## Managers should be aware of several common **rater errors** that can unintentionally bias performance evaluations and undermine fairness, accuracy, and credibility. Here's a concise list with definitions and examples, tailored for performance reviews in higher education or public service contexts:

## Common Rater Errors in Performance Reviews

| **Rater Error** | **Description** | **Example** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Halo Effect | Allowing one positive trait to overly influence all ratings | An employee is very friendly, so the manager rates them highly on all duties—even those unrelated to interpersonal skills |
| Horns Effect | Letting one negative trait unfairly lower ratings in other areas | An employee missed a deadline once, leading the manager to underrate their overall reliability |
| Recency Effect | Focusing too much on recent events rather than the full review period | A recent success skews the manager’s memory of weaker performance earlier in the year (or vice versa) |
| First Impression | Initial impression (positive or negative) clouds judgment for the entire cycle | An employee stumbles during onboarding and is judged harshly for months afterward (or vice versa) |
| Critical Incident Error | Basing the review on one major event (positive or negative) | A single project success (or failure) becomes the basis for the entire evaluation |
| Stereotyping Error | Assigning ratings based on group-based assumptions instead of individual behavior | Assuming a younger employee isn’t ready for leadership, or an older one can’t adapt to change |
| Leniency Bias | Consistently rating employees higher than warranted | A manager avoids giving honest feedback and rates everyone as “Exceptional” |
| Strictness Bias | Consistently rating employees lower than deserved | A manager believes “no one is truly exceptional” and rates harshly across the board |
| Central Tendency | Rating everyone as “average” to avoid taking a stand | No one receives an “Exceptional” or “Unsuccessful” rating—even when merited |
| Similarity Bias | Favoring employees who are similar to the manager in background or style | An employee shares the manager’s communication style and receives higher ratings as a result |
| Contrast Effect | Comparing employees to each other rather than to objective standards | A strong performer makes others appear weaker than they are (or vice versa) |
| Personal Bias | Letting personal feelings (positive or negative) affect objectivity | Liking or disliking an employee’s personality influences their performance rating |
| Attribution Error | Overemphasizing personality instead of context or environment | Assuming an employee is lazy when delays are caused by system or staffing issues |

## How to Avoid Rater Errors

* Use **specific, documented examples** of performance over the entire review period
* Refer back to the **success criteria and job duties** from the planning stage
* Use **multiple data sources** (e.g., observation, reports, feedback)
* Keep notes or a performance journal throughout the year
* **Calibrate ratings** with your supervisor or HR if you're unsure
* Be aware of your own unconscious biases—training in implicit bias can help

For additional guidance, contact your coll/div HR Representative or DHR-Employee Relations.