WRITING A POSITION DESCRIPTION
Writing a Position Description

Position descriptions are essential for:

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

Following these steps will help ensure consistent and useful descriptions.

1. Provide an overview of unit program
2. Identify the major job functions
3. Create a title heading
4. Determine the qualifications
5. Determine physical and environmental requirements
6. Add appropriate disclaimer statements

Introduction

Since work at the University tends to change over time, position descriptions should be reviewed periodically (for example, during annual performance reviews). A useful tool for developing a greater understanding of an employee’s current job duties is the Position Description Template Form, which allows the employee the opportunity to capture what it is that they do day to day. Such information may or may not match completely with the position description on file, but its essential functions and majority of work should be a close fit.

Position descriptions should reflect a consensus between the supervisor and the employee. If consensus is not possible, however, the supervisor’s decision is final.

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

- Defining job duties and required (minimum) and preferred (selection criteria) qualifications
- Defining essential functions of the job for ADA purposes
- Creating interview questions
- Discussing work expectations with applicants
- Classifying positions for posting (decision made by OHR Compensation)

For existing positions, position descriptions are tools for:

- Discussing work expectations with employees
- Writing performance standards
- Evaluating employee performance
• Reclassifying positions (decision made by OHR Compensation)

Steps in Writing a Position Description

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

1. Introductory Information

• Describe the Unit and/or Program
  What is the work of the unit? Describe the unit and/or program, its purpose and how it fits in to the University’s organization. Information about the unit and/or the program is helpful in connecting the overall objectives for the position with the mission of the unit.

• Provide a Work Summary
  How does this position support the work of the unit? Describe the overall objectives for the position, and then use a few sentences to describe its main responsibilities.

2. Identify the major job functions

• List the tasks that will be assigned to the position. Group those that are related.
  Determine a heading that starts with an action verb for each grouping. The headings are the major work functions of the position. Most positions will have four to six major function areas.

• Order the Major Function Areas by Importance
  This will help determine which major function areas are essential to the job.

• Determine the Percent of Time Spent on Each Major Function
  Determine the percentage of time typically spent on each major function area and list it on the description.

• Determine Essential vs. Non-Essential Functions of the Position
  To comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA), the essential functions of the position must be determined. Essential functions are the major job responsibilities that an employee must be able to perform, with or without reasonable accommodation.

Factors to consider in determining whether or not a function is essential:
• Does the job exist to perform this function?
• How much time is spent performing this function?
• What critical skills, experience, training, education, and/or license are needed?
• What equipment is used to do the function?
• How frequently is the equipment used?
• What are the physical and mental elements of this function?
• Can other co-workers do this function if necessary?
• Would taking the function from the job significantly change the job?
• Would there be significant consequences if the function were not performed?
Essential and non-essential functions should be differentiated in the position description. Non-essential functions are important to the position; however, could be redesigned or reassigned to other employees, if necessary.

3. Create a Title Heading

Write a title heading, including:
- Date of description/revision
- Job code and title
- Position/working title (if applicable)
- Unit and location where duties will be performed
- Name and title of person this position reports to
- Length of probationary period
- Percent time of appointment
- Term and type of appointment
- Any other identifying specifications particular to the position; i.e. work hours, work days

4. Determine the Qualifications
   
   Required (Minimum) Qualifications:

   These describe the minimum level of qualifications needed for an individual to perform the essential functions of the position. They include education, licensure or certification, and any measurable and job-related experience. Required qualifications are used by OHR employment consultants to screen applications for vacant positions.

   The University Classification Information Database on the Office of Human Resources Web site (http://onestop2.umn.edu/jobclass/EnterJobClassSearchForm.do) provides required qualifications for each University job code. Additional qualifications can be included as long as they are directly related to the job functions. Your unit’s employment consultant can assist you in determining, what, if any, additional required qualifications are needed.

