

U.W.O. STAFF ASSOCIATION

HOW TO WRITE A JOB DESCRIPTION

This booklet on "How to Write a Job Description" was prepared by the Salary Administration Staff in the Employee Relations Department to help you write your job description. The information provided here is not intended to prescribe a "correct" job description. Our main objective is to provide some guidelines on how to produce a "good" job description - one that reflects your job in the best way possible.

NOTE: if you have any questions please feel free to call Employee Relations (82198)

WHAT IS A JOB DESCRIPTION?

A job description is a number of written short statements that describe the content and requirements of the position. It is important that the description is written in fairly simple language, so the reader can easily understand what the position is required to do. It should focus on specific tasks, skills, experience and behaviour required by the job, not on abstract characteristics.

The description must describe the position, not the qualifications of the person who currently holds the position.

It must reflect the position as it exists now, not what it was last year or how it may be at some point in the future. A job description should not be like a movie reflecting the past, present and future but should be a snapshot of the position as it stands today. In the case of a newly created position, describe what is realistically expected to develop in the coming year.

HOW DO I BEGIN?

One of the first things you should do is organize the information into some reasonable and logical order. The PDQ format helps to keep the description focused and it ensures that all the necessary information is included for use in the evaluation process.

POSITION DESCRIPTION QUESTIONNAIRE (PDQ)

This questionnaire consists of four pages. The covering page contains instructions and a place for authorizations. The second page allows you and your supervisor to describe the duties of the job in an open, unrestricted manner encouraging the attachment of additional page(s) where required. The remaining two pages request information in a question and answer format.

POSITION DESCRIPTION QUESTIONNAIRE (PDQ)

The document asks for information in ten different areas as follows:

- 1) Major duties,
- 2) Staff members who report directly and formally to you,
- 3) Supervisory Duties which you perform regularly,
- 4) Composition of written material,
- 5) Minimum skills and education required for the position,
- 6) Nature and frequency of supervision received,
- 7) Types of problems/questions dealt with on own,
- 8) Types of problems/questions referred to others,
- 9) Activities position plans/organizes, and
- 10) Most important contacts.

1) Major Duties

In this section, you are expected to list the major duties and responsibilities of your job and the approximate annual percentage of time spent on each. To get a better idea of the annual percentages, refer to the covering page of the PDQ (Section C, #3).

Try to explain clearly your involvement in each duty (such as supervising, performing it, or participating in) and by all means, give examples if possible.

2) Staff Members Who Report Directly and Formally To You

Here you are asked to list the staff members who report to the position. Give their classification and/or levels, as well as the status of their appointment (Continuing, Sessional, Temporary) and try to describe briefly and very specifically. Please remember to include the name(s) of continuing/sessional staff for our references.

3) Supervisory Duties Which You Perform Regularly

Here we are asking for more information on the nature of this position's involvement in terms of supervision. It is important to remember that you do not necessarily need people reporting directly to you in order to perform supervisory duties. For example, one of the alternatives here is training and guidance. Check (with an 'x' or a check mark) one or more of the boxes that pertains to your

position.

4) Composition of Written Material

Most positions require some written material. This can be as simple as filling in blanks on a form letter or as extensive as creating an original document. Simply check off the type of composition you perform, and give a brief description of the content.

5) Minimum Skills and Education Required for the Position

Keep in mind that what is requested is the minimum skills and education required, not necessarily your qualifications. Try thinking about it as if the Department is staffing to the position and what would be the minimum they would look for in a candidate. Also, make sure that those qualifications are the same as stated on the Request For Staff.

6) Nature and Frequency of Supervision Received

How often does your supervisor give you work direction (ie., daily, weekly meetings, etc.) and what is the level of involvement of the supervisor in directing your activities (ie., prioritizing your daily workload, instructions when work procedures change, etc.).

7) Types of Problems/Questions Dealt With on Own

Describe the type of problems or questions you have authority and are expected to handle on your own.

8) Types of Problems/Questions Referred to Others

Describe here the problems or questions you are supposed to refer to others (eg., your supervisor, technical specialist) for solutions or answers.

9) Activities Position Plans/Organizes

Here describe the activities you plan or organize as part of your job, on a daily, monthly or annual basis. Some examples may be organizing your work daily, setting priorities or arranging meetings, seminars or trips.

