

Supervisory Job Aids
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Writing a Job Description

Job descriptions are essential supervisory tools for:

- ***Organizing work units***
- ***Hiring***
- ***Training and coaching***
- ***Appraising performance***
- ***Reclassification***
- ***Compensation***

Following these steps will help ensure consistent and useful descriptions.

1. *Create a title heading*
2. *State the general purpose and objective of the position*
3. *Identify the major job functions*
4. *Identify the tasks within each major job function*
5. *Determine percent of time spent on each major function*
6. *Order the major functions by importance to the job*
7. *Determine essential vs. non-essential functions*
8. *Determine required knowledge, skills and abilities*
9. *Determine physical and environmental requirements*
10. *Add appropriate disclaimer statements*



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Introduction

Job descriptions are an essential management tool. When filling vacancies, they are used for:

- Defining job duties and selection criteria
- Defining essential functions of the job for ADA purposes
- Creating interview questions
- Discussing work expectations with applicants

For existing positions, job descriptions are tools for:

- Discussing work expectations with employees
- Writing performance standards
- Evaluating employee performance
- Reclassifying positions

Since work at the University tends to change over time, job descriptions should be reviewed periodically. (For example, during annual performance reviews.) Job description should reflect a consensus between the supervisor and the employee. If consensus is not possible, however, the supervisor's decision is final.

Organization of the work unit

When designing job descriptions, especially for new or vacant positions, it's important to consider not only the individual job but the ways that it fits into the departmental organization. What are the tasks that need to be done? Has the work changed since the last time a description was written? How does this work fit into the overall unit mission?

1. Staffing Assessment

Staffing assessment involves examining the unit's needs in light of the department's strategic plan (University Compact) and the unit's goals and objectives. It can also involve analysis and redesign of the unit's business processes. The goal of staffing assessment is to create a structure that will support the work of the unit. It will identify elements such as:

- the type of tasks required to meet the unit's goals
- roles and responsibilities of unit staff
- the number of employees needed to accomplish unit's goals
- the skills required to perform those tasks
- training and professional development plans for unit staff

2. Staffing Assessment Approaches

Staffing assessment can be an informal analysis done by a supervisor when creating a new position or filling a vacancy. It can also be a lengthy process involving information gathered from unit staff, clients, and upper management. Human Resources Consultants from the Office of Human Resources are available to assist in project planning.

Internal Approach:

The internal approach focuses on a unit's workload and processes. Staffing needs are analyzed by looking at issues such as work activity, workload cycles, productivity levels, changes in technology, and changes in roles and expectations.

Questions to ask include:

- What are we doing?
- Why are we doing it?
- When should it be done?
- Who should do it?
- Where should it be done?
- How should it be done?
- What support systems need to be in place to do it?

External Approaches:

Staffing assessment often involves looking at external units to see how they handle similar problems. Are there other units at the University that do similar tasks? If so, gather information about how they structure their work. Contacts with supervisors of similar units at peer institutions can also be useful.

In some cases, a more formal research process may be useful. Questions to consider include:

- a. **Benchmarking within higher education:** Study the world class organizations within higher education, focusing on their total staff size and composition. How do other Big 10 schools staff similar units? How do the top schools in your field staff these units? How do they handle specific processes that you have identified as problem areas?
- b. **Benchmarking outside higher education:** Identify highly successful organizations with similar goals and study the processes they deem most important. How do they solve similar problems?

Steps in writing a job description

Once you've thought through the needs of your unit and how the position fits into the mission, you're ready to create a job description. The steps below will help:

1. Create a title heading

Write a title heading, including:

- Date of description/revision
- Classification code and title
- Working title (if applicable)
- Unit and location where duties will be performed
- Name of person/position this position reports to
- Length of probationary period
- Percent time of appointment
- Term of appointment
- Any other identifying specifications particular to the position

2. State the general purpose and objective of the position

Describe the overall objectives for the position, then use a few sentences to describe its main responsibilities.

The Employment Consultant is responsible for partnering with assigned departments to ensure their human resources needs are met in a high quality, timely, and cost effective manner. The position's focus is on providing job design and analysis, recruiting, selection, retention, and promotion strategies and services to departments.

3. Identify the major job functions

Identify the major parts of the job with short headings that start with action verbs. Listing specific job function headings will allow you to more easily group related tasks.

You may find it helpful to list all tasks that the position must do, group those that are related, and then determine the appropriate heading. Most positions will have five to eight major functions.

Classification
Recruitment
Applicant Screening
Data Entry
Compensation

4. Identify the tasks within each major job function

Under each major job function heading, describe the typical tasks or critical steps required to fulfill the function. Use three to seven short statements that begin with an action verb. When identifying tasks, think about:

- what actions must be taken to fulfill the major job function?
- what activities will require training, monitoring, and performance review?

Classification

- Analyze positions to determine job family, classification, and/or salary range assignment.
- Determine FLSA exemption status
- Analyze JEQs, JRQs, and requisitions submitted by employees/departments

Recruitment

- Advise clients on good staffing management practice with regard to recruitment, selection, and hiring
- Analyze and approve requisitions
- Advise clients on establishing essential qualifications, selection criteria, and selection tools

Applicant Screening

- Screen applications, referring/rejecting applicants or requesting further information to make a decision
- Explain reasons for not certifying and/or referring applicants to openings
- Enter required applicant data into computer system

Data Entry

- Input and maintain applicant and employee data into the PeopleSoft system

Compensation

- Consult on compensation principles and guidelines related to vacant positions, reclassifications, and promotions
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5. Determine the percent of time spent on each major function

Determine the percentage of time typically spent on each major job function and list it on the description.

