

Guide to Preparing Competency-based Position Descriptions

COMPETENCY

POSITION DESCRIPTIONS



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INTRODUCTION

What is a position description?

A position description is a formal statement providing essential information about a position including functions, competencies, and qualifications. The position description serves as a critical document for attracting, screening and interviewing candidates and enables an employee to better understand what is expected to successfully accomplish the responsibilities of the position. Position descriptions are usually prepared by a Manager with the approval of the Department Head.

Why do we have position descriptions?

A position description serves six key functions:

1. Provides the incumbent an understanding of the primary accountabilities, duties and responsibilities they are expected to fulfill (what is expected of the incumbent),
2. Identifies the purpose of the position based on essential and non-essential functions, core competencies and position specific competencies (what is the purpose of this position),
3. Provides essential information for assigning the appropriate pay grade, position function and/or title for the position (how do we determine the grading and compensation for this position),
4. Assists in recruiting efforts for screening and interviewing (how we tell prospective candidates about the position).
5. Provides a means to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (ensures that people with disabilities are not excluded if they can perform the essential functions of the position, with reasonable accommodation).
6. Provides the basis for determining whether a position can be exempt from the requirement to pay overtime as prescribed under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

A competency-based position description focuses more on the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to successfully accomplish the responsibilities of the position than on just the responsibilities themselves.

Types of Position Descriptions

CORE: these descriptions are for positions found in more than one department at UMMS. These positions have the same functions and qualifications and are graded the same throughout UMMS.

UNIQUE: these position descriptions are specific to a department or require a very particular set of skills and experience.

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Writing a Competency-based position description

The UMMS Position Description template is available on the HR intranet under Human Resources/Forms. The Essential Responsibilities should be listed in order of importance with the percentage of time indicated. Before beginning to write a position description, spend some time compiling information and thinking about what the position entails

- DO NOT attempt to write a position description to “fit” a specific individual. A position description should be thought of as a business plan for a needed position within the context of the department’s structure.
- Use short, direct action verbs (selected from drop-down lists contained in the Essential and Nonessential sections of the position description).
- Keep sentences concise and clear.
- Essential functions should be grouped into categories that could include several specific responsibilities.

When should a position description be rewritten?

A position description should be rewritten when there are significant changes to the functions, competencies, and/or qualifications. Position descriptions should be reviewed on a periodic basis to determine whether they are still accurate and current.

Section by section instructions for completing the position description

UMMS has adopted a standard format for position descriptions. The sections included in the position description, a summary of their contents, and an example “screen shot” of each section follow.

Position Title, Position Code, Department Name, Etc.

- **Position Title** – Drop down list from which to select an existing position title or add a new title.
- **Position Code** – Automatically populates based on the title selected. For a new position title, will populate with “New Title”. The position code will be created by HR Compensation.
- **Department Name** – Drop down list with a selection of current department names. Choose “Various” if applicable to more than one Department.
- **L.U.** – Labor Union code, to be provided by HR Compensation.
- **Grade** – Will be provided by HR Compensation upon final review of the position description.
- **SBU** – Strategic Business Unit (School, Commonwealth Medicine, or MassBiologics). Choose “Various” if applicable to more than one SBU.
- **Manager/Non-Manager** – Drop down list from which to select either “Manager – has direct Reports” or “Individual Contributor – No direct reports”.
- **Position Summary** – This section consists of a few (generally less than five) concise sentences summarizing the main purpose of the position.
- **Supervision/Direction Received** – Identifies the person who will provide direct supervision to the employee.

Note – drafters cannot revise fields in the position description template that are shaded in grey.

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POSITION DESCRIPTION				
Position Title:	Position Code:	Department:	L.U.:	Grade:
Research Associate	MR2240	Cardiovascular Medicine		
SBU	SCHOOL			
Manager/Non Manager	Individual Contributor - No direct reports			
POSITION SUMMARY:				
Under the general supervision of the Principal Investigator, performs a variety of complex research experiments				
SUPERVISION/DIRECTION RECEIVED:				
Under the general supervision of the: Director or designee				

Essential Functions

Functions are groups of duties that constitute the distinct and major activities involved in the work performed. Drafters must assign an estimated percentage of time the employee will spend performing each function. Note that for Essential Functions, no specific function can be less than 5%.

