

Supervisor Disciplinary Meeting Preparation Checklist

A step-by-step guide for supervisors to prepare for formal disciplinary meetings.

Disclaimer: This checklist is intended as a best-practice resource for use by HR professionals and managers. It is not legal advice and may not be appropriate in every employment situation. Employers should consult with qualified HR compliance or legal counsel to ensure alignment with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, including collective bargaining agreements or internal disciplinary procedures.

Phase 1: Investigation & Documentation (Get Your Facts Straight)

- Gather objective evidence (e.g., timecard reports, emails, signed witness statements, screenshots, prior warnings)
- Document specific, observable behaviors — avoid opinions, generalizations, or assumptions
- Identify the violated policy, procedure, or performance expectation (cite exact name and/or number, e.g., "Policy 3.04 – Attendance")
- Confirm the date(s) and time(s) of the incident(s) or behavior
- Review the employee's personnel file (performance history, prior discipline, mitigating or contextual factors)
- Confirm timelines and whether the action falls within any required reporting period
- Check for potential disparate treatment (Are similar situations handled consistently across employees?)
- Preserve confidentiality by limiting access to investigation materials to need-to-know parties

Phase 2: Consultation & Review (Get a Second Opinion)

- Consult with Human Resources to review facts, ensure consistency, and review the draft disciplinary letter
- Verify whether a collective bargaining agreement, employment contract, or handbook policy applies
- Ensure no known or unaddressed ADA, FMLA, or medical issues are contributing to the behavior/performance
- Consult legal counsel if the situation involves serious risk (e.g., harassment, discrimination, retaliation, termination)
- Confirm the employee has not recently engaged in protected activity (e.g., complaint, leave, accommodation request)
- Obtain written approval from senior leadership (e.g., Director, HRBP, Executive, City/Company Manager)

Phase 3: Logistics & Planning (Set the Stage)

- Schedule a private, neutral space for the meeting (quiet, no interruptions)
- Arrange for a witness to attend (typically HR or another supervisor)
- Confirm the employee's scheduled shift/time to avoid off-hours meetings (especially for hourly staff)
- Notify employee of their right to union or representative support, if required by law or agreement
- Confirm if ADA accommodations or interpreters are needed for the employee to fully participate
- Prepare and print two copies of the disciplinary letter (one for the employee, one for the file)
- Draft clear talking points or a brief script to keep the conversation focused, respectful, and factual

Phase 4: Mental Preparation (Get Your Mind Right)

- Be ready to deliver the facts calmly and clearly, without anger or emotion
- Practice active listening — be prepared to hear the employee's perspective without interrupting
- Anticipate emotional reactions (e.g., denial, frustration, tears) and plan how to de-escalate respectfully
- Stay focused on your objectives: to communicate the issue, document the action, and outline expectations

Phase 5: Post-Meeting Follow-Up (Close the Loop)

- Document the outcome of the meeting in a brief summary (what was said, what was agreed, etc.)
- File the signed acknowledgment in the employee's personnel file (retain both copies)
- Provide the employee with a copy of the disciplinary letter
- Email a post-meeting recap to HR or applicable leaders as documentation
- Set clear next steps: improvement expectations, timeline for follow-up, check-in meeting(s)
- Log the disciplinary action in the appropriate HRIS, tracker, or disciplinary log, if used

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Arguing or debating with the employee during the meeting
- Introducing new allegations not listed in the written notice
- Making informal promises or guarantees (“This won’t go in your file,” “This is just a formality”)
- Delivering discipline without HR/legal review, especially for sensitive or escalated cases
- Delaying action after investigation is complete — which may imply inconsistency or leniency

Legal & Risk Compliance Check

- Ensure all language is professional, objective, and free of emotionally charged or biased statements
- Confirm employment status (e.g., probationary, at-will, under contract) before finalizing language
- Confirm employee is not currently on or recently returned from protected leave (FMLA, ADA, etc.)
- Ensure the disciplinary letter reflects only previously verified facts — not rumors or assumptions