



University
of Idaho

Supervisor's Guide for Writing Staff Job Descriptions

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*Note: This is a living document that
should always be reviewed online because
content will be updated.*

Human Resources | hr-classcomp@uidaho.edu

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A job description is a formalized statement of duties, qualifications and responsibilities of a specific position. Its purpose is to define a job within certain established limits and identify its scope and content. It provides the foundation for recruiting, developing and retaining employees, and sets the stage for optimum work performance by clarifying responsibilities, expected results and aids in the evaluation of performance. It is also an important component to maintaining an equitable compensation system and ensuring legal compliance. The document should be revisited and updated as needed to reflect significant changes in responsibilities.

A well written and accurate job description benefits the department, hiring manager and both potential and current employees by:

- Creating a shared understanding of position responsibilities and performance expectations;
- Saving recruiting time and money;
- Providing all necessary information so potential applicants can assess whether the position and unit are a good fit; and
- Identifying and assessing qualified applicants more quickly.

In addition to online resources, the Human Resources Classification and Compensation Specialist (hr-classcomp@uidaho.edu) is available to assist supervisors in the development of staff job descriptions.

TIPS FOR WRITING EFFECTIVE JOB DESCRIPTIONS

- Write in a concise, direct style.
- Be positive! When recruiting, the job description is the applicant's first impression of the unit and the supervisor.
- Always use the simpler word rather than the complicated one, keeping sentence structure as straight forward as possible. It will cut verbiage, shorten your description and enhance understanding.
- Avoid jargon, abbreviations and acronyms. Other people reading the job description may not be familiar with them. If abbreviations and acronyms are necessary, define them the first time you use them.
- Do not use ambiguous terms. If you use terms such as "assists, handles and performs," describe "how" the position assists, handles or performs. Using the word "by" and then detailing the tasks or operations performed will usually clarify the ambiguity.
- Be gender neutral by avoiding language such as "he manages" and "she is responsible for."
- Reference job titles or departments instead of employee names.
- Be inclusive; avoid using restrictive language that would preclude the accommodation of workers with disabilities.
- Focus on primary activities, omitting trivial duties and occasional tasks.
- Only include assigned duties as of today.

- Do not include potential future duties, and eliminate any duties no longer required.
- Focus on the business needs of the unit; don't tailor a job description to an individual you'd like to hire.
- Keep in mind that the current incumbent likely has more skills and experience than is necessary for a new hire because of their time in the position.
- Do not write the job description based upon the desired job classification or market rate; express realistic levels of authority, responsibilities and duties.
- Avoid writing the job description as a step-by-step guide on how to do the work.
- Being too specific about technology, processes or procedures will cause a job description to become prematurely outdated.

WORKING TITLE (FORMERLY POSITION TITLE)

Working titles are currently assigned at the unit-level to reflect the duties of the position within the unit and subject to dean or vice president-level approval. Working titles do not determine the salary range for a position – job duties determine market rates. They may -- but are not required to -- be the same as the Human Resources assigned university title described in the next section. Working titles are maintained in Banner (NBAJOBS), used on business cards and displayed in the campus directory.

Working titles should:

- Provide a description of the function or work performed to facilitate business communications.
- Add clarity to the University's classification assignment in describing the individual role.
- Be consistent with professional/industry practice.
- Be consistent with other working titles within a job family and/or work unit.

Working titles cannot:

- Duplicate a university title not assigned to this position but used elsewhere in the [HR job family structure](#). (Example: a working title of executive assistant for a position assigned a university title of administrative assistant I.)
- Misrepresent the University or the authority of the position in any way. The use of inflated titles can create inaccurate expectations of the individual role and ultimately misrepresent responsibility and authority levels both inside and outside the institution.

