



**Tips and Tidbits**  
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**Question: What is a Within-Grade Increase (WGI)? Can a WGI be Delayed or Denied? Under what circumstance would a delay or denial of a WGI be appropriate?**

A Within-Grade Increase, also known as a “step increase”, is an increase of basic pay that is due every one, two, or three years depending on an employee’s current step on the General Schedule (GS) or Federal Wage System Pay Scale.

Although most employees consider WGI’s an “entitlement”, they are not and must be *earned*. Employees may be advanced to the next step only upon having performed at an acceptable level of competence (ALOC)\*; completed the required one, two or, three year waiting period; and, must not have received an equivalent increase\*\* during that waiting period. Since Within-Grade Increases must be earned, it follows that there may be circumstances under which they could be delayed or denied altogether.

Supervisors must postpone WGIs when: an employee is within 60 days of their WGI due date and that employee has been demoted or reassigned due to less than satisfactory performance; and, when an employee has been placed on a performance plan for less than 120 days prior to the WGI due date but the employee’s performance has been determined less than a level 3.

When the need to delay a WGI has been established, a documented performance counseling session should be conducted to advise the employee of his/her unacceptable performance, and ascertain the reason(s); provide specifics relating to performance expectations; and, provide a clear warning of the adverse consequences performance does not improve.

In an effort to further assist the employee in improving their performance, management may place the employee on a formalized Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). The PIP should clearly provide specific requirements for an ALOC. If the employee’s performance improves to an acceptable level within the extended performance period, the WGI *may* be granted retroactively to the beginning of the pay period following the completion of the applicable waiting period.

If at the end of the extended performance improvement period, and an official off-cycle rating of record has determined that the employee’s performance in respect to a major element(s) has not improved, but in fact has fallen below the acceptable level of competence, “less than fully successful”, management should take steps to deny the WGI. When a WGI is denied a new rating of record may be prepared at any time during the next 52 weeks; consequently, if it is later

determined that the employee has sustained an acceptable level of performance the WGI may be granted.

Waiting periods for General Schedule (GS) (full-time) regularly scheduled tour of duty:

- For advancement to steps 2, 3, and 4 – 52 calendar weeks
- For advancement to steps 5, 6, and 7 – 104 calendar weeks
- For advancement to steps 8, 9 and 10 – 156 calendar weeks

Waiting periods for Federal Wage System (WG/WS) (full-time) regularly scheduled tour of duty:

- For advancement to step 2 – 26 calendar weeks
- For advancement to step 3 – 78 calendar weeks
- For advancement to steps 4 and 5 – 104 calendar weeks in step 3 and 4 respectively

For additional information or further guidance relating to the laws, statutory and regulatory requirements relating to Within-Grade Increases (WGIs) please contact your servicing Human Resources (HR) Specialist. Managers and supervisors may also refer to 5 U.S.C. 5335 and 5 CFR Part 531, Subpart D; 531.404(a) and 531.409.

\* This eligibility requires a rating of fully successful or equivalent

\*\* An equivalent increase is an increase or increases in an employee's rate of basic pay equal to or greater than the difference between the rate of pay for the GS grade and step occupied by the employee and the next higher step of the grade. Promotions and QSIs are examples of equivalent increases

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