

The Fundamentals of Position Descriptions

About the Position Description

Every position in the commonwealth should have an accurate Position Description (PD). The PD serves as the foundation for all aspects of human resources management because everything associated with a position is built upon the type and level of work assigned to the position. Without knowing the type and level of the work, we would not be able to determine pay, talent acquisition strategy, talent development needs, union representation, unemployment compensation, financial disclosure, or overtime allowances.

The importance of writing accurate position descriptions cannot be overstated and has become even more important under the new vacancy-based posting process for commonwealth employment. Vacancy-based posting enables us to focus on the position-specific requirements, which are described in the PD, and facilitates a more targeted recruitment and selection process. An updated PD is a critical component of the vacancy-based posting process and must be provided by the supervisor to proceed with classifying and posting a position.

Below, you will find FAQs and a list of fundamental steps to follow when writing position descriptions.

Position Description FAQs

What is a PD?	A PD is the supervisor's official written statement of a position's duties and responsibilities for each filled and vacant position under his/her supervision.
Who prepares the PD?	Supervisors are responsible for developing and maintaining PDs for the positions under their supervision. This involves accurately describing the duties and responsibilities of the position, and clearly indicating the level of decision making, position-specific requirements and experience, and essential functions of the position.
How are PDs used?	The PD has a variety of uses. The supervisor uses the PD to officially communicate the position's duties to the incumbent of the position, identify areas of overlapping responsibility, assess training needs, and review and explain the position requirements when interviewing candidates to fill a position. PDs are also used as the primary source of information when determining the classification of a position, to aid in reorganizations, and to determine how best to implement new work processes in the organization.
Where can a supervisor create, update, or view PDs?	To create or update PDs, and for further guidance, supervisors should go to http://www.occup.state.pa.us/StartPages/Start.asp . Additionally, within Supervisor Self Service in the SAP system, supervisors may select "My Organization" to view an organization chart and associated PDs.

Tips for Writing an Effective PD

STEP 1: Identify the Position's Purpose

Answer the question in a brief one or two sentence summary: "Why does this position exist?" Consider the main function of the position as well as how the position contributes to organizational objectives. "The purpose of this position is to..."

STEP 2: Describe the Duties Permanently Assigned

The description of duties is simply a list of the duties and responsibilities assigned to the position.

- Begin with the most important duties first, preferably providing the approximate percentage of time spent on each duty, as this provides a better understanding of the overall position.
- Describe each duty, beginning with an action verb (e.g., Develops operating procedures for office fiscal processes).
- Do not include temporary duties. If the permanent duties change, so does the PD.
- Include the following statement at the end: "Performs other related duties as required."

STEP 3: Indicate the Types and Levels of Decision-Making

Identify the types of decisions made by the incumbent of the position, as well as those decisions that must be referred to someone else.

- Consider the types of problems or issues that the employee has the authority to independently resolve, as well as those problems or issues that require direction from the supervisor or others, prior to moving forward.

STEP 4: Document Position-Specific Experience and Requirements

Identify any specific experience or requirements (i.e., licensure, registration, or certification) necessary to perform the functions of the position.

- Position-specific experience identifies specialized experience required for success in the position and aids in identifying the most qualified candidate when filling the position.
- Position-specific experience and requirements should be consistent with the description of duties and related to the body of work described by the job specification.
- Examples include experience using Java, experience working in an energy program, driver's license, etc.

STEP 5: Identify the Essential Functions of the Position

Identify critical duties assigned to the position that must be performed with or without a reasonable accommodation. This ensures compliance with the provisions of *The Americans With Disabilities Act* and commonwealth policy.

- Consider the answers to the following questions: "Does the function actually have to be performed?" and "Does the removal of that function fundamentally change the work of the position?"
- In addition, consider the amount of time spent performing the function, as this speaks to the criticality of performing these functions.
- Like the job duties, essential functions are to be written concisely, beginning with a verb, and should not be represented as knowledges, skills, or abilities (e.g., Analyzes statistical data).

STEP 6: Certification of the PD

The supervisor, employee, and reviewing officer individually acknowledge the PD and certify its accuracy.