

## What is a position description?

**A position description is an agreed, written statement of tasks, duties and responsibilities required to be undertaken by the occupant of a particular position.**

At a minimum, a position description (PD) should provide an outline of duties. What follows is an outline of what a desirable PD should contain.

A position description should be an agreed document between the position occupant and the relevant supervisor/manager.

- The PD should relate to the position and not be tailored to the person
- If the job changes over time, the PD should be amended to reflect those changes.

The position description is the essential tool used to compare the descriptors in your award or agreement with your individual classification level.

A position description is written for a specific job and mutually agreed by the incumbent and the supervisor/manager. It is very important that it portrays an accurate and complete picture of responsibilities and duties of the position and does not contain vague descriptions that could describe a variety of positions within the organisation.

### How the ASU can help

The ASU provides advice and information to members regarding workplace rights and obligations. ASU members can contact their State ASU office for more information. If required the ASU provides members with individual representation.

To obtain the contact details of your local ASU Branch visit the ASU national website [www.asu.asn.au](http://www.asu.asn.au) or contact the JSA National Project Coordinator on (03) 9342 1400 or [help@employmentservicesunion.org.au](mailto:help@employmentservicesunion.org.au)

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### A position description should include

#### POSITION OBJECTIVES

- Why the position exists
- How the position meets the section or department's objectives and the organisation's objectives
- Purpose of the position
- The main role and duties of the position
- May contain elements of a duty statement

#### REQUIREMENTS FOR THE JOB

(that are needed or essential for the job to be done effectively)

- Skills
- Knowledge
- Qualifications
- Experience
- Training

#### KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Main areas of responsibility of the job that are written as actions (they start with a verb) and described succinctly and precisely

#### ORGANISATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Who does the position report to?
- Who reports to the position?
- Who does the position liaise with?

#### EXTENT OF AUTHORITY

- Limits and areas of input in decision making

If you don't have a position description or your existing PD does not truly reflect the current duties and responsibilities of your position, talk to your supervisor and start the ball rolling. If the ball does not roll, talk to your ASU Delegate, Organiser or contact the ASU.

# A GUIDE ON HOW TO WRITE A POSITION DESCRIPTION

## MODEL POSITION DESCRIPTION

1. **TITLE:** *(job title)*
2. **STREAM:** *(Administrative/Client Services etc)*
3. **LEVEL:** *(this will be the current classification of the position)*
4. **DEPARTMENT:** *(which department and section of the organisation if applicable)*
5. **POSITION OBJECTIVES:**
  - (a) *Why the position exists.*
  - (b) *How the position meets the section's objectives and the organisation's objectives*
  - (c) *The main role and duties of the position (these will be the key elements of your job eg supervising other employees, cash receipting, other specific duties.*
6. **REQUIREMENTS OF THE JOB:**

*Requirements of the job should be taken from the objectives of the position but should be expanded.  
This can be done using terminology in your award or agreement.*

  - (a) *Skills (eg basic keyboard skills, stenographic, supervisory etc)*
  - (b) *Knowledge (eg: understanding of organisation's structure, statutory requirements etc.)*
  - (c) *Experience and/or qualifications (eg: associate diploma with 2 years experience)*
  - (d) *Training (eg: external and internal training in the use and operation of the organisation's computer system etc.)*
7. **KEY RESPONSIBILITIES:**

*Take from the objectives of the position and expand on these using appropriate terminology for each key element.  
e.g. process all incoming calls in an efficient, effective, courteous manner, assist members of the public etc.*
8. **ORGANISATIONAL RELATIONSHIP:**

*List, who does the position report to, who reports to the position and who does the position liaise with.  
(Use the agreed organisational flow chart to determine which positions report to whom)*
9. **EXTENT OF AUTHORITY:**

*Use key elements from your responsibilities eg. what is the extent of your use of discretion when dealing with complaints and enquiries*
10. **AUTHORISATION OF POSITION DESCRIPTION**

**PREPARED BY:**  
**DATE ISSUED:**  
**SUPERVISOR:**  
**OCCUPANT:**  
**APPROVED BY:**

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### GENERAL

**AGREED:** This means that the PD is signed by both the member and their supervisor manager.

**CURRENT:** This means that the PD is up to date and contains information that reflects the duties that the member is doing at the present.

