

Writing a Position Description Job Aid

Purpose: The purpose of the job aid is to guide users through the process of completing a Position Description (PD) for update, fill or reclassification. A PD can be created, or modified for Professional and Scientific (P&S) or Merit employees. In each section, there is a description of what is necessary as well as examples or questions that should be answered when writing a PD.

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What is a Position Description (PD)?

A position description (PD) is a document explaining the duties and responsibilities of a position at the University. PDs promote equity across campus, set expectations of performance, and also serve as a basis for external postings. All full and part-time P&S and Merit (organized and non-organized) employees have a PD, which is used to determine position classification and pay grade.

PDs are created for new positions and modified when there is a change in duties or to request a reclassification. PDs should be written for the position, not for the incumbent and should provide a clear picture of what the duties of the position are to someone who is unfamiliar with the position (e.g. new director or supervisor).

The job factors of a PD determine the pay grade. The duties determine the classification/series (e.g. Student Services Specialist compared to an Academic Adviser).

Duties and Responsibilities

Use the following steps and guidelines to create the duties/responsibilities of this position.

1. Create a list of all the duties assigned to the position (brainstorm); duties can be a combination of related tasks.
 - Task - typing the minutes of a particular meeting.
 - Duty - maintaining a record of minutes from a series of meetings.
 2. Draft a statement for each duty starting with an action verb. e.g. hire, train, evaluate, discipline and supervise two student office workers.
 3. Group duties that belong together and provide a job duty label that describes the function of the group (e.g. 'Advising' is a set of duties).
 4. The total percent of must equal 100%.
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Qualifications : Education, Experience, Licensure & Certifications

Description: This section addresses the education, experience, and qualifications necessary to perform the duties required to function at the position's classification level. There are two types of qualifications: required and preferred.

Required Education and Experience (P&S) or Required Qualifications (Merit)

Required qualifications include what is minimally acceptable in order to perform the duties of the position. Required Education and Experience (P&S), Required Qualifications (Merit), and Required Licensure/Certifications prepopulate in the Classification and Hiring System based on the University title (e.g. Clerk IV).

Supplemental Required Education and Experience

This section is for P&S only. P&S position descriptions may further define required qualifications by adding a specific degree field or type of experience. When a classification requires a Bachelor's degree or higher, a related degree type may be specified. Qualifications for Merit positions are determined by the Board of Regents and cannot be changed.

Preferred Education and Experience (P&S) or Preferred Qualifications (Merit)

Preferred qualifications identify additional measurable qualifications that help assess applicant pools. Preferred qualifications are helpful during the hiring process to rate candidates. Screening questions are also derived from preferred qualifications. Preferred qualifications should not include individual characteristics (or soft skills) such as knowledge, skills, and abilities that cannot be confirmed by applicant provided documents. If the applicant does not have the listed preferred education and experience or preferred qualifications, the applicant may still be considered for the position.

- What specific experience would place one applicant ahead of others?
- What education or experience type would be helpful for the position, if not required?
- What qualification would aid the search committee to rate candidates?

Examples include a more advanced degree, a specific degree field or program of study, or a specific type of experience that is directly related to the duties of the position.

Required Licensure or Certification

This section should include any licensure or certification that is required to perform the duties and may vary by position. The hiring department should also provide the accrediting/certifying group or organization along with the issuing state, if applicable. If the licensure is listed as required, any application without that licensure will be labeled as not qualified.

Examples:

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- Professional in Human Resources (PHR), Human Resource Certification Institute
- Licensed teacher, State of Iowa.

Preferred Licensure and Certification

Preferred licensure and certification is used to assess candidates that are best licensed or certified for the position. The hiring department should provide the accrediting/certifying group or organization along with the issuing state, if applicable. If the applicant does not have the listed preferred licensure or certification, the applicant may still be considered for the position.

Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSA) Required



Description: This bulleted list should include the knowledge, skills and/or abilities needed to fully function in this position. All KSAs listed should be related to the duties and expectations of the position. This section should not include experience and should have one of the three terms (knowledge, skill, ability) in each bulleted statement. Examples include:

- *Knowledge* of health Insurance portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the rules and regulations applied to data security
 - Proficient *skill* using the MS Office Suite
 - *Ability* to work in extremely cold temperatures
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Complexity

Description: Complexity measures the variety and difficulty of the duties necessary for successful completion of work and considers the amount of judgment and analytical thinking necessary along with the availability of policies, procedures, precedents, and standards for guiding the position's actions. In this section, the writer should give one to two examples of complex problems or projects included in the position.

