

Position Description Writing Guide

Importance of the Position Description

Well-written position descriptions clearly, concisely and accurately document a position's

- Purpose,
- Required and preferred education, training, experience, knowledge, skills and abilities,
- Duties and responsibilities,
- Supervisor relationships, and
- Physical requirements and working conditions.

They

1. Serve as the basis for the recruitment and selection process,
2. Set guidelines and expectations for the employee,
3. Serve as the basis for the performance evaluation,
4. Establish data for classification and market comparison purposes.
5. Help the university ensure "equal pay for equal work,"
6. Are used to determine position status—exempt (salaried) or non-exempt (hourly)—under the Fair Labor Standards Act,
7. Are used to determine whether a reasonable accommodation can be made under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA),
8. Are reviewed by doctors to determine whether someone can return to work after an illness or injury.

This guide covers the basics of writing a position description. It address titles, essential and marginal duties, and the following sections of the Winthrop position description form:

- Required Qualifications
- Preferred Qualifications
- Knowledge, Skills and Abilities
- Supervision Guidelines
- Job Purpose
- Job Functions/Duties
- Success Criteria
- ADA Checklist

For more comprehensive instruction, tips or feedback, please contact the Office of Human Resources (HRHelp@winthrop.edu) about upcoming workshops and one-to-one assistance.

When should you update a position description?

Supervisors should update an employee's position description any time the job changes. Please keep in mind that changes must be based on the position, not the individual in the position. For example, if the minimum

training and experience section requires that the incumbent possess a bachelor’s degree, that requirement would not change if the incumbent earned a master’s degree.

Internal Title

The Winthrop title should be based on the position’s main function or purpose. It should convey the level of responsibility and the role, but not be overly vague or too specific.

Titles that Need Work	Good Alternatives
Program Coordinator for Accounting Internship Program	Program Coordinator
Assistant to the Director of the Accounting Internship Program	Administrative Assistant
ACC Operations Manager	Academic Technologies Manager
Health Services Registered Nurse	Registered Nurse

Required Qualifications

This section lists the education and training an individual MUST possess to be successful in the position. It typically indicates the required degree, experience, including the type of experience and number of years, and certifications or licenses.

Examples:

- Master’s degree, one year of counseling experience, and South Carolina LPC, LMFT or LISW-CP required.
- High School diploma and five years of administrative experience; Associate’s degree and three years of administrative experience; or a Bachelor’s degree and one year of administrative experience required.
- High school diploma, six months of professional experience in grounds maintenance, and a valid driver’s license required.

The State has established minimum education, training and experience guidelines for each job classification. These guidelines are intentionally broad because they apply to all jobs assigned to the classification. As a state university, we have the option of setting requirements that are more stringent than the state’s, but not less stringent.

Preferred Qualifications

Preferred qualifications include the education, training and/or experience that would be ideal but not necessary in order for someone to be successful in the position.

Examples:

- Professional experience in higher education or an academic setting preferred.
- Master’s degree preferred.

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSAs)

Knowledge refers to learning concepts, principles and information regarding a particular topic gained through formal education, training and/or experience.

Example:

- Knowledge of student development theory and academic advising best practices.
- Working knowledge of federal and state employment laws and regulations, including those related to FLSA, FMLA and I-9/E-Verify.

Skills are observable, often learned, competencies. They refer to someone's ability to use and apply knowledge and often indicate a level of skillfulness or proficiency.

Example:

- Proven written communication skills.
- Sufficient mathematical skills to create and maintain accurate financial spreadsheets.

Abilities are natural tendencies, talents and strengths that allow someone to perform a function or observable behavior.

Example:

- Ability to develop and maintain effective working relationships with faculty, staff, students and the general public.
- Sufficient technical ability to master required software.
- Ability to juggle multiple projects and meet established deadlines.

KSAs must be realistic and clearly related to a position's responsibilities and duties. For example, if the KSA section includes the ability to read and comprehend complex material or interpret state regulations, those functions must be part of the job duties.

Supervision Guidelines

This section delineates the guidelines and level of supervision the employee receives. Human Resources determines the supervision guidelines based on the position's Job Duties/Functions and the required education and experience. We will consider such questions as

1. For what level of responsibility is the employee held accountable?
2. How often—daily, weekly or more infrequently—is the employee's work be reviewed?
3. What level of decision-making does the employee have in the supervisor's absence?
4. Does the employee interpret policies or regulations in the course of performing the job?

