Fiscal Year 2026 Mandatory Narrative Summary and Tip Sheet
for Senior Executive Service (SES) and Senior Professionals (SP)

Requirements

The narrative summary must not exceed two-pages in 10-point font. Rating Officials must address each critical element separately and tie narrative directly to the performance requirements in the employee's performance plan. The narrative must be signed by the Rating Official and clearly describe the nature and quality of the employees' results. Narratives must unambiguously demonstrate the employee's contribution to mission accomplishment and fully support the initial summary rating.

For employees who served in an acting role, Rating Officials may incorporate accomplishments tied to the role under each applicable critical element. These accomplishments should be clearly identified as pertaining to the acting assignment and the narrative must specify the period the employee served in the acting role.

Critical Elements

For SES Members:

1. Faithful Administration of the Law and the President's Policies
2. Government Efficiency
3. Merit and Competence
4. Holding Others Accountable and Treating Them Fairly
5. Achieving Organizational Goals

For Senior Professionals:

1. Faithful Support of Administration of the Law and the President's Policies
2. Government Efficiency
3. Merit and Competence
4. Partnership/Leadership/Mentorship
5. Achieving Organizational Goals

Tips for Writing Narratives

- Focus on Results, Not Actions. Actions describe what someone did; results describe the impact. Demonstrate outcomes, progress against targets, quality improvements, customer impact, efficiencies, or mission advancement. *Example:* Instead of "prepared a strategic plan," use "delivered a strategic plan to reduced cycle time by 15% and enabled the bureaus to meet deadlines."
- Demonstrate How Each Competency Was Met or Exceeded. Departmental Performance Review Boards look for clear differentiation, especially at higher rating levels. Narratives should:
  - Show exceptional impact, not routine performance.
  - Describe influence on programs, stakeholders, or Department priorities.
  - Highlight leadership behaviors such as collaboration, strategic alignment, coaching, or innovation.
- Use Measurable, Objective, Observable Evidence. Departmental guidance repeatedly stresses "specific and measurable results" and "accurate, results-based ratings." Include:

    - Quantitative metrics (percentages, time saved, error reduction).
    - Timelines (met OMB deadline by August 28; delivered quarterly reviews ahead of schedule).
    - Scope/scale (impacted three bureaus; served 1,200 employees; processed 300 cases).
- Avoid Generalities. Performance Review Boards will not accept vague statements. Replace broad claims ("supported leadership," "improved service delivery") with facts, evidence, and context tied directly to the performance plan.
- Ensure Clear Differentiation Across Performance Levels. Differentiation is mandatory under Department/OPM policy. Narratives for higher ratings should explicitly demonstrate:
    - Consistently exceeding expectations.
    - Delivering results ahead of schedule or with more impactful results than expected.
    - Handling complex challenges with high quality and sensitive issues with diplomacy.
    - Meaningful contributions to Department goals (e.g., PMA, AI literacy, data-driven operations, etc.)
- Use Clear, Concise, Direct Language. Avoid jargon unless essential; be precise and readable. OPM and Department guidance emphasize concise summaries reflecting the quality of performance.
- Ensure Organization-Wide Alignment. Good narratives:
    - Link accomplishments to Bureau/Department priorities.
    - Reflect crosscutting initiatives (AI readiness, PMA goals, workforce modernization).
    - Align with critical elements and performance plan expectations, as required for SES/SP narratives.
- Incorporate Customer Perspective and Mission Value. Department frameworks emphasize customer input and needs and Department-wide service improvement. *Example*, the OS WCF Customer Experience initiative explicitly requires strengthening customer feedback loops. Show:
    - How results improved stakeholder experience.
    - How work enabled better service delivery, reduced burden, or addressed customer pain points.
    - Positive feedback, if documented.
- Maintain Organization, Readability, and Required Structure. Narratives must be readable, logically organized, and consistent with Departmental format requirements. Use:
    - Clear sections.
    - Straightforward sentence structure.
    - No extraneous text.
    - Alignment with the performance plan's critical elements.
- Document Only Verifiable, Reviewable Evidence. PRBs cannot seek additional justification and will not request revisions. Narratives must stand alone. Ensure:
    - All statements are factual.
    - Items included do not rely on undocumented claims or subjective assertions