

GUIDE TO WRITING JOB DESCRIPTIONS

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SUMMARY STATEMENT

The **Summary Statement** provides a synopsis of the major purpose of a position and its role in the department.

Example: Administrative Analyst

Under the general direction of the Director of Institutional Research and Policy Studies, the incumbent conducts institutional research and analysis in support of institutional decision making. This position supports central administration as well as faculty and staff administrators throughout campus. In this capacity the analyst is responsible for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information on a variety of topics including, but not limited to, admissions, enrollment management, students' progress, program and institutional effectiveness and program evaluation.

DEGREE OF SUPERVISION

The **Degree of Supervision** section describes the way in which work is assigned, when it is reviewed, how it is reviewed, and what guidelines and protocols are available.

Supervision Received

Supervision types include:

- **Close Supervision:** The incumbent is assigned duties according to specified procedures and receives detailed instructions. Work is checked frequently.
- **Supervision:** The incumbent performs a variety of routine work within established policies and procedures, and receives detailed instructions on new projects and assignments.
- **General Supervision:** The incumbent normally receives little instruction on day-to-day work and receives general instructions on new assignments.
- **Direction:** The incumbent establishes methods and procedures for attaining specific goals and objectives, and receives guidance in terms of broad goals. Only the final results of work are typically reviewed.
- **General Direction:** The incumbent exercises wide latitude in determining objectives and approaches to critical assignments.

Supervision Given

This section is provided so a Supervisor can list the payroll title and number of career employees supervised.

DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

A **Duty** is a distinct activity that is a logical, essential step in the performance of a function **and** a detailed description of:

- **what** work is done (action)
- **how** the work is done (procedures, materials, tools or equipment)
- **why** the work is done (purpose)

Writing Function/Duty Statements

List up to 7 core functions of the position along with the duties within each. Each function must be no less than 5% of time, and all core functions should add up to 100%.

- Begin each statement with an action verb in the first person, present tense (e.g., write, calibrate, analyze, etc.).
- Use clear and concise language. Where possible, use words that have a single meaning. Use examples and/or explanations for words which have varying interpretations.

- When the function/duty statement contains too much information for a single sentence, list the information as in the following example:
- Define uncommon abbreviations.
- Do not include references to personal qualities or skills.
- Clearly define ambiguous qualitative terms such as complex, large, difficult, etc.
- If the job is 0.5 FTE, the functions and duties should still add up to 100%.

ESSENTIAL vs. MARGINAL

Essential Functions are functions & duties that are critical to performing the job.

Marginal Functions are less than critical functions & duties.

- From the list of all functions performed, determine which are essential and which are marginal and the percentage of time spent on each.
- List the functions with the highest percentage first.
- Label each function as either “Essential” or “Marginal”.

QUALIFICATIONS/COMPETENCIES

A **Competency** is a skill, knowledge or ability required of an employee to successfully perform the functions and duties of a job.

This section of the job description identifies minimum job specifications required to perform the job. Basic competency categories include but are not limited to the following:

- Vocational (work content skills)
- Communication (reading, writing & speaking)
- Financial
- Interpersonal
- Analytical
- Self-Management

Guidelines for Writing Competency Statements

1. Each competency statement should indicate:
 - What is the **ability**
 - What is the **level** or amount of the ability
 - What is the **context** (for what purpose) in which the ability is utilized (optional).
2. Use examples from the job to help define the competency concisely.
3. Avoid using subjective modifiers like high-level, top-notch, first-rate, etc.
4. Do not include phrases such as "interest in," "desire to learn," and "commitment to growth" since these factors may be irrelevant to successful job performance and they are very difficult to assess in the selection process.
5. Tailor the competencies to the job you are describing. The competencies described in this handbook are only examples.
6. Categorize competencies as either “Required” or “Preferred” and list required first.

SPECIAL CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

Indicate any physical and environmental requirements, irregular work schedule, required licenses, certification, or background check as the following examples demonstrate.