Examples of effective working titles:

- Research Software Developer
- Graduate Student Support Coordinator
- Recycling, Surplus and Solid Waste Technician

General staff titling guidelines - not meant to be all inclusive or restrictive:

Title	Definition	Example(s)
Analyst	performs work that primarily requires analysis	Business Analyst IT Security Analyst
Assistant	assists; helps others to accomplish their assigned goals	Administrative Assistant
Associate	second in command (higher rank than an assistant director if both are within the same unit)	Associate Director
Coordinator	organizes and facilitates activities – generally without direct authority over others	Background Check Coordinator Transfer Coordinator
Director	senior staff responsible for developing, implementing and evaluating activities and staff of a major unit or specific activity that spans units	Communications Director Project Director
Junior	entry-level in a series of related positions	Junior Associate General Counsel
Liaison	facilitates or arranges interactions between two parties or organizations	Career Advising Liaison
Lead	work leader for a small group; typically performs work that is substantially similar to their peers; provides informal leadership or guidance to peers in the completion of work; does not hire, evaluate or supervise employees	Lead Electrician Sales Lead
Manager	manages the execution of an assigned function or a work unit; may or may not supervise staff that assist with execution	Equipment Manager
Senior	higher level of experience, expertise and/or responsibility within a series of related positions	Senior Engineer Senior Development Officer
Specialist	provides specialized support within a unit or function, often a subject matter expert.	Classroom Media Specialist
Supervisor	directs and inspects the day-to-day work of subordinates	Operations Supervisor
Technician	completes technical tasks	Fiscal Technician Research Technician

[Abbreviation guidelines for entering titles into Banner](#)

UNIVERSITY TITLE (NEW FIELD)

University titles will be entered at the “HRS” stop in action routing within PeopleAdmin and will be located in the “Position Control” block. Human Resources develops and assigns standardized titles to staff positions as a means of internally organizing and grouping substantively similar positions and identifying [job families](#). Positions of the same university title will have the same benchmark and market rate. University titles are currently housed only in Human Resources and not recorded in Banner; they will not be displayed in the directory or appear in job postings. A supervisor may elect to use the university title as the working title.

POSITION OVERVIEW (FORMERLY POSITION SUMMARY)

The position overview provides a summary of the role, level and scope of responsibility of a position consisting of three or four sentences providing a basic understanding -- a “bird’s eye view” -- of the role. It is not an all-inclusive list of everything a position does, rather a snapshot of the most important functions and responsibilities.

A position overview should:

- Be no longer than three or four sentences.
- Describe the basic purpose of the job.
- List the most important duties first.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Assume the reader knows nothing about the job.

For positions that fall within a [HR-established job family](#), Human Resources maintains standardized position overviews. These are not editable. However, units may incorporate additional clarification about the role of the position in the "Unit Overview" section. (Note: Job family development is in progress and supervisors will be advised when positions are assigned to a job family.)

For positions that are not part of a HR-established job family, the position overview is developed at the college/division or unit level specific to the position.

UNIT OVERVIEW

The unit overview provides a three to four sentence summary of the unit and/or program, its purpose and how it fits in to the overall organization and mission of the University. Information about the unit and/or the program is helpful in connecting the overall objectives for the position with the mission of the unit. This summary will be the same for all staff positions within a unit, with an additional sentence at the end if needed specific to the role of an individual position if it has a standardized position overview as part of a job family as described above.

RESPONSIBILITIES SECTION

The responsibilities section is the foundation of the job description. It conveys the complexity, scope and level of responsibility of a job and highlights key accountabilities and duties. Due to the significance of this section, it is important to accurately, concisely and completely describe the major responsibilities and duties of the position. Staff job descriptions must contain at least three responsibility sections; Human Resources recommends no more than five.

There are four components to each job responsibility section:

1) KEY ACCOUNTABILITY (FORMERLY JOB FUNCTION)

A key accountability is a brief summary phrase that describes a related set of responsibilities.

Key accountabilities should:

- Be written as a “by statement.” (*Examples: “Supports financial processes for the department by:” and “Creates opportunities for major gifts to the college by:”*)
- Be listed in order of the amount of time spent on each. List the accountability that encompasses the largest percentage of time first.
- Succinctly summarize a set of related duties/tasks.

2) JOB DUTIES (FORMERLY JOB DUTIES/RESPONSIBILITIES)

The job duties identify different aspects of the work within a given key accountability and provides an understanding of the scope of the position. Although there is no restriction to the number of duties included, Human Resources recommends five to eight overarching job duties that incorporate the majority of work within the key accountability.

