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 G) [18 State 99602](#)

Pass Line: FOR ALL DCMS, MANAGEMENT OFFICERS AND HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICERS
Subject: Straight Talk: Ten Easy Ways to Strengthen your EER

1. Every year, Selection Board members tell us that their biggest challenge is evaluating employee files that contain EERs that do not follow instructions, neglect simple proofreading, or fail to demonstrate promotion potential. Here are ten easy tips to help make your EER the best that it can possibly be. The Straight Talk cable series is part of an ongoing educational initiative aimed to provide insight on Foreign Service promotions and professional development.

Tip 1 – Set the scene

2. Setting the scene in the *Position Description* section provides the Selection Board with a quick understanding of where you sit in the organization and what your responsibilities are. The Selection Boards told us that they appreciated those EERs that gave a clear snapshot and included details such as the size and function of the work unit and its position within the Mission or Bureau. Remember to include the number of employees under your supervision and the scope of financial and physical resources for which you are accountable. Don't waste this space by merely providing generic input.

3. The *Special Circumstances* box, when it documents unexpected changes that occurred during the rating period that affected your ability to perform your duties, can also provide very helpful scene-setting information. Selection Boards appreciated those EERs that used the Special Circumstances box to add to the Boards' understanding of the specific challenge facing the Rated employee. While the situation does not need to be dramatic, it does need to articulate a clear connection with the Rated employee, as noted in the instructions. Remember to make the connection. For example, "Outbreaks of violence in the capital led to unreliable electricity and

extreme temperatures, resulting in excessive wear and tear of post communication equipment which required daily maintenance and repair by the employee over and above the required monthly inspections” makes the connection. “This post is a 25% differential post with poor infrastructure, bad weather, and health concerns” does not.

4. Boards will only know if you are in a stretch position if you tell them. The cover page of the EER shows the Rated employee’s personal grade and does not indicate the grade of the position the employee is occupying. Remember to have the Rater highlight in the Rater section when you are in a stretch assignment (or have taken on higher-level duties in an acting capacity), and comment on how well you are handling the additional responsibilities of the higher grade.

Tip 2 – Grab them from the start

5. Board members read a few thousand EERs – you need to make yours stand out. As the first narrative in the EER, the Rated employee’s statement has the biggest impact on the Board’s first impression. The best EERs are those that clearly explain what the Rated employee did and why it mattered. Focus on your accomplishments, not others’ failings. Use strong examples and link them to goals and outcomes. Some argue that employees encumbering certain positions have a tougher time making the link to State’s policy goals than others. Not true! A few examples of the kinds of deliverables you can mention: how an OMS facilitates the Ambassador’s implementation of the President’s agenda; how the distribution of funds supports the Mission’s policy and outreach agenda; how a Political Officer reporting a local election over which she has no control can impact decisions in Washington; and how DS ensures that the Mission has a safe and secure platform on which to work. Highlight your ability to work both independently and as part of a team. Remember teamwork matters. Because you have already set the scene in the position description, avoid additional background information unless absolutely necessary. Do not take up valuable space describing the post or country in detail.

Tip 3 – Impact is important

6. Remember it is the impact of your accomplishments that demonstrate readiness for promotion. Boards are asked to identify employees whose files demonstrate sustained superior performance in achieving outcomes that promote U.S. foreign policy goals and the Department of State mission. The strongest EERs are able to demonstrate the impact of the Rated employee’s accomplishments by linking those accomplishments to mission goals. Employees with EERs that simply provide a list of accomplishments without explaining their impact or contribution to mission goals are less compelling. Additionally, assertions without facts are meaningless. You should avoid over the top language (“the best officer ever...”) unless it is supported with specific examples.

7. Don’t make the Board read between the lines by hiding a recommendation (or non-recommendation) for promotion in the middle of the narrative. The EER must clearly state if, or to what extent, the rated employee demonstrated the potential to perform at the next highest level, explicitly and through examples. An unsubstantiated recommendation for promotion lessens the credibility of the entire EER. If the Rated employee is not ready for promotion, or needs more time to build skills, the Rater should say so. The Board will look to see the growth

in the Rated employee's performance during the next rating period.

Tip 4 – Do your homework to understand the three areas of effectiveness and how they relate to the six competencies

8. The Rater's statement no longer requires that the six competency groups be addressed specifically and individually. Instead, the Rater now describes and appraises the Rated employee's informational, operational, and relational effectiveness. Informational effectiveness draws on substantive, intellectual, and communication skills. Operational effectiveness draws on leadership, managerial, communication, and interpersonal skills. Relational effectiveness draws on interpersonal, leadership, and communication skills. See [19 STATE 12038](#) for more information on the three areas of effectiveness. But don't wait for the end of the rating period to talk with your Rater about these skills. Understanding the relationship between the areas of effectiveness and the six competencies will help you strengthen both your Work Responsibilities and your EER.

