

Human Resources: Position Description Writing Guide

A position description is a summary of the most important features of a job. In addition to duties and level of responsibility, a position description should include job specifications, which are the knowledge, skills and expertise normally required for competent performance in the job.

The position description should focus on the job itself and not the person who fills the job.

At WHOI, our position description template allows for a WHOI Title and a Working Title. The WHOI Title is the official job title on record at the Institution. Some jobs, however, may warrant a Working Title that assists with clarifying an individual's role at the Institution. Working Titles are typically used for jobs that are part of a more general career path. For example, an employee may be on the Administrative Professional Career Path at the level of Senior Administrative Assistant II. If the employee's duties are highly specialized, however, they may wish to use a Working Title such as "Training Coordinator."

Here are some pointers for supervisors, and managers to remember when creating position descriptions and titles:

- Avoid inflating position descriptions and titles. Doing so could result in confusion regarding the nature and level of work being performed as well as performance expectations.
- The job specifications (knowledge, skills and expertise) section of a position description should articulate the *minimum* qualifications for a *new hire*. When writing the job specifications, your objective should not be to describe incumbents.
- Avoid arbitrary education and experience requirements. If one of the minimum qualifications for a job is a Bachelor's Degree, you need to be able to show the relationship between that requirement and the job.
- Use clear and concise language.
- Use present tense, action verbs.
- Since technology, software, and vendors are subject to change, it is best to use generic terms rather than proprietary names.

The Human Resources Office is available to assist with writing position descriptions. The Position Questionnaire Form should be completed by the employee, supervisor and/or manager to provide necessary information. Position descriptions must be approved by the Department Chair or Senior Manager.

All new or updated position descriptions must be reviewed by the Director of Human Resources for benchmarking purposes.

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