10) Most Important Contacts

The last question on the PDQ asks you to list the most important contacts in your job, other than your supervisor or the staff that report to you. This is both internal and external, in person, on the telephone or in writing. Include groups as well as individuals. Remember, it is important to explain the reason you are contacting them.

Don't forget to sign, date your job description and indicate your current classification. Your supervisor must also sign and date the job description in order for the position to be reviewed.

PRELIMINARY DRAFT

It is always best to prepare a rough draft of the job description. You will probably find that there will be a lot of changes to this copy. Discussions between you and your supervisor may lead to further adjustments. Continue to work on your description until you are pleased with the results. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to call Salary Administration Section to discuss them. We are always available to help you either by phone or personal appointment.

FEATURES OF A WELL WRITTEN JOB DESCRIPTION

Detail vs. Generalization

The objective in a job description is to strike a balance between excessive detail and over-generalization. A job description which describes a duty as "Laboratory work (50%)" does not convey the true sense of the job and conversely, a step-by-step instruction manual is overly detailed. Although we should be able to gain a good understanding of the job through the description, we would prefer not to see a task list or the exact procedures required. Your goal should be to give the readers the true sense of the job without making it excessively detailed or too general.

Organization of Major Duties

The activities performed by a position should be analyzed and then organized into major duties. Again, because jobs differ, there is no "right" number of these major duty areas to be found in a good job description. Nevertheless, virtually all jobs, can be broken down into between three and eight key duties or responsibilities, with most falling in the range of four to six. For each of these, it is helpful to include an approximate percentage of time spent per year. The order of these duties can vary; the sequence will depend of the position. Some of the alternatives include:

- Time Allocation - from most time spent to least time spent
- Perceived Importance - from the most important to the least important
- Chronological - according to seasonal changes (for example: Fall Term, Winter/Spring Term, Summer Term)
- Procedural - according to the order the activities are performed (eg., prepares something, does things with it, follows this up by ...)

There is theoretically no limit to the alternatives available; the arrangement selected should be the

one that best expresses your job. The only major guideline to follow is that, whatever the sequence, complete the description of one duty or area of responsibility before going on the next one. Otherwise the description may be disjointed and splintered causing unnecessary confusion.

THE WHO, WHAT, HOW and WHY

A good job description provides the reader with a clear picture of: What is done, How it is done and Why it is done. The three to eight major duties or responsibilities describe What is done. Each of these must be amplified further to provide a clear sense of what is involved in achieving these ends (eg., the How something is done). Any procedures or techniques used are normally capable of being described in a few words, summarized in some fashion. We should be able to understand why those duties and procedures are undertaken. In many instances, such reasons are obvious, even to someone not familiar with that job. However occasionally, it may not be clear why things are done a certain order or why it is necessary to obtain information from various people. In these circumstances, it is helpful to give some examples.

This concept, and the recommended format, is illustrated by the following example:

WHAT: "Maintains daily contact with representatives of existing suppliers"

HOW: in person, by phone or by mail,

WHY: to expedite the delivery of purchased material

EXAMPLE: (eg., visits supplier organizations to follow up major purchases and to maintain goodwill)"

If we feel we are missing any information or do not understand parts of the job description, we will call and question. However, it is always best to be as clear and complete as possible.

Sometimes, there may be ideas that are difficult to express no matter how much you try. In these cases, you may wish to use an example to help explain your meaning. Just what constitutes a good example of an activity or responsibility will vary between positions. However, if in the course of preparing the description, an example of an activity, procedure, technique, or contact would help illustrate an aspect of the position, then by all means include it. In general, the tendency is to use too few examples; the practice should be to err on the side of including too many!

SIMPLE GUIDELINES IN PREPARING A JOB DESCRIPTION

Job descriptions serve a variety of purposes (some of which are outlined in Appendix A). For this reason they can't be completely standardized. However, there are some common guidelines that should be considered in their preparation.

(a) Opt for clarity and simplicity

Use a minimum of well-chosen words to say something, clearly and concisely, almost a telegraphic style of writing.

(b) Keep sentences short

Try to keep sentences short and to the point.

