally, the termination should not be a surprise due to the ongoing dialogue.

Ask yourself some of the following questions:

- ▶ Will this be a surprise to them?
- ▶ Did I clearly communicate my expectations?
- ▶ Did I give them the opportunity to improve?
- ▶ What did I do to help them improve?
- ▶ Will more training/time make a difference?
- ▶ Did I explain the severity of the issue and possible consequences?

If you decide to terminate an employee before the end of the probationary period, please work with your departmental HR contact or your SWS consultant so you are following the correct documentation and notification procedures.

Terminating an Employee after the Probationary Period

If you decide to terminate an employee after they have passed the probationary period, the process is more involved. You will need to work with your departmental HR contact or your SWS consultant.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can someone on probation apply to other jobs?

A probationary employee is promotion/transfer eligible within their own department. However, only current UT Austin classified staff member who have been employed in their current job for the last six continuous months are promotion/transfer eligible for university-wide or open recruitment unless you give them express permission to apply to another job.

Can a probationary employee request to use annual leave?

If any employee has six month of continuous state employment, then he or she is permitted to use it with your approval. This may or may not be concurrent with the probationary period.

What happens if an employee goes on a Leave of Absences? Is the probationary period extended?

If an employee must go on a Leave of Absence, an additional work day will be added to the probationary period for each scheduled work day not worked, and not covered by accrued sick leave. For example, during the offer if an employee discloses a pre-scheduled trip that cannot be rescheduled, a department may agree to give the employee a Leave of Absence if the employee is not eligible to use their annual accruals.

What if an employee has a break in service?

Any employee who has left and then returns to the University after any break in service will be considered a "probationary employee."

Can a Probationary employee file a complaint or grievance?

Yes. The [HOP 5-2430](#) *Grievance Policy* applies to Classified and Administrative and Professional employees, including probationary, temporary, hourly or per diem employees who work on an as needed basis.

Can a Probationary employee appeal a termination?

No. The [HOP 5-2420](#) *Policies and Procedures for Discipline and Dismissal of Employees* does not apply to a dismissal of an employee during the 180-day probationary period.

What kind of reference do you give for someone dismissed during the probationary period?

When providing a reference, you should only disclose information that was discussed with the employee or in the dismissal memo given to the employee. It should not be a surprise to the former employee.

Does an employee who moved from A&P position to a classified position have a probationary period?

No. The probationary period, applied to classified staff during the initial 180 days, it does not start or restart because someone who was A&P has now become classified.

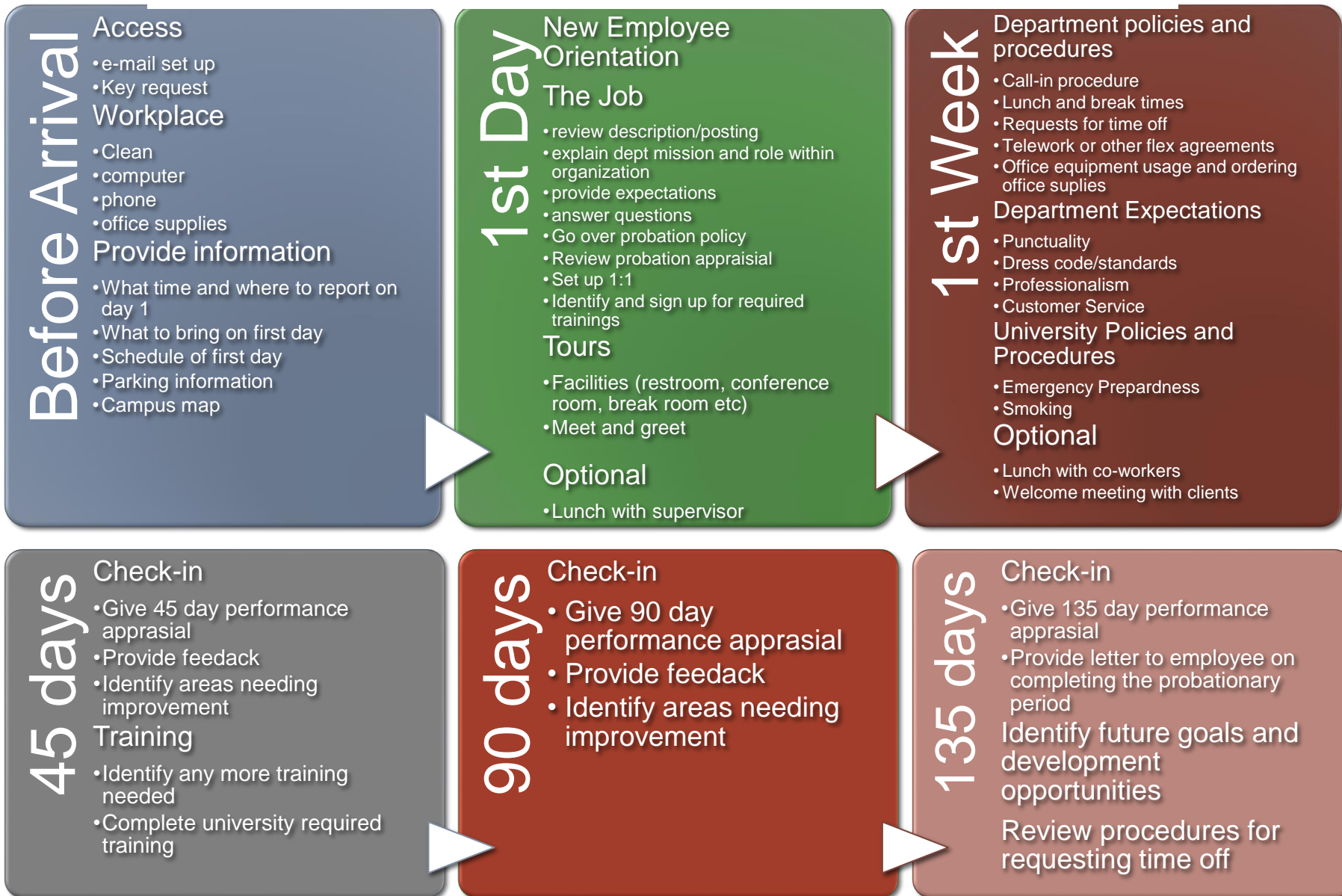
***If I hire an employee from another department without a break in service, do they start probation all over again?
Can I give a break in service so they can restart probation?***