Examples:

- Direct Supervision: The employee is told what to do and how to do it and is not required to exercise independent judgment or authority. Job duties tend to be prescriptive in nature and work is checked frequently.

- **General Supervision:** The employee is told what to do but not how to do it. The employee may develop processes and procedures for accomplishing job functions and/or perform complex duties within established policy guidelines.
- **Limited Supervision:** The employee uses his/her own creativity and/or judgment to get the job done. The employee receives general assignments and is free to work out the details. In this type of position, the employee often is expected to interpret policies and regulations within his/her defined scope of work. Work often is reviewed only upon completion or after implementation.

Job Purpose

The Job Purpose typically is a few concise sentences that capture the essence of the position—the reason it exists and its objectives.

Example:

Reporting to the Employee Relations Manager, the Senior Benefits Administrator manages all communication and compliance activities related to Winthrop’s employee benefits programs.

Job Duties/Functions

The Job Duties section is the cornerstone of the Position Description. It is the basis for determining a position’s classification within the State of South Carolina system and its status (exempt or non-exempt) under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

It delineates the essential and other duties and responsibilities necessary to achieve the stated Job Purpose.

When drafting Job Duty statements:

- Begin each statement with an action verb (see table of sample verbs on p. 8)
- Do not include duties that may be required in the future.
- Base them on what the position requires, not an employee’s capabilities or qualifications.
- If you are unsure about the percentage of time devoted to a particular function, check with the employee.

A good statement of Job Duties is not a simple list of tasks. It addresses one or more of the following questions:

1. What is being done?
2. Why is it being done?
3. How is it being done? (Indicates the methods/techniques used to perform the work.)
4. Who or what is the action/activity helping, supporting or targeting?

Example:

Provides excellent customer service to the campus community by responding to phone calls and emails within 24 hours of receipt.

Developing Job Duty Statements

1. Create a list of the position's key functions or areas of responsibility. Most positions will have at least three to five.
2. Generate a list of specific job duties associated with each of the primary functions/areas of responsibility.
3. Combine the tasks to create two to three job duty statements. Be sure to begin each sentence with an action verb.

For example:

1. Key areas of responsibility:
 - Budget management
 - Administrative support
 - Event Coordination
 - Hiring and Payroll
2. Tasks associated with each area of responsibility:
 - Budget management—monitors expenses, reviews p-card statements, orders supplies and equipment
 - Administrative support—greet visitors; answers phone and routes calls; mail; emails; drafts correspondence
 - Event Coordination—reserves space, orders food, set-up, invitations
 - Hiring and payroll—pre-employment paperwork, I-9/E-verify, Personnel Action Forms, timesheets
3. Condenses the tasks into Job Duty Statements:
 - Serves as the department budget manager—maintains the spreadsheet of department expenses; reviews monthly p-card statements for accuracy; and orders supplies and equipment and notifies the vice president if budget issues arise.
 - Provides administrative support to the vice president and department—serves as the primary point of contact for visitors and callers, receives, sorts and distributes mail; responds to emails; and drafts correspondence.
 - Coordinates department events—secures an appropriate location, schedules speakers, sends invitations and manages the guest list; and makes catering arrangements; and works with facilities to set-up for the event. Attends the event, greets visitors, and serves as liaison to the caterer and facilities staff.
 - Oversees the hiring and payroll process for temporary and student employees—collects and forwards pre-employment paperwork to Human Resources; reviews I-9 documents and conducts E-Verify; initiates electronic Personnel Action Forms; and approves student timesheets.

Job Duty Percentages

Percentages for each Job Duty statement should be between 5% and 45%, in increments of 5%.

If a duty/function constitutes greater than 45% of the position, break down the duties within the statement.

Example:

Percentage: 60%

Patrols Campus to ensure the safety of students, employees and visitors.

Patrols campus via university vehicle and monitors traffic..... 45%

Checks buildings to ensure doors are locked as appropriate....15%

ALL position descriptions must include the following: Performs other related duties as assigned. Marginal-5%

Essential Functions

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1992 encouraged employers to identify the essential duties of a position to help determine whether reasonable accommodation could be made.

