



INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITING POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

The following format should be used to develop a position description. This position description format replaces the position classification questionnaire (PCQ) that has been used in the past. The position description should accurately reflect the duties and responsibilities of the position. In addition, it provides all of the information necessary to classify the position. Suggestions for writing position descriptions and a sample position description are included for your convenience.

- TITLE:** Identify a title that appropriately describes the major function of the position. (30 characters or less preferred)
- DEPARTMENT:** This is the major department in which the position resides or is budgeted.
- SUPERVISOR:** Identify (by title only) the supervisor of the position. This is the individual who is responsible for hiring, firing, completing/signing performance appraisals and making salary recommendations.
- GRADE:** Current grade of the position or grade you are proposing. Leave blank if this is a new position.
- DATE PREPARED:** The date the job description was written or updated.
- FLSA:** Identify whether you believe the position is exempt or non-exempt by FLSA standards. If you are proposing it be exempt, then you must complete the Department of Labor FLSA Exemption Work Sheet that can be obtained from Human Resources. If you are not sure, leave it blank.

POSITION SUMMARY

In this section, state the primary purpose of the position. The position summary should be no more than three or four sentences long. State the duties, functions, and responsibilities of the position without giving detailed information. Your summary is intended to give the reader a basic understanding of the position.

QUALIFICATIONS

- EDUCATION, EXPERIENCE, & TRAINING:** This section identifies the minimum qualifications in education and experience that an employee must possess on the first day of the job to satisfactorily perform the duties and responsibilities of the position. State the educational qualifications in terms of areas of study and/or the type of education that would provide the knowledge required for entry into the position. You may also indicate the education preferred, but not required, for the position.



State the experience as the minimum number of years and type of work experience that an employee needs to be qualified for the job. Work experience that is directly related to the job may be substituted for post high school education at the rate of two years of work experience for one year of education. For example, eight years of full-time, related work in a biological research or laboratory setting may be substituted for a Bachelor's degree (a four-year degree) in a biological science. The phrase "or an equivalent combination of education and experience" may be used to indicate that such a substitution is acceptable.

**KNOWLEDGE,
SKILLS, ABILITY:**

Identify occupational certifications and/or licenses that may be required (e.g., CPR, first aid, driver's license, plumber's license, etc.), competency with specific computer hardware or software, etc. For technical, labor or craft positions, identify machines, tools and equipment necessary to carry out job responsibilities. For clerical positions, include standard office equipment used and level of proficiency required.

**PHYSICAL
REQUIREMENTS:**

A checklist for determining physical requirements is attached. Complete the checklist and then summarize the most important information from the checklist into the job description.

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS

This section contains a description of the duties, functions, and responsibilities of the position. Provide a bulleted format with generally 6 to 12 items.

Duties should be ranked according to their importance and/or frequency with which they are performed. Only duties that are fundamental or essential to the position should be listed in this section. Please include the percentage of time the employee typically spends performing each duty. Duties that require less than 5% of time should be combined with other duties or left off the job description.

OTHER FUNCTIONS

This section contains a description of the duties, functions and responsibilities that are not essential to the position and could be assigned to other staff, if the University was asked to make a reasonable accommodation to an individual under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITY

Identify the type of supervisory responsibility that is expected from this position; select the most appropriate example. Identify the number of staff and students supervised.

- responsible for own work only
- assists in providing training, work direction and problem solving assistance for student workers



Human Resources

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- supervises, trains, provides work direction and problem solving assistance for student workers plus reviews or oversees work of less-experienced staff
- supervises staff including scheduling and assigning work, reviewing performance, recommending salary increases, promotions or discharges
- position requires the management of others through subordinates who are also supervisors including organizing and controlling the area, establishing budget plans, forecasting staffing requirements and formulating policies and procedures

AUTHORITY/ACCOUNTABILITY

This section describes how much latitude a position has to make decisions without obtaining approval from the supervisor. Your opening statement might read (select one):

- works under direct (close) supervision
- works under general supervision
- works under indirect supervision
- works under minimal supervision
- works independently

In addition, list any procedure manuals, laws or standards that guide the work. Identify responsibility for managing or overseeing budgets, if any. For example:

- providing input in budget development
- tracking and monitoring the budget
- authorizing expenditures
- tracking/controlling revenues

Other examples of information in this section might include whether the position formulates, interprets or enforces policies/procedures, or whether the position determines personnel actions or assists/provides input in personnel actions.

