

GUIDE TO WRITING

ADMINISTRATIVE & PROFESSIONAL

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

What is a Job Description?

A job description is a narrative document of factual information describing on the nature, scope and responsibilities of a job and the environment in which it operates. At SFU, the job description summarizes all of the responsibilities of a job and provides information on decision making, the type of supervision received and exercised, the minimum education and experience required to perform the work, any unusual working conditions under which the work is performed, and the organizational structure in which the job operates.

What are the uses of Job Descriptions?

Job descriptions are used in many areas of human resource planning. For compensation purposes, they are used to place a value on jobs through external salary surveys and internal comparison reviews to determine equitable classifications and pay levels throughout the University. They may also be used in organizational planning, career planning, identifying training and development needs, and in setting individual goals and objectives for performance evaluation purposes. Job descriptions are a valuable aid to employees to communicate and clarify roles and responsibilities.

To be used effectively for any of these purposes, it is essential that job descriptions are factual, concise, complete, unambiguous, and written in a uniform style and format.

General Instructions

Before writing a job description review each section of the job description form and use the Glossary of Job Description Verbs to assist in writing responsibility statements.

Some ***important*** considerations before writing a job description are:

- Focus on job requirements, not the person performing the job
- Describe the job as it is now, not how it may be in the future
- Describe only the ongoing and/or continuing responsibilities of the job
- Try to describe the work of the job for someone not be familiar with the work
- Use language that is gender neutral and commonly understood
- Make a list of duties, group duties into similar work lists (e.g., budget related duty list, supervisory related duty list, operational related duty list, etc.) and then write broad responsibility statements covering each work group list that describe WHAT (using an action verb) work is done, HOW (by.....) the work is done, and WHY (to accomplish what) the work is done
- Remember, normally a job has no more than 10 broad responsibility statements
- Use common action verbs (See Glossary of Job Description Verbs) to begin each broad responsibility statement
- Use gender and culturally neutral language to describe the work
- Do not understate or overstate work requirements
- Consider adding a generic statement - "Performs other related duties and responsibilities consistent with the classification of the position" as an additional responsibility statement
- Avoid using technical terms, acronyms or abbreviations

Administrative & Professional Job Description Form

The Simon Fraser University Administrative & Professional job description form contains the following sections:

- A. Identification
- B. Position Summary
- C. Duties and Responsibilities
- D. Decision Making
- E. Supervision Exercised
- F. Supervision Received
- G. Entrance Qualifications
- H. Unusual Working Conditions
- I. Organizational Relationships
- J. Approvals

A. Identification

The purpose of this section is to identify the job within the University, the author of the description, and the date it was completed. The information requested is straightforward.

B. Position Summary

This is a brief summary of the primary function and purpose of the position. The purpose of this section is to provide information at a glance on the type and level of work performed. Complete this section after you have completed the Duties & Responsibilities section. You can simply paste the WHAT section of each important broad responsibility statement to formulate a summary of the work of the job.

C. Duties & Responsibilities

This is the most important section of the job description. This is where you list the broad responsibility statements and the requisite amount of time (projected over an annual period) spent performing each responsibility. Try to describe each broad responsibility statement with an action verb (see the Glossary of Job Description Verbs) to say what is done, how it is done, and why it is done.

The following table may be helpful in determining percentages of time involved:

1/2 hour per day is 7%	1/2 day per week is 10%
1 hour per day is 14%	1 week per year is 2%
1 hour per week is 3%	1 day per month is 5%

D. Decision Making

The purpose of this section is to provide information on the most important decisions an employee can make in the course of doing their job and the type of decisions that should be referred to their supervisor.

The following examples are designed to assist you in describing decisions made independently and those which may be referred to the supervisor:

Examples of the most important decisions the employee is expected to make:

- Makes decisions regarding how to interpret and apply academic and administrative policies
- Makes decisions to approved budgeted expenses
- Makes decisions on what capital equipment to recommend for purchase
- Makes decisions to interview and hire staff, evaluate staff performance, initiate corrective action, and handle grievances to step 2

Examples of decisions the incumbent would refer to his/her supervisor:

- Exceptions to academic and administrative policies
- Approval of non budgeted expenses
- Approval of capital purchases
- Grievances at step 2, serious staff performance issues, termination of employment

E. Supervision Exercised

This section should identify the number of continuing full-time equivalent positions for which the employee is the direct supervisor. It should also identify the total number of continuing full-time equivalent jobs reporting through subordinate supervisors for which the employee is responsible. A footnote should also be included to address other supervision which may be applicable (e.g., for volunteer, grant funded, student, temporary, contract) for other types of employment relationships.

