

Definition of a Position Description

- A well-written position description is one which clearly, concisely and accurately documents the duties and responsibilities of a job.

Importance of the Position Description

- Written documentation of a job's duties and responsibilities
- Provides information needed for the recruitment and selection process
- Sets guidelines and expectations of the job
- Provides basis for performance appraisal
- Establishes data for comparison and classification purposes
- Helps to ensure "equal pay for equal work"
- Used to determine FLSA categories

Job Purpose Statement

- The job purpose statement is exactly what it sounds like. It states the reason the position exists, its objective, and the degree of supervision needed. It is typically one or two concise sentences that capture the main purpose of the job.
 - Example: Under general supervision, administers the employee insurance and retirement functions for the employees of the B&C Board, serves as in-house expert on benefits issues, working closely with the Payroll manager.

Job Function Section

- The Job Function Section of the Position Description describes the activities that must be accomplished in order to carry out the purpose of the job. This section should **NOT** be a simple list of the tasks that the employee must perform. Instead it should be a description of duty areas. In order to help clarify, let's take a look at some definitions.
 - **Task** – a unit of work. A task is rarely the whole duty, rather it is a part of a component of the duty area.
 - **Duty** – a major component of the job. Typically refers to a number of tasks that contribute to the accomplishment of an overall objective.

Key to Writing Job Functions

- Good Job Function statements answer the following questions:
 - What is being done – use an action verb to begin each sentence (see appendix for a list of action verbs)
 - Who or what is the action being directed to – this describes the person or object receiving the action
 - Why is it being done – the objective or reason for performing the activity
 - How is it being done – list the methods used to do the work (often this part begins with phrases such as “...through the use of...” or ‘....by using...’)

Example:

- Inspects sites during the construction phase (erosion control, concrete paving, painting, fencing, sign placement) in order to ensure compliance with local and state ordinances by comparing visual observations with the specifications and plans.

Determining Essential Functions

- Effective July, 1992, the *Americans with Disabilities Act* encouraged employers to identify the essential duties of a position to help determine whether reasonable accommodations can be made. Since that time, South Carolina has been using the Position Description to help in making that distinction by designating job functions as essential or marginal. Classifying a job function as marginal does not mean that it is less important than other duties. It simply indicates that task does not necessarily have to be performed by this particular position. It is not essential to the job purpose.

An Essential job function meets the following tests:

- Carrying out that particular function is the reason the position exists.
- There are a limited number of employees available to perform the function.
- The function is highly specialized.

Minimum Requirements

- The State has established minimum education, training, and experience guidelines for each job classification. These minimum qualifications can be found on the Office of Human Resources website. However, the class specifications are intended to be generic and broad since they are used for all jobs assigned to that job classification. You may feel that those requirements are not stringent enough for the particular position you are describing. You may set your minimum requirements **higher** but you may not set them any lower than the State's requirements.

Setting Minimum Requirements

- **Step 1** – Review the job functions of the position to determine the level of complexity of the position.
- **Step 2** – Review the State’s class specifications for the minimum requirements. Do they fit with the level of complexity of the job function?
- **Step 3** – What is the typical training period for this position? Could a typical employee learn and perform this job through on-the-job training or does it take formal education?
 - Be careful not to set the requirements higher than they actually need to be. You may create an unnecessary recruitment problem for yourself if you set them higher than needed. Don’t forget – they must be at least as high as the State’s minimum requirements.
 - The minimum requirements specified by Office of Human Resources are available on-line at <http://www.state.sc.us/cgi-bin/ohr/classman2>

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- The position description also affords the opportunity to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's) needed to successfully perform the job. What exactly are KSA's?

Knowledge:

- A body of information necessary for successful performance of a specific job duty. It is gained through a learning experience such as formal education, training, or experience.
 - *Example: Knowledge of Adult Learning Theory*

Skills:

- A present, observable competence to perform a learned physical act. May imply a level of proficiency. Usually applies to physical tasks such as use of tools, machines, equipment, etc.

– *Example: Skill in operating a backhoe*

Abilities:

- A competence that the job holder must possess that allows him/her to perform an observable behavior that results in an outcome or product.
 - *Example: Ability to use Microsoft Excel to design and modify financial spreadsheets*

Linking KSA's to Job

- **Note:** It is important that all KSA's are realistic and clearly related to the duties and responsibilities of the position. For example, if one of the abilities listed is the ability to read and comprehend complex material, there should be a job function that relies on that ability to perform successfully.

Establishing Knowledge Levels

- In stating required knowledge, include the level or depth of knowledge required. The following definitions should be helpful in determining whether to require working, general, thorough, or comprehensive knowledge of a subject or field.
 - **Working Knowledge** – Sufficient familiarity with the subject to know the basic principles and terminology and to understand and solve simple problems.
 - **General Knowledge** – Sufficient knowledge of a field to perform most work in normal situations. The work calls for comprehension of standard situations and includes knowledge of most of the significant aspects of the subject.
 - **Thorough Knowledge** – Advanced knowledge of the subject matter. The work calls for sufficient comprehension of the subject area to solve unusual as well as common work problems, to be able to advise on technical matters, and to serve as a resource on the subject for others in the organization.
 - **Comprehensive Knowledge** – Requires complete mastery and understanding of the subject. This term should be used sparingly and only for unusually exacting or responsible positions required to originate hypothesis, concepts, or approaches.

Guidelines and Supervision

- The Position Description also requires that you describe the guidelines and supervision that the employee will receive while performing the job. The first step in completing this section correctly is to understand the terminology.
- **Direct Supervision** – the employee is told what to do and how to do it. The incumbent does not exercise independent judgment or authority. In these positions, there are typically very detailed procedures and methods for carrying out assignments.
- **General Supervision** – the employee is told what to do but not how to do it. The “how to” is left up to the employee. These positions have some discretion on work procedures as long as they comply with procedures.
- **Limited Supervision** – the employee uses his/her own creativity to get the job done. Decision making is left up to the employee. The employee receives assignments in general terms and is free to work out the details according to his/her own judgment. The employee is expected to interpret regulations and policies independently.

Helpful Questions for setting Supervision Level

- What will the employee be held accountable for?
- How often is the employee's work reviewed? (daily, weekly, or more infrequently)
- What level of decision making does the employee have in the absence of supervision?
- Are there any formal regulations, policies, etc. that must be following in fulfilling job responsibilities?

Comments Section

- This section is useful in identifying unique work, physical and/or environmental characteristics of the job

Examples:

- Works in close quarters, crawl spaces, underground, etc. 10% of the time.
- Climbs ladder to paint, repair, build, change light bulbs, etc. 10% of the time.
- Works outside/inside exposed to extreme heat, cold and other weather conditions 10% of the time.
- Operates specialized or technical equipment 15% of the time.
- Drives trucks or operates heavy duty equipment 10% of the time.
- Job requires overtime or on-call duty.
- Overnight travel 2 to 3 times per month is required.

Summary

- The position description plays a critical role in managing our human resources. You now have the knowledge and tools needed to write a good position description. The best way to ensure that these new skills “stick” with you is to put them to use. We suggest that you review the position descriptions for all employees reporting to you. Make the necessary revisions that will ensure up-to-date, well-written position descriptions are on file for each of your employees.