Essential Functions are functions and duties that are critical to performing the position. “Essential functions” are those functions that the individual who holds the position must be able to perform independently or with the assistance of reasonable accommodation.

It is generally best to start with itemizing the functions that the position is expected to perform, answering the question of ‘what do I want this position to do?’ with concise, factual statements. These items then become the basis of the Essential Functions section. Analyze and determine estimated percentages of time spent on each essential function.

It is an essential function if:

- It is a critical function;
- The duty takes up more than 5% of the employee's time;
- Eliminating the duty fundamentally changes the position;
- Operations will be disrupted if the duty is not performed;
- Every incumbent in this position is required to perform the duty or responsibility;
- Prior incumbents in the position regularly performed the duty or responsibility.

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS:		
	Function	%
Conduct experiments		50
	conduct in-depth analysis of research experiments	
	perform complex experiments in the laboratory	
Analyze Data		30
	interprets data, forms conclusions, and plans next experiments	
	compiles and analyzes data and performs computations using software, spreadsheets, and graphing	

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Nonessential Functions

Next, consider the nonessential functions that will comprise a part of this position.

Nonessential functions are groups of duties that are not critical to performing the position. This means that the function could be reassigned to another employee without significantly changing the position. This category will include “other duties as assigned” to provide the supervisor with the flexibility to add functions or duties without revising the position description.

Example: Participates in departmental budget meetings in the absence of the supervisor.

Remember -- All remaining duties that take up less than 5% of the employee's time are considered "nonessential", which means that the function could be reassigned to another employee.

NONESENTIAL FUNCTIONS*:		
	Function	%
	Laboratory supplies	4
	maintains laboratory supplies and equipment	

Competencies

Competencies describe the skills, knowledge and attributes necessary to perform the position.

1. Skills – Abilities needed to execute position duties, such as software and computer proficiency, interpersonal skills, accounting skills, or specific laboratory techniques.
2. Knowledge – Areas of specialty or expertise; for example, nursing, finance, employment law, or history.
3. Attributes – Characteristics an employee must display in the position; for instance, initiative, collegiality, resourcefulness, or professionalism.

Knowledge, Skills, and Attributes needed to succeed in a position fit into two basic categories: “Core Competencies” and “Position Specific Competencies”.

- **Core Competencies** – These competencies are identified by UMMS leadership and should be demonstrated by all employees across the enterprise except for the Leadership/Management competency that is for managers only. UMMS Core competencies are listed below:
 - ACCOUNTABILITY
 - INITIATIVE
 - PROBLEM SOLVING/DECISION MAKING
 - QUANTITY/QUALITY of WORK
 - SERVICE ORIENTATION
 - DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Manager Only Core Competency:

- LEADERSHIP/MANAGEMENT

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Core Competencies:

COMPETENCIES:

PROBLEM SOLVING/DECISION MAKING
Identifies and analyzes problems weighing the relevance and accuracy of available information
Generates and evaluates alternative solutions and makes effective and timely decisions
Reviews the effects and implications of decisions and takes appropriate follow up actions
QUANTITY/QUALITY of WORK
Pays close attention to detail
Strives to achieve accuracy and consistency in all tasks
Organizes work to achieve maximum productivity
Actively applies strategies and tactics that routinely deliver results
Follows all safety rules, proactively works to prevent accidents, and encourages the use of sound judgment in order to comply with departmental and UMMS safety policies and procedures
Produces a consistently high volume of work that also meets quality standards

- **Position Specific Competencies** – In this section, the manager identifies three to five competencies that are unique to the position and necessary for the individual to successfully accomplish the position's functions. These competencies are specific to the position being considered and need to be demonstrated by people in those specific positions to be successful. There is a drop-down list of position specific competencies to choose from. You should pick up to three competencies that are most critical to performing the requirements of the position.

Examples:

- Attention to Detail - Is thorough when performing work and conscientious about attending to detail.
- Communications and Media - Knowledge of the production, communication and dissemination of information and ideas to inform and entertain via written, oral, and visual media.
- Computer Skills - Uses computers, software applications, databases, and automated systems to accomplish work.
- Project Management - Knowledge of the principles, methods, or tools for developing, scheduling, coordinating, and managing projects and resources, including monitoring and inspecting costs, work, and contractor performance.

