# Chapter 3 Filling Vacant Positions Appendix 3c - What Every Supervisor Should Know About Position Descriptions

#### What is a Position Description?

State statutes define a position as a "group of duties and responsibilities...which require the services of an employee on a part-time or full-time basis." A position description (PD) is a structured document assigning work to a given position as it is expected to be performed after customary orientation and training. It will tell the reader what the worker is responsible for doing, how it is done, and how it relates to other positions within and outside the work unit. The PD should accurately and completely describe the permanent duties and responsibilities that are assigned and performed. Position descriptions are not intended to cover every kind of work assignment a position may have. Rather, they cover those work assignments which are predominant, permanent and recurring.

### Who Writes the Position Description?

By state statute, the agency appointing authority assigns work to employees. S/he may delegate this responsibility to subordinate staff. This means that the PD can be written by the supervisor, employee, manager or personnel officer. Since the first-line supervisor is almost always responsible for directly assigning and reviewing the work (on behalf of the appointing authority), the PD is most often written or reviewed by him/her. employees can and often do have important ideas and information which can be used for updating the PD. However, it is not an official assignment without the supervisor's approval.

#### Why are Position Descriptions Important?

Position descriptions are necessary documents which affect employees' positions in a multitude of areas, including: assignment of duties, classification of the position, identification of training and development needs, recruitment and exam development, organization and planning of the work unit, and the establishment of performance evaluation goals and standards.

Position descriptions are particularly important when a personnel management survey is being conducted of the occupational area. It is crucial that supervisors ensure the position descriptions of their staff are accurate and comprehensive descriptions of the assigned duties. During a survey, PDs are a vital source document used in the classification analysis of the assigned duties; comparisons to the external private and public sector labor market; internal comparisons to similar positions in state service; the comparison of the position to the new classification specifications; and reallocation to the appropriate new classification and level.

#### What Does the Employee's Signature on a Position Description Mean?

Look at section 17 on the position description form. The statement preceding the line for the employee's signature says, "I have read and understand that the statements and time estimates above and on attachments are a description of the functions assigned my position."

The employee's signature does not mean the employee agrees with or likes the PD and its assigned duties. Signing the PD means the employee understands the work assignments. It is not necessary that the employee agrees with the assignments. If the employee refuses to sign, the supervisor should attach a note to the PD stating that the duties have been explained to the employee and the employee refuses to sign. A copy of the PD and note should be provided to the agency personnel office. employees can be held accountable for work assignments on a PD they refuse to sign as long as the assignments are reasonable and within the employee's control.

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### Does an employee have to Perform Any Duties Not Identified on Their Position Description?

A position description cannot and does not list every task an employee must perform as part of their job. Tasks which are understood as necessary to accomplish the goals listed on a PD are required to be performed. In addition, tasks which are reasonably related but not on the PD can also be assigned. Finally, employees may periodically receive work assignments of a temporary nature which are not on or related to tasks on their PD. This is also acceptable as long as other contractual and legal requirements are met. For example, there are limitations on the assignment of "bargaining unit" work which might violate contractual overtime requirements.

## Does the Use of "Buzz Words" Increase the Likelihood of a Position Being Reclassified or Reallocated to a Higher Level?

"Buzz words" do not increase the likelihood of a reclassification or reallocation being approved.

What is key is the **assignment and performance** of work consistent with the classification and level being requested. If the classification specification contains key words and concepts, then a position which performed those duties is more likely to be reclassified or reallocated to that level. However, just writing the "buzz words" in a PD is insufficient. During the review process, the Personnel Office will be verifying that the work listed on the PD is being performed.

#### **Position Description Guidelines**

#### **University of Wisconsin-Madison Classified Personnel**

A position description form is really nothing more than a clear, concise and complete outline of the position. To be clear, the information must be in a language the average reader can understand. To be concise, unnecessary wording and unnecessary details should be omitted. To be complete, all information that will help the reader understand the position must be included.

#### **Purpose of Position Description**

The position description is the key document used in determining the appropriate classification and level of a position. It is descriptive of the major goals of the position, but it is not construed to limit or modify the power of the appointing authority to assign work to employees. It should be used as an information source for the development and implementation of an effective recruitment and selection plan if a position becomes vacant. An accurate position description helps the employee know what is expected by clearly defining the work to be performed in relation to the overall goals of the work unit. The position description can be the basis for identifying training needs and criteria for evaluating performance.

#### **Completing the Position Description**

The position description should be filled out by the first-line supervisor or his/her designee. Most of the items on the position description are self explanatory. Should you have any questions, please contact your employing unit Personnel Representative.

Whenever a position description accompanies a personnel transaction, a current organization chart of the work unit should be included. The organization chart should show the employees' names, superordinate-subordinate relationships, classifications and current work schedules.