Tip 5 – Don't fear the Area for Development

9. Areas for Development should be credible and identify the competency in which the Rated employee has room for growth. Areas for development should be tied to current performance and may not be the need for formal or informal training. Be careful about noting the same thing as both a praiseworthy skill in the narrative and as a criticism in the Area for Development - it lessens the credibility of the entire EER. Rated employees should remember to address previous Areas for Development in the narrative, demonstrating their professional growth.

Tip 6 – Read the Instructions Carefully

10. A frequent complaint among Selection Board members is the failure of Rated employees, Raters, and Reviewers to read and follow the instructions on the DS-5055.

- Rated employees: When you are describing your accomplishments and how they advanced Mission goals, balance "I" references with "we" references. Take credit, but be humble. Leave out self-aggrandizement. Remember that Boards are reading EERs from employees who may have served at the same post at the same time. They do not look favorably on several individuals taking sole credit for the same accomplishment!
- Raters: You have the responsibility to assess the Rated employee's accomplishments and their impact. What did the Rated employee do and why did it matter? Remember, if the Rated employee supervised other employees, describe his/her effectiveness as a supervisor, including developing subordinates, mentoring, and concern for morale.
- Reviewers: You make an independent assessment of the Rated employee's preparedness for assuming positions of greater responsibility, citing examples of performance. You also provide a 360 view of the Rated employee, addressing his/her relationships with the Rater, peers, and subordinates. If you disagree with the Rater's evaluation of the Rated employee, or if relations between the Rater and Rated employee

are strained, you must make this clear. In fact, some of the most powerful Reviewing statements were those by Reviewers who felt the Rater had underestimated the strength of the Rated employee's performance – and didn't hesitate to say that, highlighting examples of the Rated employee's accomplishments and impact.

Tip 7 – Tell a story - there should be an overall flow to the EER

11. The best EERs tell the story of what the Rated employee did and why it mattered. Raters and Reviewers should describe the impact of the accomplishments from different perspectives. It is therefore necessary that Raters and Reviewers read each other's statements to avoid repetition of the same examples and to illustrate different aspects of the Rated employee's performance. If Raters and Reviewers are writing EERs for multiple employees at same grade and skill code at the same time, do not use the same language on multiple EERs. The same Board will see them all and will notice when Raters and Reviewers recycle the same language for multiple employees. In addition, Rated employees should remember that Boards are reviewing your performance material from your eOPF. If you are at a three or four year post, make sure your EERs focus on different aspects of your work or emphasize increased responsibilities.

Tip 8 – Proofread Again...And Again...And Again

12. Numerous spelling and grammatical errors may weaken an otherwise glowing EER. In addition to proofreading, ask colleagues and friends to check it for errors. Remember that spacing, and especially paragraph spacing, is also important. With space at a premium, it is nevertheless not wise to cram in your statement without open space between paragraphs. Some white space ensures EERs are easy to read. Too much white space indicates a lack of substance. Every aspect of your EER should show Boards that you are not only performing well at grade, but also, even more importantly, that you have the potential to perform well at the next highest level. An EER with typos, run-on sentences or spacing issues is hard to read and will not leave that impression.

Tip 9 – Print it out

13. Print your EER before submitting it to make sure all of the narrative sections are within the allotted space. Some systems and browsers allow extra space for drafting, but the final EER form does not. The easiest way to ensure that there are no spacing issues and that all statements are complete is to review a printed copy of the EER.

Tip 10 – Final DOs and DON'Ts

14. Here is a list of dos and don'ts that will strengthen your EER.
- DO use Active voice (action verbs beat adjectives and adverbs)
 - DO be Accurate and Authentic
 - DO be Concise, Clear and Credible
 - DO use gender-neutral language (if you would not use certain language to describe a man, do not use it to describe a woman, and vice versa)

- DON'T be overly creative or humorous (you never know how the Board will respond)
- DON'T mistake flowery language for content
- DON'T include inadmissible comments (See 19 STATE 14578 and 3 FAM 2815.1 for additional information about inadmissible comments)

15. HR's Office of Performance Evaluation (HR/PE) posts information on performance-related topics on its intranet site throughout the year. If you have any questions or concerns about a performance issue, please reach out to us on HRPEQuestions@state.gov and we will do our best to advise you. In addition, HR/PE organizes webinars and DVCs on EER-related topics. Please contact HR/PE Program Analyst, Jamila Moumeni, at MoumeniJS@state.gov for more information.

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