
How to Write a Position Description

What is a Position Description

A position description is a document that specifically identifies the objectives, duties, and responsibilities of a position.

Specifically, position descriptions:

- Assist Human Resources with setting accurate classification and competitive pay and determining the proper Fair Labor Standard Act (FLSA) status
- Serve as the basis for setting standards for an employee's performance
- Are helpful to job applicants, employees, supervisors, and Human Resources staff during the employment process
- Prevent any possible misunderstanding by informing employees what they need to know to successfully perform their jobs and fulfill the mission of the University
- Should be maintained in the department's files and Human Resources
- Should be no older than two (2) years old
- Should be signed by the employee, direct supervisor of the position, and Human Resources

What a Position Description Describes

1. What work is assigned to the position?
2. How is the work accomplished? (i.e. methods, procedures, etc.)
3. What are the primary duties of the position?
4. How often are the job duties performed?
5. What percentage of time per week (based on the work week) is spent on each job duty?
6. What specific materials, equipment, and/or machines are used in carrying out the job?
7. Does the position work alone or with other positions? What type of involvement occurs with other positions?
8. What type of supervision is received? What is the supervisor's position number and job title?
9. Does the position supervise other positions? What are the position numbers and job titles of the other positions?
10. Does the position have financial responsibility? What is the approximate dollar amount?

Helpful Hints

1. The position description should focus on the job duties of the position rather than the specific employee performing the work.
2. Position descriptions should be written in an accurate, concise, uniform, and complete format so that the employee, direct supervisor of the position, and Human Resources can clearly understand the duties and responsibilities.
3. Position descriptions should be written in common, straightforward, everyday language. Familiar terms should be used.

Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Use short, direct verbs in the present tense
- Describe specifically and in sufficient detail:
 - What work is completed
 - What methods are used
 - What equipment and/or tools are used
 - Responsibility for the results
 - Consequence of actions or errors
 - Instructions or guidelines provided
 - Supervision exercised and received
 - Relationship of position with others within the organization
 - Any other pertinent facts
 - Assign approximate percent of time spent in each outlined responsibility
 - Provide sufficient information in the position description to clearly distinguish the differences in the position's functional level compared to another level within a job family

Don't:

- Copy the position's class specification
- Use ambiguous terms, such as "handle," "assist," "inspect," "research," etc., without an explanation and detail as to what this involves
- Lump several responsibilities together and assign large percentages of time
- Use abbreviations or technical terms without an explanation
- Describe personal characteristics of the position
 - Example: "Deals with the public and must have a pleasing personality at all times"
 - This can be listed under "Other Characteristics of the Position"

Writing Style Examples

Guideline	Example
Write in the present tense, starting with an action verb and use succinct statements.	Answers the phone. Prepares documentation.
Write about tasks and duties, not goals and outcomes.	Correct: Makes journal entries. Incorrect: Supports financial program stability.
Use clear and concise language. Avoid unnecessary wording.	The job incumbent Transports all University mail to the various locations throughout the entire facility.
Avoid gender-based language.	Use "Chair" rather than "Chairman."

Additional Assistance

For further assistance in writing Position Descriptions, please contact HR-Compensation.

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