Do 	Don't 
Describe what thinking and guidelines are considered by the position	Assume understanding
Explain the most complex duty for which the position is responsible first	Explain what is individually challenging based on one person's skill set
Explain and specify detail as if the reader is unfamiliar with the position, field of work, or organizational structure e.g. Creating professional annual reports for budgeting requires gathering and analyzing information from multiple industry sources, including primary and secondary sources.	Use overly vague language e.g. Responsible for annual reports
Provide examples	Make statements that can't be supported by position duties and expectations
Write the position as a business document e.g. <i>This position is responsible for...</i>	Write in the first person e.g. <i>I do my work, etc.</i>
Elaborate and consider what is being requested	Copy from duty section
Describe/show how a position is complex supported by examples	Make value statements e.g. This position is highly complex.
Spell out acronyms	Assume acronyms are globally understood

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Examples: The following examples are all well written. They demonstrate a good example of a high complexity level, mid complexity level and low complexity level. All examples in subsequent sections are considered good examples for a summary statement, unless otherwise stated. Examples should be provided to support the summary statement.

High	This position is responsible for creating policies for broad use by the University and leading teams of senior-level managers to address critical projects related to the Board of Regents, public advocacy, restructuring and strategic initiatives with University wide impact. Projects are critical to the mission of the University and support initiatives of the President.
Mid	This position creates policies for the college and leads a broad scope of projects related to marketing, private industry, admissions to the college, and graduation rates. Projects are critical to the mission of the college and support initiatives of the Dean.
Low	This position has a high level of ability for problem solving and must have an analytical mindset to complete fiscal and human resources duties. This position follows established processes and procedures within a single program area.

Innovation

Description: Innovation measures the extent to which the job demands resourcefulness, creativity, ingenuity or inventiveness. This factor considers the degree of original thinking required to organize or develop new or improved methods, ideas, strategies, procedures or techniques.

Examples:

High	This position is charged with solving complex scientific problems and has little precedent to draw from. Traditional techniques are rarely useful and this position must create new methods to address challenges. Novel research initiatives are formulated and developed by this position and are of national and international interest.
Mid	This position is responsible for developing new methods for sample preparation and modifying existing instrumentation to meet unique research needs.
Low	This position is responsible for improving existing standard procedures and processes to increase efficiency of the work unit.

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Impact on Institutional Mission

Description: Impact on Institutional Mission refers to both scope and freedom of action. It measures the scope (breadth) of responsibility of the job with regard to the overall institutional mission, in addition to the freedom of action (depth), and the level of authority and responsibility for a position. Other examples or things to consider may be research, instructional support, programs, public relations, administration, support services, finance or asset control, student advising and development.

The scope may range from an immediate work unit, to department, college, University, national, or global impact and can have a positive or negative effect.

Scope	
Form/Field	Writing Guidance
Positive Impact	<p>Describe what units, departments, colleges/divisions this position effects. Describe the overall positive effect of decisions made by this position. A thing to consider may be what is impacted by this position and how is it impacted. This may include multiple stakeholders and responsibilities.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The position ensures that the research lab spends funds within the parameters and guidelines of the university and other funding sources This positively affects the ability of the department to obtain future funding, have positive results on audits, and allows principal investigators to focus on research activities by supporting administrative functions of the research team.</p>
Negative Impact	<p>What mistakes could potentially be made? What are the consequences and who/what would it affect? How is the error corrected?</p> <p><i>Example:</i> This position could allow an expense on a grant account that violates guidelines for the grant and causes the item to not be reimbursed. This would cause a principal investigator to potentially lose an award and may negatively affect the future ability to obtain funding.</p>
Monetary or Quantitative Impact	<p>Support other factors using quantitative or monetary data.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Responsible for post-award monitoring for two grants worth a total of \$3 million. NSF provides one grant for \$2 million on a multi-institutional grant, where ISU acts as the subcontractor. The other grant is provided for the same program through the state for educational programming.</p>

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The freedom of action articulates the authority to make decisions that have impact beyond the unit, department, college or university.

Freedom of Action	
Form/Field	Writing Guidance
Supervisor Guidance	<p>Describe the type of guidance given by the hiring supervisor and how often. Describe the types of decisions the position makes on a regular basis and what types of decisions the supervisor makes the final decision on. It is not enough to say that a position is autonomous.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The hiring supervisor refers to resources, provides project direction, sets goals, establishes desired outcomes, and meets with the incumbent on a bimonthly basis. This position makes recommendations for the hiring supervisor’s approval. Recommendations typically affect operations of the research lab.</p>
Policies and Procedures	<p>Describe what guides the work. Do these policies, procedures, regulations and laws aid in making appropriate decisions, create barriers to completing duties, or provide guidance in areas for interpretation? Describe not only what is used, but how and/or why.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The position is governed by federal, state, and local laws; the Iowa Administrative Code, the Code of Iowa, Civil and Criminal procedure and all institutional policies and procedures.</p>

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Internal Interactions

Description: The Internal Interactions section appraises the responsibility for working with or through others within the University community, including students, staff, and faculty on a regular, recurring, and essential basis for operations. This section does **not** include contacts within the position's immediate work area/unit.