F. Supervision Received

The purpose of this section is to provide information on the type of supervision provided to the employee. In writing the description consider the following factors:

- How often is work reviewed with the supervisor?
- Is the incumbent expected to report on the details of what he/she is doing?
- How much and what type of advice or assistance is provided on how to accomplish tasks?
- Is the position provided with general objectives which must be met with little or no assistance?
- Are the results of the work always and/or rarely checked before they are approved?

Definitions:

Works Under Close Supervision: Works in accordance with established procedures and well defined instructions. Details of work are checked for accuracy.

Works Under General Supervision: The details of tasks are usually left to the employee as long as established procedures are followed. Most assignments are completed independently.

Works Under Direction: Works to accomplish specific objectives. There are frequent consultations with the supervisor on phases of work, but not on specific details.

Works Under General Direction: Establishes own work procedures and performance standards to achieve general objectives. Overall results are subject to review but little or no input is received on details.

Works Under Administrative Direction: Works within broad guidelines and objectives. Structures own work unit and allocates work to subordinates without reference to supervisor.

Examples: **Close Supervision:** receives non-routine assignments from supervisor with clear instructions and any details are reviewed before the work is undertaken. The supervisor checks non-routine work when it is completed.

Direction: receives assignments from supervisor and discusses objectives. Details and procedures are determined by the incumbent and overall results of work are subject to review. On occasion, initiates own projects to meet general objectives set by the supervisor.

G. Entrance Qualifications

When completing this section, think of the requirements of the job and not an employee's personal qualifications.

- Do not include qualifications that may be "preferred or assets" because they are not **REQUIRED** to do the work.
- Formal qualifications, experience, and skills should be the **MINIMUM, REQUIRED, and DIRECTLY RELATED** to the responsibilities to enable an employee to satisfactorily perform the work, common to other jobs requiring characteristically similar work, defensible, and measurable through testing and/or interviewing
- Include "OR an equivalent combination of education, training and education" after any formal educational requirement or after the formal educational requirement and years of experience unless the work could not be performed without these qualifications. An equivalent combination may not be appropriate where a professional designation or registration is required by law or licensing governing body.
- Include any special requirements such as access to a motor vehicle and valid driver's license if appropriate
- Ensure any unusual working conditions such as an ability to work flexible work hours involving some evening and weekend work, be on call and able to return to work after normal working hours, travel within or outside the lower mainland, etc. is present if applicable
- Avoid using technical terms, acronyms or abbreviations
- Try rephrasing organization related qualifications and/or skills (e.g., experience in the use of the SIMS registration system rephrased to experience in the use of enterprise student information systems; experience in the use of Access for Windows, Excel, File maker rephrased to experience in the use of a variety of word-processing, database, and spreadsheet applications such as ...) to avoid limiting your pool of potentially qualified applicants that could easily adapt and learn SFU specific tools

H. Unusual Working Conditions

Use this section to refer to uncommon conditions under which the work of the position is performed such as a requirement to be on call and return to work outside normal working hours, a need to travel outside the lower mainland to perform work, a need to work in inclement weather conditions, etc.

I. Organizational Relationships

This section is straightforward. Simply note the applicable reporting structure in the unit.

J. Approvals

Once the job description is complete, it is a good idea to review the description with the employee (if there is one) to ensure nothing has been overlooked and the employee understands the content of the description. The completed form should then be approved by the immediate supervisor (and next administrative level/immediate supervisor's supervisor if applicable).

APPENDIX A

<i>HOW TO WRITE A BROAD RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT</i> <i>Sample Statement for a Purchasing Job</i>			
<i>The Four Basic Requirements</i>	<i>What To Do</i>	<i>A Typical Statement Broken Down</i>	<i>Notes and Suggestions</i>
<i>A. Start with a verb</i>	<i>Eliminate all unnecessary words by starting with an action verb.</i>	<i>Maintains...</i>	<i>Use a verb to appropriately describe the level of responsibility associated with the work.</i>
<i>B. Tell What</i>	<i>Tell "what" is done. (This is an important part of the sentence. In general terms, it describes the nature of the responsibility.)</i>	<i>frequent contact with existing or potential suppliers...</i>	<i>If the sentence ended here the information would be incomplete and would not convey the associated level of responsibility.</i>
<i>C. Tell How</i>	<i>Tell "how" the work is done. (This conveys a level of responsibility).</i>	<i>by telephone, letters ,and site visits...</i>	<i>The addition of "how" an activity is carried out defines the extent of the individual's involvement in the activity.</i>
<i>D. Tell Why</i>	<i>Tell "why" it is done. (This further qualifies the activity by showing the relative importance of the activity).</i>	<i>to expedite the delivery of purchased material and stay informed of developments in the field of purchasing scientific equipment and supplies.</i>	<i>The addition of "why" an activity is done defines the objective for doing the work.</i>

You may make several drafts before finalizing the job description. Please contact your Human Resources Advisor if you would like assistance.