

Guidance: NatSci Template – Position Description

A position description contains the following components: position title, position purpose, assigned scope, major duties and responsibilities, knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), position duties, qualifications, working direction, and interfaces. Content and formatting should follow the guidelines below.

Internal Title & MSU Classification

Each MSU employee holds an MSU HR Title commensurate with an MSU HR classification. In addition, the unit could use an internal title. Internal titles often describe the role's characteristic duties. For example, an employee classified as an “Administrative Business Professional (APA 12)” might have an internal title of “Business Manager”.

Purpose

The Position Purpose provides a high-level overview of the position, level, and scope of responsibility, consisting of three or four sentences providing a basic understanding, the “bird’s eye view” of the position. A concise summary of “why the position exists?”

Assigned Scope

These one or two bullet points address the level of work and the group(s)/department(s) the position supports.

Responsibilities

This section describes the responsibilities assigned to the position, also referred to as the essential functions. They describe the fundamental nature of the position, which occupies a large proportion of the employee’s time. *Do not cut and paste essential characteristics of the MSU Classification into the Major Duties and Responsibilities.* Some items to consider:

- List position duties that reflect the position requirements and ensure they are not based upon the capabilities of any one individual (e.g., record keeping, documentation, training, etc.).
- Focus on the outcome of tasks; include explanatory phrases that tell why, how, where, or how often the tasks and duties are performed.
- Identify areas of direct or indirect accountability.
- Reference areas of decision-making, where one will influence or impact.
- Describe the level and type of budgetary or financial responsibilities.
- Describe the nature of the contact, the people contacted, and the extent to which the incumbent will interact with others within and outside of the University.

If applicable, also address the **type of supervisory responsibility** that is expected from this position. Detail the extent of the position’s authority to hire, discipline, terminate, assign work, train, and evaluate the performance of subordinates. This can be either a separate position duty or noted in other position duties as appropriate. The following lists various levels of supervision:

- Provide direction to other individuals.
- Supervises, hires, trains, provides work direction, and problem-solving assistance for student workers. Also oversees the daily operations of other staff.
- Supervises staff, including hiring, scheduling, and assigning work, reviewing performance, and recommending salary increases, promotions, transfers, demotions, or terminations.
- Manages others through subordinate supervisors.

The position duties should be listed in accordance to their **importance and/or frequency** which they are performed. They are typically presented in a bulleted or numbered format, consisting of approximately 4-8 separate duties, with each one assigned a “percent of time” (adding to 100%) which reflects the estimated time an employee will spend over a year. Duties that require less than 5 percent of time should be combined with other duties or removed from the position description. The following chart will assist you in estimating percent of time:

Percentage	Week	Year
5 percent	2 hours	2 ½ weeks
10 percent	4 hours	5 weeks
15 percent	6 hours	1 ½ month
20 percent	8 hours	2 ½ months
25 percent	10 hours	3 months

Major Duties and responsibilities typically begin with an action verb. For example, “Assists with answering calls”, “Creates detailed diagrams”, or “Manages inventory systems”. The final bullet in the list is a catch-all and should read “Performs other duties as required or assigned, which are reasonably within the scope of the duties in this position classification. [5%]”.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs)

This section lists special qualifications and unique requirements needed to successfully meet and perform the major responsibilities of the position.

Knowledge is the comprehension of a body of information acquired by education and experience.

In stating required knowledge, include the level or depth of knowledge required for entry into the position. The following definitions should be helpful:

Working knowledge: sufficient familiarity with the subject to know basic principles and terminology and to understand and solve simple problems.

General knowledge: sufficient knowledge of a field to perform most work in normal situations. The work calls for comprehension of standard situations and includes knowledge of most of the significant aspects of the subject.

Thorough knowledge: advanced knowledge of the subject matter. The work calls for sufficient comprehension of the subject area to solve unusual as well as common work problems, to be able to advise on technical matters and to serve as a resource on the subject for others in the organization.

Comprehensive knowledge: requires complete mastery and understanding of the subject. This term should be used sparingly and only for unusually exacting or responsible positions required to originate hypotheses, concepts, or approaches.

Skills are present and observable competencies to perform a learned activity. Skills can be readily measured, for example, the skills required to proficiently manipulate data may be a skill in computation using decimals and/or a skill in editing for transposed numbers, etc.

Abilities are the power to perform an observable activity at the present time. This means that abilities have been evidenced through activities or behaviors that are similar to those required in the position, e.g., the ability to plan and organize work.

Qualifications

This section provides details about the minimum level of education, experience, or equivalent that is necessary to qualify to perform the responsibilities of the role.

MSU Required: Text is to be taken verbatim from the MSU Classification. No changes are allowed.

Unit Required: Qualifications must align with MSU Classification requirements, but may specify a specific degree or type of experience required by the unit. This helps narrow down classifications that have very broad qualifications.

Unit Desired: Higher qualifications or additional experience can be listed in this section. For example, the MSU classification requires a bachelor's degree, but the unit would prefer a master's degree.

Work Direction and Interfaces

This section designates who the position reports to. It also specifies who the position interfaces with across the organization and outside (vendors, external stakeholders, and other partners).

Tips for Writing Position Descriptions

- Write in a concise and direct style.
- Always use simpler words rather than the complicated ones; keep sentence structure as simple as possible. It will cut verbiage, shorten your description, and enhance understanding.
- Use descriptive action verbs in the present tense (for example, writes, operates, or performs).
- Avoid abbreviations and acronyms. Other people reading the position description may not be familiar with them. If abbreviations and acronyms are necessary, define them the first time you use them.
- Don't use ambiguous terms. If you use terms such as “assists, handles, and performs,” describe “how” the position assists, handles, or performs. Using the word “by” and then detailing the processes, tasks, or operations performed will usually clarify the ambiguity.
- Avoid gender-specific language, such as “He manages” and “She is responsible for.”
- Focus on essential activities; omit trivial duties and occasional tasks.
- Avoid referencing other employees' names; instead, refer to the position title or department.
- Only include currently assigned duties. Do not include potential future duties and eliminate any duties no longer required.