Physical and Environmental Requirements:

- Ascends/descends ladders, scaffolds, stairs, and works in confined spaces and in proximity to loud machinery.
- Positions one-self in order to work in confined spaces such as trenches, pits, manholes, attics and tunnels.
- Recognizes exposure to live circuits and/or operating machinery.

Work Schedules:

- Work scheduled overtime and be available for emergency overtime when the need arises by responding to overtime call outs before and after standard scheduled hours of work.
- Work a temporary, alternative schedule or shift as requested by supervisor.

Required Licenses:

- Licensed to drive in the State of Georgia and the ability to drive a pickup truck or van.
- Drive a vehicle which requires a Class 2 Georgia Driver's License.

Background Checks:

- The selected candidate will be required to pass a criminal history background check and/or fingerprinting.

KNOWLEDGE MODIFIERS

The following terms may be used to define the level of knowledge required:

1. General Knowledge:

- Ability to use a source to find specific information.
- Generally familiar with information contained in source documents or covered in a subject field.
- For example, a general knowledge of Policies refers to the purpose of the policies, the general subjects that the policies cover, and how to reference the policies.

2. Working Knowledge:

- Ability to recall important and commonly-used information from the source. □□For example, working knowledge of Policies would include the ability to recall major and commonly used provisions of specific rules.
- Working knowledge does not imply a thorough, detailed knowledge of the specific provisions of all the rules.

3. Detailed Knowledge:

- Thorough understanding of all information contained in the source.
- Using the Policies example again, an individual with detailed knowledge would be expected to know the provisions of all rules in detail without having to look them up, including provisions which are not frequently used.

VOCATIONAL SKILLS

Vocational (work content) Skills display mastery of a particular vocabulary, procedure, trade or subject matter necessary to perform a job in a particular field. These skills are acquired by such means as technical education, apprenticeships, or on-the-job training.

Examples of Vocational Skill Statements:

- **Clerical/Admin Support**
 - Demonstrated skill in using [software applications] to produce business letters and financial reports
- **Communications (publications)**
 - Demonstrated journalistic abilities sufficient to write news releases and other PR materials for consumer, professional and trade outlets in print, broadcast and on-line media
- **Construction/Maintenance**
 - Knowledge of [specific method, machinery, technique, etc.] to...
 - Demonstrated experience in [building, lathing, cutting, etc.] to...
- **Human Resources**
 - Knowledge of public sector collective bargaining including scope of representation, contract compliance and public sector labor union behavior
 - Knowledge of federal/state affirmative action and equal employment laws/regulations sufficient to analyze proposed personnel policies
- **Management/Professional**
 - Demonstrated experience in managing strategies for successful cultivation and solicitation of annual and major gifts with special attention to laws and familiarity with the discipline's terminology
- **Technical/Engineering**
 - Demonstrated skill in Web design, including ability to compose and edit HTML and create Web-specific graphic forms
 - Knowledge of [hardware/software] configurations, maintenance, procedures, protocols, administration, etc.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

- **Reading Standard English Text**
 - Read documents written in Standard English text (e.g. administrative policy manuals)
- **Reading Technical**
 - Read [technical, legal or scientific] documents to...
- **Basic Writing**
 - Use Basic English words and phrases to...
 - Write brief sentences to...
- **Business Writing**
 - Write grammatically correct routine business correspondence such as brief transmittal memoranda
 - Write concise, logical, grammatically correct analytical reports
 - Write technical reports that are suitable for publication in professional journals
- **Basic Conversational Speaking**

- Speak simple sentences. Speak on a one-to-one basis using appropriate vocabulary and grammar to obtain information and explain policies, procedures, etc.
- **Public Speaking**
 - Make presentations to persuade others to accept a specific opinion or action, or provide information and instruction
- **Extemporaneous**
 - Discuss variety of job-related topics on short or no notice
 - Handle rapid changes or difficult questions in conversation
- **Speaking with Diverse Audiences**
 - Speak with persons of various social, cultural, economic and educational backgrounds...
- **Bilingual Speaking**
 - English/Spanish bilingual oral communication skill to...
- **Phone Reception**
 - Speak clearly and distinctly...
- **Visualization**
 - Vividly describe people/scenes so others can visualize them