**INCREMENTS:** Movement within a level which occurs each year either automatically or through annual appraisal.

**POSITION DESCRIPTION:** This is the document that describes the duties and responsibilities of a person's job.

**RECLASSIFICATION:** Movement from one level to another that occurs as a result of changes in job descriptions/duties / responsibilities. (Reclassification can be appealed).

### DESCRIPTION OF WORK

**ACTION:** Smallest component of work, eg. opening a filing cabinet.

**ACTIVITY:** Group of related tasks which may well constitute a significant part of a function, eg. maintain a filing system.

**FUNCTION:** A collection of activities which may constitute the whole or part of a work area.

**TASK:** Unit of work (group of actions) forming a consistent or significant part of an activity.

**WORK AREA:** The area, in which the employee works, be it a function / section / department or whole organisation.

### DEFINITIONS

**APPLY:** Administer, put to practical use, use as relative or suitable, employ for a particular purpose.

**ASSIST:** To help, to give support, to lend aid.

**BASIC:** Fundamental, uncomplicated.

### COMPLEX:

*Limited Complexity* - relates to work which involves the application of established principles, practices and procedures. General, actions and responses which can be readily identified and repeated from previous experience.

*Very Complex* - relates to the application of a comprehensive knowledge of established practices and procedures as they affect all aspects of the range of operations, or an in-depth knowledge of the operation. Generally responses require a high level of analytical skills with the work drawing together a range of aspects and the method selected from a range of genuine alternatives.

**CONTRIBUTE:** Help to bring about, supply.

**CONTROL:** To exercise directing, guiding or restraining power over, to check or regulate, to keep within limits.

**COORDINATE:** To facilitate or oversee the undertaking of tasks in order that a or a series of tasks can be completed.

**CRITICAL:** An indicator that a component, issue or decision is fundamental to subsequent actions, considerations and decisions, crucial.

### DIRECTION:

*Close Direction:* Employee receives detailed instruction on job requirements, methods to be adopted on unusual or difficult features. Employee's work is subject to checking at all stages.

*Regular Direction:* Employee receives instruction on job requirements, methods to be adopted and unusual or difficult features. Employees's work is subject to progress checking.

*General Direction:* Employee receives general instructions usually covering only the broader aspects of the work. In some situations detailed instructions may be necessary. The work of experienced and competent officers is subject to final checking and, only as required, progress checking.

*Limited Direction:* Employee receives limited instructions which clearly state objectives. Employee has significant degree of competence and experience and is able to achieve the objective by conforming to instructions but with minimal guidance.

*Broad Direction:* Employee normally receives instructions in the form of broadly stated objectives. Extensive knowledge and experience enables employee to contribute to the determination of goals and objectives.

**DEVELOP:** Create, improve on, expand.

**DISCIPLINE:** An identified occupation, eg. environmental health, librarian etc.

**ELEMENT:** Component, part of.

**ELEMENTARY:** Rudiments of first principles, in the first stages, fundamental.

**ENFORCEMENT:** Act of enforcing – giving effect to.

**ESTABLISH:** To set up, to institute, to place on a firm basis.

**EXERCISE:** To bring to bear or employ actively (as in exercising authority or influence)

### EXPERIENCE:

*Experienced:* To have worked in a relevant field for sufficient time to have sufficient understanding of the basic principles of the discipline, to have ability to successfully undertake the majority of normal requirements of the work situation and to have a good appreciation of the activities involved.

*Considerable Experience:* To have worked in a relevant field for sufficient time to ensure competence or undertake and advise on a full range of normal requirements of the work situation and to have the ability to perform a variety of activities involving special, unusual or complex features of work.

*Extensive Experience :* To have worked in a relevant field for sufficient time to ensure ability to control and advise on the full range of activities and to be expert in terms of a wide variety of special, unusual or complex features of the work.

**EXTENSIVE:** Large, far reaching, comprehensive.

**FACILITATE:** To oversee an activity or range of activities.

**FORMULATE:** To develop, to devise a statement of policy or procedures.

**FUNCTION:** A collection of activities which may constitute the whole or part of a work area.

**GRADUATE:** Degree holder

**GUIDANCE:** Assistance and or providing advice.

**IDENTIFY:** To name, label or highlight an item or activity.

**IMPLEMENT:** To carry out, to perform acts essential to the execution of a plan or programme, to give effect to.

## What is a position description?

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS, continued

**INITIATE:** To originate, to introduce in the first instance, to cause or bring to pass by original act, as in organising a plan, policy or procedure.