Below are questions to address when completing this section:

- With what positions, units, departments, and groups does the position interact?
- What is the purpose of the interaction? (e.g. providing or obtaining information, influencing others or decisions, or negotiating).
- What is the potential impact of the interaction?
- At what rate do the interactions occur (regularly, recurring, essential)?

Examples:

High	Regular and recurring interactions with University Council, the President, deans and department chairs, Senior Vice President and Provost, budget cabinet and other university partners to negotiate, mediate, resolve disputes and provide consultation and guidance to create effective policies for the University.
Mid	This position has daily contact with interdepartmental researchers and academic staff responding to questions and problem reports related to soybean research and experimental design. This position provides informed input on statistical analysis for the research project.
Low	This position communicates with students daily regarding payment plans. Without this communication, students often make late payments and incur charges.

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External Interactions

Description: The external interactions section measures the responsibility for working with or through others *outside* the University to perform the duties of this position. Consider the nature and level of contact encountered on a regular, recurring, and essential basis.

Below are questions to address when completing this section:

- What people, groups, entities, government agencies, or other external constituents does this position work with?
- What is the purpose of the interaction? For example, providing or obtaining information, influencing others or decisions, or negotiating.
- What is the potential impact of the interaction?
- At what rate do the interactions occur (regularly, recurring, essential)?

Examples:

High	This position will negotiate contracts with external health care providers for university wide benefit programs. Negotiation requires tact to discuss key issues and solve problems related to plans, coverage, and premiums affecting students, faculty and staff.
Mid	This position will collaborate with researchers from other universities on a biweekly basis to design novel experiments regarding plant genetics and disseminate confidential research results. Information will be complex in nature, due to the advanced level of research and will require a high level of interpretation and explanation.
Low	This position will call and email external vendors and sales personnel to discuss equipment and purchase part replacements monthly.

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Leadership

Description: Leadership provides a description of positions and projects that are directly and indirectly supervised by this position. The table below clarifies the difference between direct and indirect responsibilities.

Direct Supervisor	Indirect Supervisor
<p>A direct supervisor would have the authority to make hiring decisions and would be responsible to evaluate performance, discipline, and terminate direct reports.</p> <p>A direct supervisor would also oversee administrative personnel functions, such as scheduling and leave management for the employee.</p>	<p>An indirect supervisor would monitor progress and review and assign tasks for a student, merit, or P&S employee.</p> <p>An indirect supervisor can assign and evaluate direction of a project.</p>
<p>Additionally, a direct/indirect supervisor would train, assign tasks, observe and review student, merit, and/or P&S employee(s).</p>	

This section may include responsibility for project or process leadership where guiding and leading others is required to achieve a common goal.

Example: This position is responsible for leading groups of IT professionals, both P&S and Merit, on enterprise system projects. Project leadership includes guiding the group, assigning and reviewing tasks, and collaborating with groups across units.

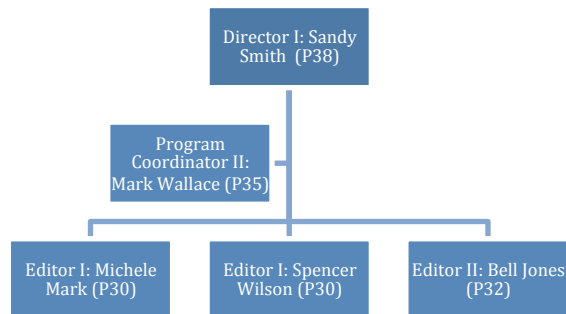
Documents

The organization chart must include or reference (*example provided on next page*):

- all employee names, classifications, and pay grades
- solid and dotted lines to represent direct and indirect reporting relationships

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Organization Chart Example:



Note: For instructions on how to create an org chart, please see Microsoft's resource on **Creating an Organization Chart in Word**

(<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/word-help/create-an-organization-chart-HA010354860.aspx>).

If a position is split between two departments, two org charts should be provided.