FINANCIAL SKILLS

- **Accounting**
 - Reconcile financial ledgers and process accounts payable/receivable
- **Basic Math**
 - Add, subtract, multiply and divide whole numbers, fractions and decimals without a calculator to...
- **Budget Management**
 - Knowledge of general and fund accounting and business practices to effectively manage budgets
- **Financial Analysis**
 - Develop creative financial solutions and make projections using present and future values, loan computations, and annuity calculations
- **Measures & Weights**
 - Perform operations with units such as cup, pint and quart; inch, foot and yard; ounce and pound to...
- **Ratios, Rates & Percentages**
 - Compute ratios, rates and percentages to...
- **Statistics**
 - Perform routine statistical computations such as correlation coefficients, t-tests, Chi-squares and analyses of variance to...
 - Knowledge of descriptive statistics such as measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- **Coaching**
 - Encourage individuals either in a one-to-one or small group situation
 - Establish rapport and gain the trust of others

- Listen perceptively and convey awareness
- **Establishing Work Relationships**
 - Establish and maintain cooperative working relationships with...
- **Interacting with Diverse Audiences**
 - Interact with persons of various social, cultural, economic and educational backgrounds for the purpose of...
- **Persuading & Negotiating**
 - Sell or promote
 - Mediate between contending parties or groups
 - Negotiate or exchange ideas, information and opinions with others to formulate policies and programs and/or arrive jointly at decisions, conclusions or solutions
 - Reason persuasively to...
- **Public Relations**
 - Interact diplomatically with the public in a continuous public contact setting
 - Maintain equanimity in the face of resistance or contrary opinions
- **Supervising**
 - Supervise [people, resources, projects, etc.] including:
 - Organizing work flow to accomplish established objectives
 - Delegating responsibility
 - Training
 - Evaluating subordinate effectiveness
 - Administering necessary discipline
- **Teaching**
 - Foster a stimulating, accepting learning environment
- **Teamwork**
 - Work as part of a team or collaborate with colleagues

ANALYTICAL SKILLS

- **Classifying**
 - Systematically arrange into groups or categories according to established criteria
- **Analyzing**
 - Analyze information, problems, situations, practices or procedures in order to:
 - Define the problem or objective
 - Identify relevant concerns or factors
 - Identify patterns, tendencies and relationships
 - Formulate logical and objective conclusions
 - Recognize alternatives and their implications
 - Perceive and define cause and effect relationships in...
 - Analyze complex technical data such as using logic and quantitative reasoning
 - Organize material, information, and/or people in a systematic way to optimize efficiency and minimize duplication of effort
 - Coordinate [people, resources, projects, etc.] by determining the time, place and sequence of actions to be taken on the basis of analysis of data

- Modify and/or adapt designs, procedures or methods to...

SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS

- **Changing Tasks**
 - Perform effectively in environments with frequent workload changes and competing demands
- **Repetition**
 - Perform repetitive work according to set procedures
- **Concentration**
 - Perform with frequent interruptions and/or distractions
- **Fluctuating Workload**
 - Perform effectively under conditions of fluctuating workload
- **Prioritizing**
 - Set priorities which accurately reflect the relative importance of job responsibilities
 - Prioritize assignments to complete work in a timely manner
- **Follow Through**
 - Work independently and follow through on assignments with minimal direction
- **Ambiguity**
 - Take action when answers to a problem are not readily apparent in equivocal circumstances.

TERMS TO BE REPHRASED

It is important to **state qualifications in terms of observable work behavior rather than general words or phrases**, which can have a variety of meanings. The following are examples of ways in which some commonly used terms can be rewritten to be more job-specific.