Classification	40%
Recruitment	20%
Applicant Screening	30%
Compensation	5%
Data entry	5%

6. Order the major functions by importance

Along with percentage of time spent, this will help determine which functions are essential to the job. It is possible that a function which is done infrequently is still highly important to the overall job.

1. Classification	40%
2. Recruitment	20%
3. Applicant screening	30%
4. Data entry	5%
5. Compensation	5%

7. Determine essential vs. non-essential functions of the position

Essential functions are the major job duties that an employee must be able to perform, with or without reasonable accommodation. Factors to consider include:

- Does the position exist to perform the function?
- Are there other employees available to perform the function or among whom the function can be distributed?
- What degree of expertise or skill is required to perform the function?

Essential functions can be identified with phrases such as “must be able to...” Non-essential functions can be noted with “typical tasks may include” or by marking them “non-essential.”

It is critical that the tasks be labeled in this way. The supervisor’s judgment regarding essential functions, along with the existence of a job description prior to posting and/or advertising, are considered by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) when reviewing cases for ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance.

Compensation (non-essential) (5%)

Consult on compensation principles and guidelines related to vacant positions, reclassifications, and promotions; assist departments in applying and calculating augmentations and in-range salary adjustments; carry out assigned special compensation projects.

Since it is low on the importance list, compensation would probably be considered non-essential if the unit could reasonably assign this function to another employee. Reassignment would not fundamentally change the job’s key responsibilities.

8. Determine required knowledge, skills, abilities and experience

List qualifications needed to perform the work, such as:

- Knowledge – factual information needed to perform the job. For example, does this job require technical training? Completion of a particular degree program? Special certification?
- Skills – “how-to” abilities needed for major functions, such as ability to perform basic math, monitor the health of lab animals, or operate specific equipment.
- Experience – demonstrated abilities to perform the major job tasks. Typically, this would be as past paid or volunteer work experience. You could also ask for writing samples, portfolios, or other work examples. Be aware of non-traditional ways in which applicants may gain relevant experience.

The University Classification Information Database on the Office of Human Resources web page (<http://data.ohr.umn.edu/>) provide guidelines for essential qualifications, but it is acceptable to request additional qualifications as long as they are directly related to the job functions.

Minimum or essential qualifications:

These describe the minimum level of qualifications for an applicant to be able to perform the essential functions of the job. They include education or degrees, licensure or certification, and any job-related experience required. Minimum qualifications are used by Human Resources to screen applications for vacant positions.

Preferred qualifications:

Additional levels of experience, knowledge, skill, and/or ability the ideal new employee would have. These desirable qualifications are not used to screen applications at Human Resources, but may be useful in assessing applicants for a vacancy. Remember that such criteria must be applied equally to all candidates.

Don’t narrow your pool of qualified applicants and/or open yourself up to a discrimination case by requiring more than is really necessary to perform the essential functions of the job.

For example,

...do you need someone with a BA in Human Resources, or would someone with a BA in Music who has been working in Human Resources for five years be qualified?

...do you need someone with a high school diploma or someone who “must be able to read technical literature including ____, ____ and ____?”

...do you need someone with a “valid driver’s license” or someone with the “ability to perform tasks at various locations throughout the Twin Cities?”

Minimum/Essential Qualifications: Baccalaureate degree and three years human resources experience including some employment responsibilities. Additional four years relevant experience may be substituted for the degree. Documented customer service experience.

Preferred Qualifications/Selection Criteria: Masters degree or currently working on Masters degree in a human resources related field.

9. Determine physical and environmental requirements

The physical and/or environmental requirements of the position may be evident in the tasks listed in the job description or by the abilities required in the qualifications. When considering physical requirements, remember that long periods at a computer terminal or standing at a service counter may be physically demanding. It’s also important to list any unusual environmental conditions, such as loud noises, cold temperatures, confined spaces, dust, or fumes.

Focus on the *end result* of the task, not *how* to achieve it. For example, “Must be able to move 25-pound aluminum parts from a 40-inch high conveyor belt to a 60-inch high platform 3 times per minute for 2-3 hours daily,” is preferable to “Must be able to lift 25 pounds.”

10. Disclaimer Statement

Job descriptions typically change over time as unit requirements and employee skill levels change. Supervisors may revise and/or add duties. The following statement should be included in all job descriptions. **“The employer reserves the right to assign other duties.”**

Position Description Questionnaire

The Office of Human Resources Job Center has developed a Position Description Questionnaire which is useful in gathering job-related information needed for writing job descriptions (see attached PDQ Form).

In addition to the elements defined in the job description, other factors may also be considered when interviewing applicants for a vacancy, evaluating an employee’s performance on the job, or assessing a possible job reclassification. These include:

Problem solving:

- What level of advice or assistance available?
- Are there written procedures, manuals, or other resources available?
- Does the position have responsibility for developing new procedures, programs, etc.?

Supervisory responsibilities:

- Does the position have supervisory, managerial, or lead worker responsibilities?
- If so, how many people, and at which levels, are supervised by this position?

Managerial responsibilities:

- Does the position have payroll or budget responsibilities?
- Does the position develop and/or explain policy?
- If so, what level of accountability is required?