South Carolina agencies achieve this goal by identifying Job Duties/Functions as essential or marginal.

Essential duties/functions must meet one or more of the following criteria:

1. The job duty/function is one of the reasons the position exists.
2. A limited number of employees are available to perform the function.
3. The function is highly specialized.

Each Job Duty statement must indicate whether it is Essential or Marginal.

Success Criteria

Success Criteria tell an employee the level of performance a supervisor expects.

Each Job Duty Statement must have corresponding Success Criteria, which must

1. Be measurable
2. Be objective
3. Be attainable and
4. Reflect the level of skill required to be successful in the position.

Measurable criteria include

- Time—completing a function by a certain date or within a certain time period.
- Quality—work must be accurate and/or consistent.
- Frequency—task must be performed twice daily, weekly, monthly, etc.
- Productivity—certain number of items must be processed weekly or certain number of tasks must be accomplished each day.

- Cost—minimizing cost associated with an event or staying within the annual supplies and equipment budget.

Example:

Coordinates recruiting logistics—maintains the recruiting spreadsheets; creates search files; uses updated position descriptions to create job vacancy notices (JVNs) and screening questions; and posts vacancies on NeoGov and the HR bulletin board. E-30%

Success Criteria:

1. Updates the recruiting spreadsheets daily.
2. Ensures JVNs contain all required employment-related information, are in the approved format, and are error-free prior to posting.
3. Posts positions as soon as the hiring supervisor approves the JVN and screening questions (the next morning if approval is received after 4 p.m.).

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Checklist

Position descriptions in the new Position Management system feature an ADA Checklist rather than a write-in section.

The checklist includes sections on

- Mental demands
- Physical demands
- Lifting requirements
- Visual acuity requirements
- Noise conditions and
- Equipment usage

It also has text boxes to include any requirements not covered specifically by the checklists and a section on Winthrop-specific systems.

The checklist is important for employees seeking accommodations under ADA and for employees on FMLA, because doctors review this section along with the Job Duties section when determining whether an employee is eligible to return to work after an illness or injury.

For these reasons, please review the list carefully and select only those that are **essential** to the position. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Human Resources by phone or via email @ HRHelp.winthrop.edu.

Action Verbs

Accommodate	Coordinate	Incorporate	Recall
Accelerate	Correspond	Increase	Receive
Accept	Counsel	Inform	Recognize
Achieve	Create	Initiate	Recommend
Acquire	Customize	Inquire	Record
Adapt	Decide	Inspect	Recruit
Address	Delegate	Install	Reduce
Adjust	Deliver	Instruct	Regulate
Advise	Demonstrate	Interact	Regulate
Allocate	Design	Interface	Render
Analyze	Determine	Interpret	Report
Apply	Develop	Interview	Research
Appoint	Devise	Invent	Resolve
Appraise	Direct	Investigate	Review
Approve	Disseminate	Issue	Schedule
Arrange	Distinguish	Issue	Search
Ascertain	Distribute	Keep	Select
Assess	Document	Life	Sell
Assign	Draft	Maintain	Serve
Assist	Edit	Manage	Solicit
Audit	Eliminate	Measure	Solve
Audit	Encourage	Monitor	Specify
Author	Enforce	Motivate	Strategize
Authorize	Establish	Negotiate	Streamline
Budget	Estimate	Notify	Strengthen
Buy	Evaluate	Observe	Study
Calculate	Examine	Obtain	Summarize
Calculate	Execute	Operate	Summarize
Check	Expand	Order	Supervise
Clarify	Expedite	Organize	Support
Clear	Explore	Originate	Survey
Collaborate	Facilitate	Oversee	Take
Collect	Forecast	Participate	Teach
Communicate	Formulate	Perform	Test
Compare	Forward	Plan	Train
Compile	Furnish	Predict	Transfer
Complete	Further	Prepare	Translate
Compose	Generate	Present	Troubleshoot
Compute	Give	Prevent	Update
Conduct	Guide	Process	Validate
Confer	Handle	Procure	Verify
Consider	Hire	Program	Verify
Consolidate	Identify	Provide	Weight
Consolidate	Illustrate	Pull	Write
Construct	Implement	Purchase	Recall
Consult	Improve	Quantify	Receive
Control	Improvise	Rate	Recognize