PROBLEM SOLVING

This section includes representative samples of the problems the position addresses (generally 2 – 4 examples). Please indicate the kinds of problems that are experienced and the processes used to resolve them. For example, do the problems recur to such an extent that specific processes/procedures are established to address them; or are the problems typically new/unique and require the employee to discover new methods to address each situation?

It is important to identify between general types of problems facing the incumbent rather than unique or specific examples. One-time problems (such as designing a new automated record-keeping system, setting up a new, specific computer system, etc.) or other temporary situations should not be included.

CHOOSING WORDS CAREFULLY

To achieve the two primary goals of position description writing - accuracy and brevity - you must check and double-check the words you have chosen to describe each job activity. Sometimes it is helpful to have someone who is not as familiar with the job read over what you have written. Here are a few guidelines regarding the use of words in a position description:

- Use a simple word rather than a sophisticated one. Never say "metropolis" when "city" will work.
- Use a single word rather than three or four.
- Avoid technical words unless you are sure they will be easily understood. If you must use them anyway, explain.
- Keep the use of gerunds to a minimum. A gerund is a verb used as a noun; for example, "Handles processing of change-of-address forms." A better construction would be "Processes change-of-address forms."
- Avoid imprecise words such as "situation," "facilitate," "interface," etc. Ask yourself if the word you have used might be interpreted differently by two different people.
- Use words that focus on the outcome of the job function, rather than on the process used to create the outcome.

WRITING GUIDELINES AND STYLE RECOMMENDATIONS

- A terse, direct style should be used throughout the description.
- Keep sentence structure as simple as possible; omit all words that don't contribute necessary information.
- Begin each sentence with an active verb (see the "Glossary of Useful Verbs"). Always use the present tense, third person singular (writes, oversees, etc.)
- Wherever possible, describe the desired outcome of the work, rather than the method for accomplishing that outcome. For example, instead of "writes down phone messages" - a task-oriented approach - you might say "accurately records phone messages."
- Focus on essential activities. A task that is performed frequently throughout the day may not be as "essential" or as critical to the job as something done only once or twice or week.
- Disregard minor or occasional tasks that are common to all jobs or are normally taken for granted, unless they are still "essential" to the job. Under "Other Functions", list those functions which could be delegated to another employee if a request were made for a "reasonable accommodation" under the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Avoid the narrative form. You are writing a position description, not a story. When possible, eliminate articles (a, an, the).
- Be consistent when using terms like "may" and "occasionally." Their meanings should be spelled out to avoid confusion. For example, make sure

- that if the word "occasionally" is used in the essential functions section of the description, the occasional work performed truly is essential to the job.
- Avoid words, such as "handles," that don't tell specifically what the employee does. Others you may want to avoid: "checks", "prepares," "examines," "sends." If these words are the most accurate and specific ones available, it may be acceptable to use them. But if a more specific term would describe the task more clearly, use it.
- Be clear and use non-technical language whenever possible. A good position description explains the objectives, duties and responsibilities of a job so that they are understandable even to a layperson.
- Refer to job titles rather than people. For example, "Reports to Human Resources Director" instead of "Reports to Estrella Simpson."
- Be precise in defining responsibility. The degree of responsibility given indicates the importance of the job and is a vital factor in evaluating it.
- Use parentheses to indicate qualifying or incidental explanatory details, as opposed to actual job duties.
- Discriminate between important and trivial facts. If an item is really trivial, perhaps it should be omitted.
- Qualify whenever possible. Don't just say that a file clerk "files" materials; say that he "files alphabetically."
- Stick to a logical sequence in describing duties and responsibilities whenever possible.
- Remember that the length of a position description does not indicate the importance of the job.

The writing style of your position descriptions may vary widely because they've been prepared by a number of different staff members. Someone should be made responsible for editing all the descriptions when they are done to make sure there is a consistent style throughout. If these guidelines are followed closely, editing for consistency should not be difficult. The "ideal" job description is written in a very impersonal style. The emphasis on conciseness and the use of very specific terminology encourages a finished product that reveals little of the writer's personal style.