   List qualifications needed to perform the work. Guidelines to consider include:
   - Never exceed or ask for less than the required qualifications listed in the generic job specification for the job code being posted.
   - All required qualifications must be measurable and job related; do not include language such as “ability to” or words such as “excellent” or “advanced level” because these cannot be measured; use phrases such as “demonstrated/document experience” instead.
   - When appropriate, include training/education equivalencies for the experience requirement.
   - University specific experience (i.e. EFS, UMCaL, PeopleSoft) may be included in the required qualifications if relevant to the essential job functions, but doing so impacts the applicant pool. Consultation is a must with these requirements.
   - A four year (or greater) college degree cannot be a required qualification for bargaining unit vacancies and cannot be a selection criteria for AFSCME Clerical or Teamster vacancies.
Be prepared to consider the following when developing the required qualifications:

• Is a degree/education in a specific field of study necessary or would general education satisfy the education requirement?
• Would work experience substitute for the degree?
• Do you need to require specific software or would general exposure to or experience with computers be sufficient?

• Preferred Qualifications: (Selection Criteria)
  Additional measurable and job-related levels of experience, knowledge, and/or skill the ideal employee would have. The preferred qualifications are not used to screen applications within the Office of Human Resources, but are used to assist the hiring authority further assess applicants for a vacancy, typically through interviews. Remember that such criteria must not exceed the qualifications listed in the generic job code being posted and must be applied equally to all candidates.

  Depending on the way required and preferred qualifications are designed, the pool of qualified applicants may be affected. Your unit’s employment consultant is available to assist you in determining what is necessary to perform the essential functions of the job.

5. 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 required qualifications. When considering physical requirements, remember that long periods at a computer terminal or standing at a service counter may be physically demanding. It is 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 boxes 3 times per minute for 2-3 hours daily”, preferable to “Must be able to lift 25 pounds”.

7. Disclaimer Statement

Job descriptions typically change over time as unit requirements and employee skill levels change. Supervisors may revise and/or add duties to reflect these changes. To reflect this, the following statement should be included in all job descriptions: “The Employer retains the right to change or assign other duties to this position.”
Example

Principal Office and Administrative Specialist, Department of Arts & Music

Date: January 2014
Classification & Title: 1826, Principal Office and Admin Specialist
Working Title: None
Percent Time: 100%
Work Schedule/Hours: Monday– Friday, 8:00am– 4:30pm
Term: A – 12 month appt.
Type: Continuing
College/ Admin Unit: Liberal Arts
Campus Location: Minneapolis

Overview:
This position is located in the Department of Arts and Music, providing support to staff in both the Arts Building and the School of Music Building. The employee provides desktop publishing support for five faculty, is the receptionist for the department, and maintains office supplies.

Essential Functions:
Act as Receptionist (40% of job)
  Answer department phone in a timely manner
  Take accurate messages
  Answer students’ questions in person and on the phone
  Refer callers and visitors to proper sources

Desktop publishing (30% of job)
  Create manuscripts, letters, tables, and graphs for faculty and student organizations
  Create flyers and posters for recitals, concerts, and other department events
  Be familiar with software used by the unit; attend training courses as needed to stay current

Provide Supplies (15% of job)
  Check in supplies when received from vendors
  Provide supplies to staff on request
  Order supplies on a weekly basis; select appropriate vendors from approved University sources
  Maintain supply cabinet
  Follow-up on problems with vendors

Non-Essential Functions:
Office Support (15% of job)
  Prepare travel documents
  Schedule meetings
  Send out monthly mailings

Minimum Qualifications:
Two years of office experience or a combination of education and/or experience to total two years.
Experience with desktop publishing. Position requires sitting 80% of the time and lifting 25 pounds on a regular basis.

Preferred Qualifications:
Demonstrated experience communicating orally and in writing. Experience writing clear, concise letters or e-mail messages with accurate spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
Scheduling/calendaring experience.

* The Employer retains the right to change or assign other duties to this position.