Job duties should:

- Be formatted as a bulleted list.
- Use progressive active verbs (ending in “-ing”) which complete the start of the sentence found in the key accountability statement.
- Provide an overview of the different tasks or activities a position will be responsible for.
- Fairly represent the task and the level of responsibility granted to the employee. (*Example: Use “submitting travel claims” not “managing travel claims” when describing duties at the department level. Accounts Payable manages the travel claims process.*)
- Be as general and as clear as possible while relaying important specifics. Instead of listing each task, organize and summarize. (*Example: Instead of listing “compiling, entering and tracking purchase orders, requisitions, encumbrances, reimbursements and vendor invoices” list “processing a variety of financial transactions.”*) Being too specific requires more frequent updating and can lead to employees feeling like tasks not specifically listed are not their responsibility.
- Describe the outcome that is expected rather than serve as a step-by-step desk manual.

[Action words to describe tasks and responsibilities](#)

3) PERCENTAGE OF EFFORT (FORMERLY PERCENTAGE OF TIME)

Percentage of effort quantifies an estimation of the amount of time, over the course of a year, an employee will spend completing each key accountability rounded to the nearest 5%. Duties that comprise less than 5% of a position's effort should be combined or removed. The sum of all key accountabilities must total 100% effort regardless of FTE.

Percentage	Week	Year (full-time, 12-months)
25%	10 hours	3 months / ~500 hours
20%	8 hours	2 ½ months / ~400 hours
15%	6 hours	1 ½ months / ~300 hours
10%	4 hours	5 weeks / ~200 hours
5%	2 hours	2 ½ weeks / ~100 hours

4) ESSENTIAL VERSUS MARGINAL

At least 5% of the ongoing work of the position, in addition to general statements like "other duties as assigned" and "contribute to team effort," must be noted as marginal.

Naturally, we believe all the duties of a position are essential or we would not have them listed. We have to adjust our definition of "essential" and "marginal" to that of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, (EEOC) and the Americans with Disabilities Act, (ADA) for the purpose of job descriptions, and limit essential functions to those that meet the narrow definition established by the EEOC: *Essential tasks/functions are those which a person must be able to perform with or without a reasonable accommodation. Employers can require all applicants and employees to perform essential tasks of the job in question.* (The ADA does not relieve a disabled person from the obligation to perform the essential tasks of the job).

Marginal tasks/functions are all the other assigned work; those tasks that are non-essential to the position. This means specific duties or tasks that are not, in and of themselves, the reason the position exists. Marginal tasks can be assigned to someone else or other accommodations can be developed if a qualified individual under the ADA cannot perform them.

Factors to consider in determining if a function is essential:

- Does the job exist to perform this function? If not, it is likely a marginal function for this position.
- How much time is spent performing this function? A function must take at least 5% (100 hours per year) of the position's effort to be considered essential.
- Can other co-workers do this function if necessary?
- Could someone else perform the duties with minimal to moderate disruption or inconvenience?
- Would taking the function from the job significantly change the job?
- Would there be significant consequences if the function were not performed?

QUALIFICATIONS AND WORKING CONDITIONS (NEW FORMAT)

Qualifications	
Required Experience	
Required Education	
Required Licensures, Certifications or other	
Additional Preferred Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, Education and Experience	
Physical Requirements	
Working Conditions	

Positions that fall within a [Human Resources-defined job family](#) will have pre-established required education and experience with recommended preferred qualifications that may be edited or added to with Human Resources review. Positions that do not fall within an established job family, do not have pre-established requirements, but should meet established standards detailed below and be consistent with other like positions in the department and across the university. The Human Resources Classification and Compensation Specialist can assist supervisors with developing qualifications.

There are six sub-sections of qualifications:

1) REQUIRED EXPERIENCE

Required experience is the minimal amount of experience required for entry into the position; the background experience needed to be able to learn and perform duties of the position. Human Resources recommends three to five succinct required qualifications for most positions.

Format in a bulleted list, one requirement per bullet.

Required experience must:

- Be non-subjective and easily understood by all applicants, and it should be evident through review of just written application materials whether an applicant meets the qualification or not (Yes/No or Pass/Fail). This is a federal requirement we must comply with.
- Describe the experience an applicant would need to advance/promote into this position – not reflecting the current incumbent’s competencies they possess after having already done the work for some time.
- Avoid using brand names whenever possible. For example, instead of “Excel,” use “spreadsheet software.”

