

Guidelines for Completing a Job Description

A job description should describe major responsibilities and essential functions; however, it should not include every detail of how and what work is performed so that it remains useful even when minor changes occur. Either a staff member or supervisor may write the job description, but the supervisor must approve it.

Here are some writing style recommendations for writing a clear job description:

- Use a clear, direct style throughout the description
- Avoid the narrative form. Keep sentence structure as simple as possible
- Begin each sentence with an action verb, using parallel structure
- Use the present tense
- Focus on essential activities; omit trivial duties and occasional tasks
- Adhere to a logical sequence in defining responsibilities and be precise
- Avoid vague words like "handle" that do not specify what actions the position takes
- Use factual, non-technical language whenever possible
- If acronyms are used, spell out the words the first time they are mentioned
- Refer to job title rather than individual names
- Be descriptive. For example, if position "prepares reports," explain what that entails.

The following outlines the major sections of the job description and some effective strategies for completing each section:

Section 1: Identifying Information

- Administrative information
- Titles should communicate the purpose of the position - why the job exists. For example, the title Coordinator should be used to describe coordinating the work of other departments and/or individuals, not just the position's work.

Section 2: Position Purpose

- Bird's eye view of the overall purpose
- Why the job exists—not "how" the work is accomplished
- One or two sentences—not a detailed listing of tasks
- Begin with "The position coordinates..."

Section 3: Major Responsibilities

- Usually a single sentence (don't try to set down every detail)
- Allocate percentage of total time spent on each responsibility area.

Supporting Actions

- Tell how major tasks and functions are accomplished.
- Use brief, to the point sentences.
- Begin each sentence with present tense action verb; avoid verbs that do not indicate the action involved.

Section 4: Decisions Position is Free To Make

- Areas that the position primarily impacts or influences
- Describe the level of decision making and independent judgment. This is important to determine if the position is exempt or non-exempt.
- Provide specific examples.
- Decisions which are escalated to the supervisors
- Recommendations to committees, departments, etc.

Section 5: Dimensions

- Areas for which the position has direct and indirect accountability.
- Quantitative data
- List which positions this position will supervise.

Section 6: Job Qualifications and Competencies

- Minimum education or training required in this role; you may include preferred education
- Minimum years of experience required
- Include “or equivalent combination of education and experience” statement if appropriate.
- Specific skills necessary to perform job competently, not the incumbent's qualifications
- Differentiate between what is necessary and what is desirable /preferred.

Section 7: Other Information

- This section should include any physical demands required to perform the job. For example, indicate if the position requires lifting and/or moving X pounds, significant physical activity, repetitive manual tasks, standing X percent of the time or is subject to outside environmental conditions.
- Exceptional working conditions or erratic schedule requirements
- Any special processes, protocols, regulations (including workplace safety regulations) or, consequences associated with the position