

Writing Effective Position Descriptions

(Second article in a series on position classification.)

The most important document you write, as a public employee, may be your position description. Management uses your position description to:

1. decide your job classification,
2. determine your job assignments,
3. form the basis for your performance evaluation report,
4. weigh your experience and other qualifications when you apply for a promotion, and
5. prove the job-relatedness (validity) of any decision they make about you.

Your position description and descriptions of other positions in your job class are also used when:

1. making salary range decisions,
2. developing job class specifications,
3. making changes to your existing job class, and
4. creating new job classes.

In July 2000, the Municipality revised its job description form, doing away with the forms P1 and P2 and creating the combined Position Description (PD) form. You can retrieve this form through your Municipality Microsoft Outlook account.

You (the employee) provide much of the information for the PD. In most cases, you will be asked to provide or certify the accuracy of the duties and responsibilities section of the PD (item #14). This is the heart of the PD and should be completed thoroughly and accurately. A reviewer should be able to read this section and have a complete picture of you doing your job.

Tips for writing effective duty statements:

1. Begin with describing the **action** you take to do each important task. Look at the following two duty statements and choose the one that is more effective:
 - a. *Responsible for handling departmental mail.*
 - b. *Receives, sorts, and distributes approximately 500 pieces of mail daily for Department XYZ.*

The second statement is better. It tells what the employee actually does.

2. Describe the **impact** of the duty – those who benefit when the duty is properly performed. Let's continue with our mail duty statement.

...This mail is delivered within building 534 to approximately fifty employees...

3. Describe the job **context** and **conditions**. What's it like for you as you perform this task?

...on three floors using a mail cart and freight elevator. On average, mail pieces weigh less than one pound, but can infrequently weigh up to forty pounds (1-2 pieces per week). The incumbent performs this duty alone under limited supervision.

4. Describe the **knowledge** required for you to perform the duty.

...The incumbent must follow U.S. Postal Service regulations and department rules for receiving and delivering mail. The incumbent must know how to screen all mail for signs of tampering, explosives, or other hazardous contents.

How much detail should you include?

It depends on the complexity of the task and the nature of the task-related factors. Here are some things to consider as you decide how much detail is needed:

1. Are you being asked to write the entire PD or just the duties and responsibilities section? Can you count on your supervisor to include all of the relevant details in the other parts of the PD?
2. Who will be using the completed PD? Beside yourself and your supervisor, personnel specialists and senior managers who make classification and hiring decisions about your position will review your PD. Can these people do your job? Do they know your job as well as you? Probably not. You should provide enough detail, skipping jargon and complex terms, to give these people a clear picture of your job.

Your description of your duties and responsibilities should include information about each relevant classification factor. Remember the nine classification factors from our previous article? They are:

1. Knowledge
2. Supervisory Controls
3. Guidelines
4. Complexity
5. Scope and Effect
6. Personal Contacts
7. Purpose of Contacts
8. Physical Demands
9. Work Environment

You should re-read the previous classification article before writing your PD. If you do not have a copy, or if you have questions about this article, contact Hank Wiedle, AMEA Labor Relations Specialist, at wiedle@acsalaska.net.