- High Stress/Pressure -- Perform a variety of duties, often changing from one task to another of a different nature. (Consider when several duties in a job indicate significant differences in technologies, techniques, environmental factors, physical demands or work situations.)
- Concentration -- Perform with frequent interruptions and/or distractions. Make appropriate job decisions following standard office policies and past precedents. Recognize an emergency situation and take appropriate action. Think through the consequences of a decision prior to making it.
- Easygoing/Emotionally Stable/Even Temperament -- Ability to establish and maintain cooperative working relationships with co-workers and the public.
- High Energy Level -- Complete heavy workload within established time frames.
- Initiative/Drive/Self-Confidence/Self-Reliance -- Work independently and identify potentially more effective methods of work operation
- Common Sense/Good Judgment/Flexibility/ Adaptability/Versatility -- Ability to interact appropriately with colleagues and students for different purposes and in different contexts. Adapt to frequent changes in workload. Adjust priorities quickly as circumstances dictate.

FUNCTIONAL VERB DEFINITIONS

It is important that the **stated job functions are similarly interpreted by the writer of the Job Description writer as well as the evaluator of the Job Description**. The following list is intended to provide you with

"working definitions" for some commonly used verbs to ensure clarity amongst many readers and prevent the use of indefinite or ambiguous expressions.

- **Administer** -- Manage or direct. (Generally requires some additional explanation to show specific detail. See "Manage".)
- **Advise** -- Offer an informed opinion or give specialized information to others.
- **Allocate** -- Assign or apportion for a specific purpose or to a particular person.
- **Appraise** -- Judge as to quality or value; compare critically with established standards.
- **Approve** -- Exercise final and decisive authority.
- **Analyze** -- Identify the elements of a whole and critically examine and relate these component parts separately and/or in relation to the whole.
- **Assign** -- Specify or designate tasks and duties to be performed by others.
- **Authorize** -- Approve or commit an act implying subsequent action by others.
- **Compile** -- Put together information or assemble data in a new form.
- **Control** -- Direct, regulate, or guide the use of money, methods, equipment, and materials. Also, the process of monitoring activities to ensure conformance with planned results.
- **Coordinate** -- Regulate, adjust or direct the related actions of others in order to attain desired results.
- **Create** -- Produce through imaginative skill.
- **Delegate** -- Entrust to another person tasks or duties that require exercise of some authority of the person originally responsible, as "to delegate an administrative assistant to represent the department at conferences."
- **Develop** -- Disclose, discover, perfect, or unfold a plan or idea in detail, gradually. It implies study and/or experiment unless otherwise stated. (When used as "to develop subordinates," see "Train".)
- **Devise** -- Form in the mind by combinations of ideas, new applications of principles, or new arrangements of parts
- **Direct** -- Govern or control work operations by establishing and implementing objectives, practices, and methods.
- **Estimate** -- Forecast future quantities, values, sizes, extents, etc., either on the basis of judgment or calculations.
- **Execute** -- Put into effect or carry out methods, plans, etc...
- **Forecast** -- Predict future events based on specified assumptions.
- **Implement** -- Carry out or fulfill by taking action.
- **Inform** -- Communicate knowledge to others.
- **Initiate** -- Set in motion or introduce.
- **Inspect** -- Examine materials, equipment, reports, work, etc. to...
- **Interpret** -- Explain to others (orally or in writing) the meaning or significance of something.
- **Investigate** -- Uncover facts by systematically finding them, conducting a searching inquiry, and examining various sources.
- **Maintain** -- Keep in satisfactory condition.
- **Manage** -- Plan, organize, direct, control, and evaluate operation of an organizational unity with responsibility for the output.
- **Negotiate** -- Confer with others to reach an agreement.
- **Propose** -- Suggest for consideration or adoption.
- **Recommend** -- Present a matter for action or approval.

