



# A Guide for Preparing Position Descriptions



Human Resources

# Key Session Outcomes

- Know why position descriptions are needed
- Know what should be included in a position description
- Know why each section is important
- Discover valuable writing aids

# Why is a position description needed?

- Provides a clear and concise outline of the position's key accountabilities, knowledge, skills, abilities and minimum qualifications.
- Serves as a tool to understand how the position fits within the department and the university.
- Assists in assigning value to the position.
- Helps to define the right type of person needed to fill the position.
- Provides a guide in evaluating employee performance.
- Provides information for consideration under the American's with Disabilities Act (ADA).

# When do you write a new position description?

- When a new position has been created and approved whose essential functions and minimum requirements do not compare to any existing position description within the university.
  - *Example: Essential functions and minimum requirements for director positions are different. A position description is required for a new director position.*
- When a position has changed substantially due to an organizational structure change.

# Do all new positions require a new position description?

- No. If the essential functions and minimum requirements compare to existing position descriptions within the University a new position description is not needed.
  - *Example: Essential functions and minimum requirements for academic advisor positions are the same. A new position description is not necessary.*
- Job descriptions can be modified as business needs arise.

# What should be included in a position description?

- Position Title
- Department
- Reporting Relationship
- Position Summary
- Essential Functions
- Special Requirements of the position
- Supervisory Responsibilities
- Minimum Qualifications
- Knowledge, Skills, Abilities



# Position Title, Department, Reporting Relationship, Position Summary

- Position Title
  - Title is assigned in collaboration with HR and Job Slotting Committee
- Department
  - Name of department where the position resides.
- Reporting Relationship
  - Title of position that the new position will report to.
- Position Summary
  - Summarize the position and describe the role the position fills in the area. The summary should be no more than two or three sentences.

# Essential Functions

- Major duties and/or key accountabilities.
  - List the recurring accountabilities and duties that define the position.
  - Not a detailed listing of tasks.
- Section is critical when determining if an accommodation is possible under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).\*
- Defines what an employee must do with or without reasonable accommodation.

\*For further information regarding ADA and how it applies to the UVU workplace, contact the ADA Coordinator at ext. 8643.



# Essential Functions

- **Reasons why a function could be considered essential:**
  - The position exists to perform the function.
  - *Example: If you hire someone to proofread documents, the ability to proofread accurately is an essential function, since this is the reason that the position exists.*
- **There are a limited number of other employees available to perform the function, or among whom the function can be distributed.**
  - *Example: It may be an essential function for a file clerk to answer the telephone if there are only three employees in a very busy office, and each employee has to perform many different tasks.*
- **A function is highly specialized, and the person in the position is hired for special expertise or ability to perform it.**
  - *Example: A company expanding its business with Japan is hiring a new salesperson, so requires someone not only with sales experience, but also with the ability to communicate fluently in the Japanese language).*

# Essential Functions

- Answers the following questions:
  - What duties does the employee perform on a daily basis?
  - What critical outcomes or results is the employee accountable for?
  - What percent of time is spent on the essential function?
    - Each essential function on the list should comprise at least 10% of the incumbent's time (4 hrs/week).

# Essential Functions

- Prioritize according to the percent of time spent on the function.
- Duties and responsibilities no longer performed or those that may be required in the future should not be included.
- Begin each essential function with an action verb.

# Supervisory Responsibilities.

- List any direct reports for which the position has hiring, firing, promoting, and performance responsibilities.
  - Include direct report's title, job grade, Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)\* status (exempt or nonexempt), and whether they are a full-time, part-time or student employee.

*\* Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA): a federal law which establishes minimum wage, overtime pay, recordkeeping and youth employment standards affecting full-time and part-time workers in the private sector and in Federal, State, and local governments*

# Special Requirements of the Position

- List any physical and/or working conditions required.
  - Should be based on the minimum physical requirement for performing the position.
  - Be careful when listing special requirements of the position.
    - Does the position require the employee to *lift* 50 pounds, or does it require the ability to *move* a box of paper from one location to another? (could use dolly or move one ream at a time)
    - Does the position require the employee to *walk* across campus or *move* across campus? (for security positions the ability to walk or run would be essential)
  - Every entry in this section must be directly supported in the “Essential Functions” section.

# Qualifications

- List the education and experience needed to satisfactorily perform a position.
  - Must be based on the minimum requirements for performing the position.
  - What is *really* needed?
    - Is there tolerance for a new person's learning curve or, do you need to hire someone with specific experience?

# Knowledge, Skills & Abilities

- Qualifications a person must possess to satisfactorily perform the essential functions of a position.
- Entries in this section must be supported by the “Essential Functions” section.
- Knowledge, Skills & Abilities are used to score position applications and interviews.

# Knowledge, Skills & Abilities

- **Knowledge** – Defines the mental aspects of position.
  - What employee must **know** (usually obtained through education, training or experience.)
  - *Example: accounting principles*
- **Skills** – Defines the manual and/or *applied* mental aspects of the position.
  - What employee must be able to do (typically obtained through experience or training)
  - *Example: maintain general ledger*
- **Abilities** – Typically defines aptitudes present at birth, but may in some cases be acquired.
  - Natural talents or developed proficiencies
  - *Example: balance multiple priorities*



# Tips

- Be precise.
- Begin each sentence with an action verb.
- Keep sentence structure as simple as possible.
- Omit unnecessary words that do not contribute pertinent information.
- Describe current duties as they exist now, not as they may be performed in the future.

# Tips

- Define acronyms to assist in the review, evaluation, and clarification of the position.
- Focus on critical activities.
  - Disregard minor occasional tasks which are not unique to a specific position.
- Be specific on skills requirements
  - Use “Ability to clearly present technical concepts to a non-technical audience” or, “Ability to communicate technical information to non-technical audiences” rather than “Strong communication skills”.

# Tips

- For clarity, use explanatory phrases that tell how, why, where, or how often.
  - Instead of “distributes questionnaires”, use “distributes all questionnaires to develop a comprehensive database of feedback from customers.”
- A position description is a legal document.
  - Typically, any reference to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability or veteran status is illegal.
- The position must be truly doable.
  - When combining several tasks into the same position description, ensure that you are not creating a position few people could accomplish.
- Make sure that the Knowledge, Skills and Abilities support the Essential Functions.

# Example - Custodian

- Clean bathroom sinks, toilets, mirrors, floors and spot wash the walls.
- Removes trash and soiled waste from the women's bathroom.
- Maintain rooms so they are available for prompt reuse by cleaning ledges, fixtures, washing walls, vents and lights.
- Complete required continuous training and educations, including department specific requirement.
- Thoroughly cleans and maintains all bathrooms for prompt use.

# Remember

- HR is available to offer guidance in writing your position description.
- Compensation Specialist
  - Ext. 6089