**INNOVATIVE:** New and different. An action, person or object that is able to respond to changing requirements.

**INSTRUCTION:** Directions given.

**INTERPRET:** To clarify or explain, translate.  
Judgment: Application of an amalgam of knowledge and experience to derive appropriate decisions.

**KNOWLEDGE:** An understanding of techniques, principles, procedures and practices gained through either study or through experience gained over time.

*Developing Knowledge* - a learning process which will lead to enhanced knowledge.

*Working Knowledge* - sufficient knowledge to perform function.

*Sound Knowledge* - well founded, reliable.

*Comprehensive Knowledge* - Knowledge which is wide ranging and in-depth.

*Detailed/Thorough Knowledge* - Complete.

**MAINTAIN:** To keep possession of, to hold or keep in any condition, to keep up-to-date or current, as to maintain records.

**MAJOR:** Greater, more important.

**MANAGE:** To control, to exercise control or command, To have direct working responsible for direction, quality outcome and operations of a particular task or a unit of workers for example a department.

**MANAGEMENT:** The technique or practice of managing or controlling.

**MINOR:** Smaller, subordinate.

**MODERATE:** To keep within reasonable bounds, measured, not large, medium, not excessive.

**MONITOR:** Check on a regular basis.

**NEGOTIATE:** To confer with others with a view to reaching agreement.

**NOVEL:** Something that is new or an extension of an application or theoretical principle beyond its normally accepted range, i.e. creative research or the introduction of new technology.

**OBJECTIVE:** Goal or, purpose.

**OPERATE:** To conduct or perform a group of activities or functions. To utilise a piece of machinery.

**OPERATION:** An action or series of actions done to produce a particular result.

**OPERATIONAL:** In working order and ready to use.

*Operational Responsibility* – answerable for the day to day running.

**OVERSIGHT:** To look after, guide the work of others, to allocate work without quality/quantity control.

**PERFORM:** To carry out, to execute some action, to carry out to the finish, to accomplish.

**PRACTICE:** Habitual action, method.

**PREPARE:** To make ready for a particular purpose.

**PROCESS:** Course of action, method of operation, to be subject to some special treatment, to handle in accordance with a prescribed procedure, as in processing work or requisition.

**PROFESSIONAL:** Requires in its application levels of theoretical knowledge which have been attained only through tertiary study. To met the standards of the industry.

**PROGRAMME:** A specially arranged selection of things to be done, a plan, schedule or procedure, to arrange or work out a sequence of operations to be performed.

**PROJECT:** A proposal, scheme or design, detailed study of a particular subject.

**PROVIDE:** To supply for use, to furnish, to take precautionary measures in view of possible need.

**REGULATORY:** To control, to rule.

**RESPONSIBLE:** Liable to be called to account, answerable, accountable for actions.

**REVIEW:** To rework in order to correct or improve, to make a new, to examine with a view to improve or provide a more up to date version.

**ROUTINE:** Regular course of procedure, unvarying performance of certain acts, performed by rule.

**SIGNIFICANT:** Noteworthy, of considerable amount of effect or importance.

**SOUND DISCIPLINE/KNOWLEDGE:** Extensive, reliable, substantial.

**SUPERVISION:** To direct, to inspect with authority, to guide and instruct with immediate responsibility for the purpose of performance, to superintend, to lead, to allocate work and check against given standards (test for supervision, i.e. Who do employees report to when sick, matters of prioritising), disciplinary matters, responsibility for work output, RDO, annual and sick leave approval, roster changes, accountable for function of section, conduct performance appraisal, organise replacement staff, interview panel involvement.

*Direct Supervision* - One on one supervision. Have responsibility to oversee/, monitor the quality and quantity of staff's daily work.

*Regular Supervision* - Systematic provision of supervision

*General Supervision* - Ongoing, not going into detail.

*Full Supervision* – To control the quality of work in light of the concepts underlying the process within which the subordinate employee functions.

**STRAIGHTFORWARD:** Relates to work which is clear-cut and directly aligned with the employee's experience and training.

**SUBSTANTIAL:** To provide ample quantity, ample or considerable amount.

**SUPPORT:** To uphold to contribute to the success of, to form a secondary part which assists.

**TECHNICAL OVERSIGHT:** To look at, look after the technical aspect of an activity / function.

**UNDERLYING:** Fundamental, to form the basis or foundation.

**UTILISE:** To make use of.

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