The probationary period does not restart when transferring to another department. Departments are strongly encouraged to conduct reference check with the previous department. It's highly recommended to request the employee's file which typically includes performance appraisals. It is not appropriate to give a false break in service for the purpose of restarting the probationary period. For more guidance on reference checks see <http://www.utexas.edu/hr/manager/hiring/references.html>.

	1st Day	End of 1st Week	Day 45	Day 90	Day 135 & Beyond
Manager's Message	Make sure your new employee has their most important questions answered today. Empower your new employee with the tools he or she needs to be successful from the start.	Make sure your employee knows they will be out of their comfort zone while starting a new job. Encourage your new employee to approach you with any questions or concerns.	Your new employee should be feeling like a part of the team. Take the time to frequently follow-up with your employee to resolve any challenges and issues.	You should have a good idea of how things are going. Check with your employee and show your support by identifying potential barriers and showing interest in him or her.	You should work together to chart a course of training and new skills that will help the new employee see future opportunities at UT.
1	Is there anything you didn't understand about the new hire orientation you just completed?	Did you get your w-4, direct deposit, and benefit enrollment completed yet?	Is this what you expected when you were hired? Any Surprises? What?	Do you understand how your position fits within our department/team?	Do you have any questions about the performance review process?
2	Did everything go well with your new hire paperwork?	Do you have any questions regarding the department's attendance, performance and/or conduct standards?	Are you receiving enough feedback from me regarding your job performance?	Is there anything that you have brought to my attention that has not yet been resolved?	Are you aware of the professional development options available to you?
3	Do you have everything you need for tomorrow?	What worked/didn't work during your first week on the job?	Have you completed your required University trainings?	Are you aware of the areas you need to working on?	As your supervisor, what are the things I can do to support your career goals?
5 Supervisor's Check-in Questions for New Hires					
4	Do you have any questions about anything you learned today?	Have you read your job description? Do you have any questions regarding your job duties?	Has your training been helpful? Is there any additional training, supplies, or materials you feel you need?	What kind of support or direction do you need from me that you aren't getting? Do you have any frustrations in your job?	Have you noticed any different aspects of the job you want to gain more experience in?

5	Have you met everyone on the team? If not, let me introduce you to some of the people you will be working with.	Have there been some things that are unclear? Was someone able to answer all of your questions?	Are you feeling supported by me? By your team members?	What satisfies you in your work? What gets in your way?	What do you feel is your most significant accomplishment thus far?
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Supervisor's Checklist for New Employees



*If it's not working out or you plan to dismiss during probation, call your departmental HR or SWS person.

Probationary Employee Appraisal Form

INSTRUCTIONS: Use this form to provide feedback to the probationary employee during their 180-day probationary period. The Probationary period is a part of the selection process. Its purpose is to determine that the probationary employee's performance, ability, willingness and dependability merit continuation of University employment. It is your responsibility to notify an employee when their performance is below acceptable standards. You should counsel the employee as to the actions required to improve performance to an acceptable standard.

Check One: 45-Day Review 90-Day Review 135-Day Review _____

Employee's Name: _____ Department: _____

Employee's Title: _____

Appraised By: _____ Date Of Appraisal: _____

Date of initial employment with The University of Texas at Austin: _____

The employee will complete his/her first 180 days of employment on: _____

Evaluate the employee's progress to date:

Employee is making satisfactory progress

Employee is not making satisfactory progress

If the employee is making satisfactory progress, you should use space below to make recommendation for aiding the employee in continuing his/her progress on the job. If the employee is not making satisfactory progress, indicate nature of problem, dates of counseling, and remedial action taken. Indicate any training programs in which employee failed to meet requirements. Attach additional sheets for comments if necessary. Consider all of the expectations for the position.

This is a Position of Special Trust. In compliance with university policy, all individuals who have computer access to Category-I Data must complete the Position of Special Trust Form each year, available at <https://www.utexas.edu/vp/it/policies/uts165/specialtrust/>. Questions should be directed to the Chief Information Security Officer.

Supervisor's Signature Date Employee's Signature Date

Printed Name and Title Printed Name and Title

Related policies

Policy	Group	Applicable sections
5-2230	Probationary Employee	All
5-2310	Performance Evaluation Policy for Classified Personnel and Non-Faculty Professional Staff	All
5-2420	Policies and Procedures for Discipline and Dismissal and Grievances of Employees	II.4.e
5-2430	Grievance Policy	All
5-4110	Annual Leave	Section C.1.
5-2330	Promotion/Transfer Policy for Regular Classified Employees	Section 2.b

Helpful links

[HOP - Probationary Employees Policy](#)

[Managing Probationary Employees](#)

[Probationary Performance Appraisal Form](#)