Position Specific Competencies:
Attention to Detail - Is thorough when performing work and conscientious about attending to detail.
Written Communication- Writes in a clear, concise, organized, and convincing manner for the intended audience.
Dependability- Arrives on time to work, meetings and appointments. Adheres to schedule. Follows up on decisions, actions, and commitments.

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Physical Demands and Work Environment

Because an individual must be able to perform the essential functions of a position, with or without reasonable accommodation, it is important that the physical tasks associated with the essential functions be identified appropriately so that persons with disabilities can determine if any accommodation is necessary. There is a drop-down list of typical physical demands associated with positions. Please be sure that these physical demands are accurate and necessary to perform the position. Once you have chosen the appropriate physical demands, you will need to indicate the level of the activity. The drop-down list includes: "Frequent", "Occasional", or "Constant".

PHYSICAL DEMANDS AND WORK ENVIRONMENT:	Level
Reaching. Extending hand(s) and arm(s) in any direction.	Occasional
Standing. Particularly for sustained periods of time.	Frequent
The worker is required to function in narrow aisles or passageways.	Occasional
Walking. Moving about on foot to accomplish tasks, particularly for long distances or moving from one work site to another.	Constant
<i>Add additional details here:</i>	

Machines and Equipment Used

This is a list of machinery or equipment that is required to perform the essential duties of the position. There is a drop-down list of typical machines and equipment associated with positions. As mentioned above, please be sure that this listing is accurate and necessary to perform the position.

MACHINES AND EQUIPMENT USED:
Lab equipment
Telephone
Computer
<i>Add additional details here:</i>

Qualifications

All qualification statements must be specific, realistic, and defensible - clear, and demonstrably necessary to successful performance of the position.

From a practical standpoint, if position qualifications are unnecessarily high, they screen out people who are qualified to perform the work. This may make recruiting efforts more difficult and have the effect of driving up pay rates unnecessarily. Inflated requirements may also screen out a disproportionate number of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities, thus exposing UMMS to legal risks. Think carefully to be sure your minimum qualifications can be uniformly applied to all applicants.

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Qualifications Matrix

You can use the following matrix to prepare the qualifications for the position description.

	Minimally Required Identify those items that are minimally required to perform the essential duties of the role not what the current incumbent may possess. For example, if the position can be performed with a bachelor's degree and the incumbent has a master's degree, indicate bachelor's degree as the minimum educational requirement.	Preferred or Specialized These are not required to perform the basic functions of the role.
Education Formal education (e.g. High School Diploma, Bachelor's degree, licenses and/or certifications etc.)		
Experience Type or number of years of directly related work experience		

- Required Qualifications**

Required Qualifications are the list of education and years of experience required to successfully accomplish the functions of the position. Under this section, you should list only the "minimum" education and years of experience required to perform the position responsibilities.

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS:	
Education	Bachelor's Level Degree
<i>Add additional details here:</i>	Biological Sciences
Experience	1 - 2 years
<i>Add additional details here:</i>	

- Preferred Qualifications**

Unlike Required Qualifications, Preferred Qualifications are the list of education and years of experience that you "would like to have" for someone performing the position. When you think about Preferred Qualifications, you think about what the "ideal" candidate would have for education and experience, not necessarily the minimum need to perform the position responsibilities.

PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS:	
Education	Master's Level Degree
<i>Add additional details here:</i>	
Experience	No prior experience necessary
<i>Add additional details here:</i>	

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Signatures and Submission

Position descriptions should be forwarded to the Compensation Department after the Department Head has approved. You can forward the signed position description to the Compensation Department by clicking the "Submit Form" button. The Compensation Department will review the content of the description, will follow up with the department should they have any questions, and will also evaluate the description to determine the appropriate salary grade. Once evaluated and approved, the Compensation Department will return the approved position description to the originating Manager.

Notes:

The template allows you to "Save" the description and return to it for completion or editing.

The template has a "Spell Check" feature, which you should use to check the spelling of all text fields that you draft prior to submitting to Compensation.

SIGNATURES:		
Manager:		11/6/2017
Department Head:		11/6/2017
<div>Submit Form Print Form Save Form Check Spelling</div>		