

HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY

GUIDE TO WRITING POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

Introduction

Position descriptions are critical employment documents that establish expectations for incumbents, influence a position's classification, pay range, and can affect performance evaluations and opportunities for training and professional development. When creating and updating position descriptions it is crucial to focus on the essential elements of the position and to use language that is clear, concise and accurately describes the nature of the work.

A position description should address the following questions:

- Why does the position exist?
- What duties are essential to this position?
- What is the level of supervision received? Given?
- What are the qualifications for the position? (minimum & preferred)
- What are the basic working conditions associated with the position?

Components of a Position Description

HSU position descriptions include the following sections:

General Information: List the incumbent's name (if applicable), the position's working title, current classification (if available), the department, position number and time base.

Primary Action: Is the position description submitted for a recruitment? Is this a position that already exists on campus or a brand new position? For existing positions, is the position description being submitted for a position description update, a skill level review or a classification review? Finally, if a skill level review or classification review is the reason for the submission, does the request come from the employee or management? Check the boxes that apply.

Signatures: The position description must be reviewed and signed by the immediate supervisor and the appropriate administrator(s). The signatures of the appropriate administrator(s) indicate that they verify the content of the position description is accurate. When the position description is finalized and shared with the employee, the employee should sign the document to acknowledge receipt.

Position Summary: One (1) to three (3) brief paragraphs that explain why the position exists. Describe the main purpose of the position and the role that it plays in the department/University/CSU System.

Essential Job Functions: This section is the foundation of the position description and describes the position's primary responsibilities and essential functions. Organize the job functions into broad categories and indicate the percentage of time spent performing or frequency of these duties. Each broad category should have five (5) to ten (10) bullet points that describe the work involved in more detail. Include an "Other Duties as Assigned" category to account for potential incidental work (generally 5%). The "Other Duties as Assigned" category does not require additional bullet points.

Minimum and Preferred Qualifications: The minimum qualification described in the position description should match with the minimum qualifications from the appropriate classification

standard. If there are qualifications for the position that are desirable but not required, they can be included in a preferred qualifications section.

Knowledge, Skills and abilities: Include knowledge, skills and abilities that are critical for the incumbent to possess to be successful in the position and that are related to the essential job functions. Often, the classification standard will dictate the knowledge, skills and abilities that are required for a particular classification or skill level within a classification.

Working Conditions: Include equipment used in the performance of the assignment and the physical demands and environmental working conditions required for the position.

Recommendations

- Write the position description for the position and not the incumbent.
- Avoid writing the position description based upon the desired job classification.
- Focus on critical activities that are essential to the position.
- Describe the duties that are currently associated with the position and will be on-going.
- Avoid including duties that may be performed in the future or that are project based with a defined beginning and end date.
- Be specific when describing duties and responsibilities, while still allowing for flexibility.
- Describe duties in terms of what is done, rather than how it is done.
- Use appropriate language that help to more clearly describe the work or the position and avoid flowery or overly long descriptions. Use language that is concise, factual and impersonal.
- Avoid using language that is subjective or states an opinion or recommendation.
- Avoid the use of vague language, overly general wording, jargon, abbreviations or technical terms.
- Revisit position descriptions regularly and update when appropriate to keep them current. An excellent time to review and update position descriptions is during an employee's annual evaluation period or when a position has been vacated prior to recruitment.

General Guidelines

Essential Job Functions: Group work activities into three (3) to five (5) major areas of responsibility. Indicate the percentage of time typically required for each function. Functions that require less than 5% of an employee's time do not need to be listed as essential functions. Choosing appropriate language is key to writing accurate essential job functions. The essential job functions section conveys the complexity, scope, and level of responsibility associated with the position.

Essential job function statements address:

- What is the function?
- How it is completed?
- Why it is essential?

Example: Analyzes accounts payable reports in a manner consistent with generally accepted accounting principles to provide informed budgetary recommendations to the appropriate administrator.

Qualifications: The CSU classification standards provide the minimum qualifications associated with each classification. Position descriptions should restate the minimum qualifications from the classification standard. Exceptions must be based on the stated essential functions of the position and be approved by Human Resources.