Common feedback:

- Required qualifications cannot replace onboarding. It is unreasonable to expect a new employee to be able to perform all aspects of a new position without a learning period.
- If a skill can be learned in six months or less, it generally should not be considered required experience to qualify for the position.
- Soft skills (such as oral communication) that are better assessed during interview are listed in the preferred section.
- Avoid duplication in skills from one requirement to another.
- Consider whether a duration of experience is required (e.g. one year), or whether just having the experience is suitable.
- Years of experience should match the level of the position. For example, it is unreasonable to require significant years of experience for an entry-level position.
- For entry-level positions focus on general, transferable skills instead of experience having performed position-specific tasks.
- Listing too many required qualifications can 1) be intimidating to applicants and 2) may artificially limit the size of the applicant pool.

[Sample experience statements](#)

2) REQUIRED EDUCATION

Required education is the minimum level of education an applicant must have for entry into a position. Any education required beyond a high school degree or GED must be for specialized knowledge in a specific discipline that is necessary for entry into the position. In instances where a degree is desirable for the intrinsic values (critical thinking, broad education, etc....) it is a preferred qualification.

Classified positions: with limited exceptions (approved by Human Resources), the highest allowable required education is a high school degree or GED and not all positions require a high school degree or GED. A supervisor may be interested in a higher level of education, however, for classified positions this will generally need to be contained in the preferred section of the qualifications.

Exempt positions: may list a degree as a required qualification but, if included, must list the disciplines that provide the specialized knowledge needed for entry into the position. Education requirements should be considered carefully. If work experience is the more common way expertise is gained, then a degree is most likely a preferred qualification and not a required qualification. In limited instances, Human Resources may approve a degree requirement for exempt positions without listing disciplines. For assistance, contact the Human Resources Classification and Compensation Specialist.

Education / Experience Equivalencies for Classified Positions

For higher-level classified positions, it is possible that well suited applicants have either several years of experience or a combination of relevant education and experience suitable for entry into the position.

With Human Resources approval, a completed associate's degree can substitute for 2 years of required experience, and a completed bachelor's degree can substitute for 4 years of required experience. The equivalency is added into the required experience field after the base-level of experience required of all applicants in this format: *"Five years of accounting experience; an associate's degree in accounting may substitute for two years of required experience, or a bachelor's degree in accounting, finance or business may substitute for four years of required experience."* As shown in the example, specific disciplines must be identified and included in the equivalency statement.

Please note that whether an equivalency will be considered must be determined prior to posting. Once the job is posted for recruitment, the search committee cannot consider equivalencies unless they were included in the job description.

Education / Experience Equivalencies for Exempt Positions

If an exempt position requires a degree, this indicates that specialized knowledge acquired from formal college-level study is required for entry into the position. In rare cases, extended work in a specialized field can replace formal study.

With Human Resources approval, an additional four years of work beyond what is otherwise required can replace a bachelor's degree. The equivalency is added to the required education field in this format: *"Bachelor's degree in accounting, finance or business; four additional years of experience may be substituted for a bachelor's degree."* This indicates that the applicant must have the experience listed in the required experience section plus four additional years.

Please note that whether an equivalency will be considered must be determined prior to posting. Once the job is posted for recruitment, the search committee cannot consider equivalencies unless they were included in the job description.

[More about education requirements](#)

3) REQUIRED LICENSURES, CERTIFICATIONS OR OTHER

Include required licensures and certifications employees must have in order to be able to complete essential duties. If there will be a grace period for a new hire to acquire licensure/certification, list the time frame as "or obtain within X months of hire." The timeframe is often, but not always, six months to coincide with the probationary period for classified staff. Consider how long it will take the employee to obtain the licensure. For example, does it require attending training that is only available once per year and when will it be offered next? If no

date is listed, then applicants must possess the required licensure/certification to be considered for the position.

Driver's License: We can only require applicants to have a valid driver's license if they must drive a university vehicle or equipment as an essential function of the position and is at least 5% (100 hours per year) of their overall effort.

Travel: If they will be traveling around between locations to complete essential duties, but not driving a university vehicle, then describe any required travel. Be general but give some indication about the scope of travel. Will it be local day travel, or overnight travel? What is the frequency; occasional, regularly or frequent? Non-essential travel (for example, attending professional development conferences) is not include it in this section.