Other Essential Functions

Description: It is important to define the physical requirements and environmental conditions of the position because they may impact decisions relating to performance appraisals, disability accommodations and worker's compensation. When writing a position description, be sure to adequately describe the frequency in which the applicant may be exposed to physical and environmental conditions as well as any other potential exposure to hazards.

Below are questions to address when completing this section:

- What conditions will the position encounter to complete the job responsibilities?
- What is the frequency of the function identified?
- **Note:** Even if a function is performed infrequently or a small portion of time, it may be crucial enough to the position to be considered an essential function if the consequences of not performing the function would result in harm to the operation of the department or unit (e.g. The position will operate a forklift once a calendar year to relocate equipment shipments).

Below are a few condition examples:

- *Physical Requirements:* standing, walking, lifting, pulling, climbing, reaching, tasting, hand operations, hand/eye coordination
- *Environmental Conditions:* extreme heat/cold, lighting, humidity, exposure to chemicals, noise pollution, air pollution, work hazards, and possibility of disease exposure or electric shock

Sample Physical Requirements Statements:

- Must be able to regularly lift 50-70 lbs. in the computer server room on a nightly basis.
- Position will be sedentary at a desk while using a computer.

Sample Environmental Conditions Statements:

- Position will be exposed to extreme heat and noise pollution.
- Position will be exposed to pesticides, dust, pollen, mold, and fuel and will be around machinery with moving parts.

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Summary of Essential Duties and Responsibilities

Description: A job summary is a structured overview of the key aspects of a position. The information in this section should provide the applicant with a clear understanding of the position's essential duties, responsibilities as well as soft skills and abilities of the ideal candidate.

The summary section should be formatted in the following structure:

Topic	Description
Introduction	<p>Opening sentence containing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iowa State University • Department name • Optional: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ College/Unit ○ Responsibilities/overview of the Department ○ Work location if other than campus building
Job Duties/ Responsibilities Overview	<p>Do Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe primary or fundamental duties and responsibilities • Duties and responsibilities that expand on why certain qualifications are required or preferred <p>Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The phrase 'other duties as assigned' • Acronyms without stating the full name at least once
The 'successful candidate' description	<p>Sentences including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinguishing characteristics about the position • Knowledge, abilities or skills • Work hours if includes nights, weekends, travel • Other important information for the applicant to understand

P&S Job Summary Example

The Department of Agronomy at Iowa State University is seeking candidates for an Assistant Scientist II. The Agronomy Department in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences provides research-based educational programs in a variety of agronomic areas to support producers and agri-business professionals. Our objective is to make crop production more efficient, more productive, and economically and environmentally sustainable.

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This position will implement and manage all field and laboratory research studies conducted by the cropping systems research and extension program. The program designs and conducts research experiments in collaboration with crop physiologist, soil scientists, entomologists, geneticists, and appropriate scientists in other disciplines.

Responsibilities include managing facilities, equipment, research fields on university and private farms, designing field and laboratory experiments, identifying research sites, plot establishment, pesticide application, collecting data and samples throughout the growing season, harvest, and writing reports. Other duties include supervision of undergraduate and graduate students, and teaching them the research methods and practices used for obtaining meaningful research data. This position frequently faces unique situations requiring rapid decision making based on sound agronomic principles with little or no input from other persons.

The successful candidate will possess strong problem-solving capabilities along with the ability to work independently as well as with a team. The candidate will also be detail oriented with solid interpersonal skills to effectively interact with personnel, which include technicians, students and hourly employees.

Merit Job Summary Example

Iowa State University is seeking applicants for a Food Service Coordinator II. This position works under the Manager and Assistant Manager of Campus Cafés. Responsibilities include: forecasting product needs; setting up for service, preparing, and serving food and beverages to customers at the ABE's Harvest Cafe; coordinating opening and closing activities of the café; coordinating production requirements with the commissary kitchen, bakery, and supplies from Food Stores and other vendors; maintaining food and beverage record keeping; ensuring safe and sanitary handling of all food and drink products, equipment and supplies; assuming responsibility for training and supervision of student employees; and other duties as assigned by management. This position will serve as the on-site supervisor at the ABE's Harvest Cafe during normal hours of operation and oversee student employees with respect to training, supervising their work performance, and any relevant communications back to the Campus Cafes' management team.

The duties of this position require the ability to lift/push/pull cases of food and bags of produce weighing up to 50 pounds, the ability to work cooperatively as a team member in a team-oriented environment and to train and work cooperatively with student staff. The ability to serve students, faculty, staff and university guests in a hospitable, customer-oriented manner is essential. Ability to perform basic math skills and calculate the number of portions prepared and served for record-keeping and estimating quantities of ingredients is needed for recipe preparation.