# Chapter 3 Filling Vacant Positions Appendix 3c - What Every Supervisor Should Know About Position Descriptions Definitions

- **Goals:** the expected results of each employee's work; the expected accomplishments, product or output that results from the work activities of the employee.
- **Worker Activities:** the specific tasks the employee performs to accomplish the goal. Worker Activity statements describe what a worker actually does.
- **% Time:** the proportion of the employees's total work time in the course of a year spent on a goal or worker activity.
- **Close Supervision:** the work is performed according to detailed instructions and supervision is available on short notice.
- **Limited Supervision:** the incumbent proceeds on his/her own initiative while complying with policies, practices and procedures prescribed by the supervisor. The supervisor generally answers questions only on the more important phases of the work.
- **General Supervision:** the work is performed independently. The incumbent seldom refers matters to supervisor except for clarification of policy.

#### The Form

POSITION DESCRIPTION
DER-PERS-10 (Rev. 5/84)
State of Wisconsin
Department of Employment Relations
DIVISION OF PERSONNEL

IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ INSTRUCTIONS ON BACK OF LAST SHEET OF POSITION DESCRIPTION FORM. THIS IS VALUABLE INFORMATION.

- 1. **POSITION NUMBER** Internal employing unit numbering system. This is a way for the employing unit personnel representative to identify it's reclassification requests.
- CERTIFICATION/RECLASSIFICATION REQUEST NUMBER For reclassification: leave blank. Classified Human Resources will enter an assigned number, followed by the assigned Personnel Specialist's initials for that reclassification. For certification request: enter the certification request number appearing in the upper right-hand corner.
- AGENCY NUMBER The UW-Madison's number is 285 for all transactions.
- 4. NAME OF employee: For Certification Request actions: leave blank. For Reclassification actions: enter the last name first, then the first name and the middle initial.
- 5. **DEPARTMENT, UNIT, WORK ADDRESS** The first line should be "University of Wisconsin Madison". The second line should be the college or division and department.
- 6. CLASSIFICATION TITLE OF POSITION: For classification request action: the classification title should be identical to item 17 (Note: this is the "Requested Class on the Certification Request Form"). For Reclassification actions: it should be the position's present classification title.
- 7. **CLASS TITLE OPTION (TO BE FILLED IN BY)**: This is a generic title used to more specifically identify a position for recruitment, examination and certification or layoff when job analysis has shown that the special characters and qualifications of the position so necessitate.
- 8. **NAME AND CLASS OF FORMER INCUMBENT** Name and class of the last incumbent to fill the position.

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- 9. **AGENCY/WORKING TITLE OPTION** Working title of position, if different from classification title of position. This is the working title within the organization and does not have to be an official Civil Service Title.
- 10. **NAME AND CLASS OF EMPLOYEES PERFORMING SIMILAR DUTIES** If there are other jobs within the department or if you know of other jobs outside of the department that are similar, enter the incumbent's name and classification. Otherwise enter "None in department."
- 11. NAME AND CLASS OF THE FIRST-LINE SUPERVISOR Self explanatory.
- 12. FROM APPROXIMATELY WHAT DATE HAS THE employee PERFORMED THE WORK DESCRIBED BELOW? For Certification Request action: this can be left blank. For Reclassification action: the incumbent must have performed the permanently assigned duties at least 6 months, preferably longer.
- 13. **DOES THIS POSITION SUPERVISE SUBORDINATE employeeS IN PERMANENT POSITION?** If YES, complete a Supervisory Position Analysis form (DER-PERS 84)
- 14. POSITION SUMMARY PLEASE DESCRIBE BELOW THE MAJOR GOALS OF THIS POSITION The summary statement gives an overview of the position. It should summarize the goals of the position and describe the essential purpose of the job. The summary statement should indicate the degree of supervision, discretion and the level of responsibility or authority; describe the context in which the work is performed; organizational relationship and the physical location of the position. Perhaps it would be well to wait until Item 15 (describe the goals and work activities of this position) has been completed before writing the summary. If the Goals and Worker Activities are clear, concise and complete, then Item 14 can be merely a restatement of the Goals. The position summary should give the reader a quick overview of the duties and the level of responsibility of the position.

#### 15. DESCRIBE THE GOALS AND WORKER ACTIVITIES OF THIS POSITION

- a. **GOALS**: Describe the major achievements, outputs or results. List them in descending order of importance.
- b. **WORKER ACTIVITIES**: Under each goal, list the worker activities performed to meet that goal.
- c. **TIME** %: Include for each goal. If any major worker activity accounts for more than 10% of the whole job, the % should be specified.
- 16. SUPERVISORY SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY THE FIRST-LINE SUPERVISOR OF THIS POSITION See instructions on the back of the last page of the position description form. The supervisor's signature indicates that the above description is what the department wants the job to accomplish and how it wants it accomplished.
- 17. employee SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY THE INCUMBENT OF THIS POSITION If the employee is just starting on the job, his/her signature indicates an understanding that the above description is what the job is to be. If the employee has been on the job for some time, his/her signature indicates that the above description is an outline of what the job consists of.
- 18. **SIGNATURE OF PERSONNEL MANAGER/PERSONNEL REPRESENTATIVE** The signature and date are a required part of the position description.