- Requires travel between locations during the business day for meetings and support of program activities.
- Requires frequent overnight travel to Boise.
- Requires occasional travel to regional program meetings.
- Requires regular multi-day travel to high schools throughout Washington and Oregon.

Schedule: Include any unusual schedule circumstances, such as:

- This position may be required to work an alternate schedule or shift as requested by supervisor
- This position may be required to work scheduled overtime and be available for emergency overtime when the need arises by responding to overtime call outs before and after standard scheduled hours of work.
- This is an essential position that may be called upon in the event of an emergency and/or University Closure.

Also include in this section other requirements of employment such as any minimum age requirements, mandatory participation in drug testing or medical surveillance.

4) ADDITIONAL PREFERRED: (PREVIOUSLY PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS)

Additional preferred qualifications are an expanded listing of qualifications which can be used to further determine a person's ability to be productive and successful in the job. If included, the preferred qualifications can focus on any or all of the following: additional education, additional experience, knowledge, skills and abilities.

Although there is no limit on the number of preferred qualifications, Human Resources recommends approximately five well-defined preferred qualifications, and no more than ten. Too many preferred qualifications may make it difficult for search committees to identify the most qualified applicants.

Preferred qualifications should:

- Be measurable.
- Be grouped together with headers.

Example:

Ability to:

- understand basic technical work areas in order to disseminate accurate information
- think critically; act independently and exercise initiative; maintain confidentiality
- establish and maintain effective working relationships
- work with diverse individuals from varying cultural backgrounds.

Knowledge of:

- UI policies/procedures and grants/contracts administration
- Banner Finance Module
- advanced Excel functions

Experience:

- conducting training and/or making public presentations

- Be written clearly, defining the expectation and allow search committees to assess to what level applicants meet or exceed the qualification.
- Whenever possible describe levels of experience or proficiency.
- Be written in terms of transferable skills instead of specific tasks that the position will perform. This broadens the applicant pool and allows for career advancement of applicants.

[Sample experience statements](#)

[Sample additional preferred knowledge, skills and abilities](#)

[Defining levels of proficiency](#)

5) PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

Although this section will be blank for many positions, it allows departments to describe physical requirements that are needed to complete essential job duties. To be ADA-compliant, statements must be written in terms of the required outcome, not the way a duty is performed.

Ability to lift and/or otherwise move heavy objects is another common requirement. It is not necessary to indicate what items the employee will have to move - but should include the maximum weight and frequency.

Only list a physical requirement if it is required to complete an essential function of the position and takes at least 5% effort (100 hours) over the course of the year. As an example, it may be convenient for an administrative assistant to lift and move copy paper boxes from one office to another, but is that truly why the position exists? Will it take 100 hours per year to complete the task? Can someone else move the boxes if the employee is unable? This is likely not an essential function. Conversely, a farm assistant that will be moving irrigation equipment around the farm will potentially do so for several hours per day and the duty is essential to the position.

[Sample physical requirement statements](#)

6) WORKING CONDITIONS (OPTIONAL)

Working conditions are differentiated from physical requirements, in that they are informational, describing the environment in which a position will operate while completing essential duties.

Will the employee be working outdoors in extreme weather for extended periods of time? Will they be routinely exposed to safe but potentially unpleasant odors? Will the work be performed somewhere other than a university facility (for example, remote field work)?

[Sample working conditions](#)

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

Within the PeopleAdmin action, upload a current organizational chart for the unit as a PDF that includes working titles and PCN numbers. Do not include incumbent names for filled positions, names are unnecessary and require continual updates. Some chart templates become difficult to read and print once saved as a PDF. Be sure the upload will be readable by users in PeopleAdmin and that positions that no longer exist have been removed.

The organizational chart provides context for the position, illustrating both the formal reporting structure and the overall composition of the unit.

Ensure that the chart answers the following questions:

- If the position is new, is it on the chart and reflects the future structure?
- To whom does this position report?
- What other positions report to the same supervisor?
- What positions report to this position?
- Who else works in this unit?
- Does it include other vacant positions that are expected to be filled soon?