Some Helpful Definitions associated with the Qualifications Section:

- Skill – A technical expertise or proficiency.
- Ability – A mental or physical aptitude, capability, or competence.
- Education – Formal schooling, instruction, or training in a program of study.
- Experience – A background of performing position-relevant activities. Please keep in mind that prior work experience requirements should be included in the minimum or preferred qualifications section and not in the knowledge, skills and abilities section.
- Knowledge – The ability to recognize, recall, and interpret facts, theories or principles gained from instruction or learned through experience. It is measured by the depth, scope, and the ability to integrate knowledge to address and solve problems.
- Basic Knowledge – A foundational background and understanding of the specialty or field. Can include the ability to apply basic practices and an understanding of specialty terminology.
- General Knowledge – A general familiarity with information contained in key source documents or the subject field or specialty. Implies the ability to use a source to find information based on a broad understanding of principles and practices applicable to the specialty, but does not imply a thorough or in-depth understanding.
- Working Knowledge – Working knowledge is more tangible than a general knowledge. It is not only the ability to recall information, but also the ability to readily apply commonly used information. Typically requires demonstrated competence in applying general principles and practices applicable to the specialty.
- Thorough Knowledge – A complete and detailed background and understanding of all aspects of the specialty area.
- In-depth Knowledge – A deeper and more detailed knowledge of the specialty area down to the salient details which allows for problem solving at a deep level. Usually involves knowledge of advanced principles, theories and practices.
- Comprehensive Knowledge – A complete and extensive mastery, understanding and expertise in the specialty, and often associated specialties.

Physical Demands and Working Conditions: A position description should state the physical demands associated with the position and include an estimate of time the demand is present and in performing which job functions. Physical demands and working conditions should be directly related to essential job functions.

Some examples of common physical demands and ADA compliant phrasing:

- Stand or sit – Must be able to remain in a stationary position on a constant basis.
- Walk – This position requires frequently needing to move about inside the office to access files and office equipment.
- Handle or feel – Constantly operate a computer and related office machinery.

- Climb – Occasionally ascends/descends a ladder to service lights.
- Stoop, kneel, crouch or crawl – Position requires the need to constantly position self to maintain computers and networks in the labs including going under desks, in the service closet and crawl spaces.
- Talk and hear – The position constantly communicates with students responding to inquiries regarding course offerings and sequencings. Must be able to exchange accurate and timely information
- See – Must be able to detect defects in fabricated materials.
- Carry and lift – Frequently removes and moves recycling materials in containers weighing up to 50 lbs.
- Exposure – Constantly works in outdoor weather conditions to maintain grounds.

Compliance

Affirmative Action (AA)

Affirmative Action requires that the university make good faith efforts to ensure diverse pools of applicants. Every effort should be made to ensure that the qualifications stated in the position description do not unnecessarily eliminate any group of potential applicants.

ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act

Essential job functions need to be identified in the position description and all requirements need to be tied to the essential functions. Doing so helps to determine whether an individual with identified disabilities could perform the essential duties of the position, possibly with accommodations.

Collective Bargaining

Frequently, collective bargaining agreements have provisions related to maintaining employee position descriptions.

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)

EEO regulations establish state and federal standards for fair employment practices. Humboldt State University and the CSU must be able to validate its employment practices whenever they are perceived to be discriminatory.

HEERA

The Higher Education Employer-Employee Act is a state law which establishes processes for ensuring employee representation in conditions of employment at CSU and other state institutions of higher education. HEERA also defines which positions belong in the Management Personnel Plan (MPP).

Sample Action Verbs

accommodates	achieves	acquires	addresses	adjusts	administers	advises
allocates	analyzes	applies	appoints	approves	arranges	assigns
assesses	assists	audits	augments	authorizes	budgets	clears
calculates	circulates	clarifies	collaborates	collects	communicates	confers
compiles	completes	composes	computes	conducts	consolidates	creates
constructs	consults	controls	coordinates	corresponds	customizes	counsels
delegates	delivers	demonstrates	designs	develops	devises	directs
disseminates	distinguishes	distributes	documents	drafts	enforces	edits
establishes	evaluates	explores	facilitates	furnishes	generates	guides
handles	hires	identifies	illustrates	implements	improves	informs
incorporates	increases	initiates	instructs	interacts	issues	operates
interfaces	interprets	investigates	lifts	maintains	manages	monitors
negotiates	observes	organizes	participates	performs	plans	predicts
prepares	presents	processes	programs	provides	purchases	records
recognizes	recommends	recruits	reduces	reports	researches	resolves
reviews	schedules	searches	selects	solves	specifies	strategizes
streamlines	strengthens	summarizes	supports	trains	translate	updates
troubleshoots	validates	verifies				