- **Research** -- Specific inquiry involving prolonged and critical investigation, having for its aim the study of new facts and their interpretation, the revision of accepted conclusions or theories that may be affected by newly discovered facts, or the practical application of such new or revised conclusions.
- **Review** -- Consider or examine facts or results for accuracy, completeness, and suitability.
- **Study** -- Apply thought to any subject of investigation.
- **Supervise** -- Personally oversee or control work performance and conduct of others where there is opportunity for control or inspection of work performed.
- **Train** -- Teach, demonstrate, or guide others in the performance of assigned work

EXAMPLES OF PHYSICAL DEMANDS

- **Bend** -- Flexion of the upper trunk forward while standing and knees extended or knees flexed when sitting.
- **Carry** -- To hold or rest weighted objects (indicate weight) directly on hands, arms, shoulders, or back while walking from one location to another.
- **Climb** -- Ascend/descend with gradual or continuous progress by oneself, using both hands and feet.
- **Crawl** -- Moving body slowly in a prone position on hands and knees, with arms extended and elbows bent.
- **Kneel** -- Maintaining the body in an erect posture while resting body weight on one or both knees.
- **Lift** -- Exertion of physical strength to move objects (indicate weight) from one level to another.
- **Push** -- Exertion of force on or against an object (indicate weight/size) to move it from one location to another.
- **Reach** -- Extending the hands and arms in any direction.
- **Stoop** -- Flexion of the upper body forward at the waist with partial flexion of the knee while standing.

EXAMPLES OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

- **Noise** -- Sufficient noise, either constant or intermittent, to cause marked distraction or possible injury to sense of hearing.
- **Fumes** -- Smoky or vaporous emissions, usually odorous, thrown off as the result of combustion or chemical reaction.
- **Odors** -- Unpleasant smells.
- **Gases** -- Examples include carbon monoxide and ozone.
- **Dust** -- Airborne particles of any kind, such as textile dust, wood, and silica.
- **Hazards** -- Conditions where there is danger to life, health or bodily injury such as closeness to moving mechanical parts; working on scaffolding and high places; exposure to burns, radiant energy, explosives, toxic chemicals, and electric shock

(The information below is compiled and adapted from BLR's popular *Job Descriptions Encyclopedia*, December 2007 and <http://hrdailyadvisor.blr.com/archive/2009/02/03>)

THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF WRITING JOB DESCRIPTIONS

DO – Give specifics

Rather than stating that a maintenance worker “keeps up equipment”, it is better to spell out the position's requirements which might include, “performs routine maintenance on all machines”.

DO – Use Accurate adjectives

Include adjectives that describe the pace of the work (“fast-paced”, “deadline driven”) or the work environment (“enclosed area”, “noisy setting”)

DO – Focus the job description on the job, not the incumbent

A good job description focuses purely on job expectations and outcomes, not how the job is handled by the person who happens to be in it.

DO – Allow for flexibility

The job description should never restrict supervisors from assigning additional duties not specified in the job description. Most job descriptions include a statement like, “Additional duties as assigned”.

DO – Keep job descriptions current

If job descriptions haven't kept up with workplace changes, confusion and legal challenges may be headed your way. Courts pay little attention to job descriptions written after lawsuits are filed.

DON'T – Use subjective terms, opinions or recommendations

Avoid using words that are subject to differing interpretations such as “this job is the most difficult job on campus”. Also – instead of saying you seek a certain attitude, cooperation, or initiative, describe expected outputs, different constituencies with whom this position interacts, and the nature of those relationships (such as “reports to”, “provides support to”, “and supervises”).

DON'T – Use words that raise a question of discrimination

Avoid questionable language such as “youthful”, or “able-bodied”.

DON'T – Use vague, general working or jargon or technical terms

Avoid: “Handles emergencies”

Instead: “Calls 911 in the event of an emergency”

DON'T – Include anything derogatory or specific about a person who previously held the position

Job descriptions are not the place to air grievances or disappointments about individuals who previously held the position. Talk about what the job holder does not what he or she doesn't do.

DON'T – Gloss over essential versus non-essential functions

With the advent of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), it became “essential” to separate essential functions of a job from those less so. This allows persons with disabilities to still be hired if they can carry out those key tasks (sometimes with reasonable accommodation), even if they can't do lesser tasks. Every job description must make this separation to be ADA-compliant. If your job descriptions are fuzzy about essential functions, things won't go your way in court.

DON'T – Describe duties to be performed in the future

Avoid: “When the conversion is done, employee will handle task X”.

The general rule is that a function must have been performed for a period of 3 months before being included in a job description.