(c) Choose verbs carefully

Select verbs carefully, trying to make the description as specific as possible. Choose active verbs and use them in the present tense. Avoid passive verbs. Use words like "tests", "forms", "uses", etc.

(d) Choose accurate words

Pay attention to the words you use. Strive for accuracy whenever possible. Avoid using vague words (eg., assists supervisor), use a specific word or phrase whenever possible (eg. responds to inquiries on behalf of supervisor).

(e) Limit the use of word "may", instead use such words as "routine", "daily", "periodically", "occasionally", since they convey a higher degree of meaning.

NOTE: A list of meaningful words to aid in the preparation of your job description can be found in Appendix A.

FINAL DRAFT

To identify problems, it can be very valuable to quietly read the finished product aloud to yourself. This can pinpoint awkward wording, sentences without verbs, or other unclear points. While it can appear to be foolish exercise, it can save later embarrassment or misunderstandings.

AUTHORIZATION/APPROVALS

Each job description must be signed and dated by both you and your supervisor. This joint authorization provides the University with the assurance that you both agree the document presents an honest and accurate description of your position. Also, because this means you and your supervisor must discuss the position, it helps ensure that unintentional discrepancies (between what should be done and what is being done) are avoided. After you both have signed the description, it must be sent to the Dean's or Budget Unit Head's Office. They will also review it and sign your description before submitting it to the Salary Administration Section of the Employee Relations Department.

USES OF JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Job Descriptions are used as a basis for wage and salary administration since they assist in preparing job specifications as well as comparing and evaluating jobs. For example, job descriptions are used for:

Salary Surveys: by providing the necessary foundation for comparing salaries within the company/organization with salaries for similar positions outside the company/organization; therefore permitting the establishment of competitive salary ranges.

Salary Comparison: within the organization, thereby avoiding salary inequities and establishing fair prices for jobs of similar value.

Performance Appraisals: by measuring the employee's performance against the duties, responsibilities and functions as they appear in the job description.

Better understanding among personnel: by clarifying responsibilities, assignments and job relationships.

Recruiting, Hiring and Placement: by helping the Employee Relations Officers to determine the professional profile of those for whom they are searching.

Management Development: by allowing managers/supervisors to design and improve the company's organizational structure.

Training New Employees: by giving them an overall view of the job and thus helping them better understand what is expected of them.

Self-Understanding, Development, Promotion: by helping the incumbent assess his/her qualifications and abilities in relation to the jobs duties and responsibilities.

APPENDIX A

HELPFUL WORDS FOR USE IN PREPARING JOB DESCRIPTIONS

ACTION WORDS: (Verbs)

accounts for	details	lifts	repairs
acts	determines	maintains	requests
adjusts	directs	makes	reworks
analyzes	discovers	manipulates	reviews
answers	drafts	marks	schedules
applies	drives	mixes	secures
approves	estimates	observes	selects
arranges	examines	obtains	sells
assigns	figures	operates	sets
cares for	files	orders	shoots
carries	finds	organizes	sits
checks	follows	performs	sketches
cleans up	formulates	places	stamps
climbs	gauges	plans	stands
compares	handles	prepares	stores
composes	inspects	processes	supervises
computes	installs	proposes	systematizes
conducts	instructs	pulls	takes
constructs	interprets	pushes	teaches
controls	investigates	reads	totals
coordinates	issues	receives	types
decides	itemizes	recognizes	uses
designates	judges	records	walks
designs	keeps	refers	works
	lays out	removes	writes

THINGS ACTED UPON: (Nouns)

assemblies
blueprints
books
castings
cars
charts
correspondence
decisions
diagrams
drawings
equipment
errors
fittings
formulas

gauges
graphs
handbooks
instruction manuals
instruments
letters
machines
manuals
materials
memos
methods
models

orders
parts
patterns
problems
processes
products
records
reference books
reports
requisitions
service manuals
sketches
specifications

standards
supplies
subassemblies
tables
technical literature
telephones
templates
tools
trucks
working drawings

QUALIFYING WORDS: (Adjectives)

accurate
adequate
average
cold
complex
correct
cramped
difficult

dirty
dry
effective
efficient
excessive
extreme
high

hot
humid
inside
kind
noisy
normal
outside
proper

strong
sufficient
suitable
superior
uncomfortable
weak
wet