

# Writing PD Duty Statements

The position description (PD) is a fundamental tool for many human resource functions including classification and pay, recruitment and performance management. An accurate, up-to-date, well-written PD ensures appropriate allocation to a job class, supports a supervisor's legally defensible hiring practices and can assist supervisors and incumbents in clearly communicating and understanding performance expectations.

## (1) When does a position description have to be revised?

The Division of Personnel & Labor Relations requires updated PDs on an as-needed basis. PDs do not have to be updated in any set interval. Update a PD when one or more of the following has occurred:

- The supervisory authority assigned to the position is changed or modified (e.g., direct report positions added, changed, deleted, etc.)
- A new primary duty (the main duty for which the position exists to perform) has been assigned
- The position's focus has shifted (e.g., responsibility shifts from reviewing a form for completeness to approving the action requested on the form, OR the position supports Program B while its PD indicates it supports Program A)
- The mission, goals, or objectives of the position, or the program the position supports is changed or modified (e.g., new statutory mandates alter the program function, department executive team establishes new goals or mission that impacts the work performed by the position in question)
- Essential duties have been added, deleted, or modified
- The physical requirement and potential hazards section has been modified. This information is necessary to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and OSHA bloodborne pathogens standards.

## (2) Where do I find the PD form?

The position description form is located in the Online Position Description (OPD) system. Access the PD form by logging into OPD at: <https://dop.state.ak.us/opd>

## (3) Who is responsible for writing a position description?

At its best, PD writing is a collaborative effort between the supervisor and the incumbent of the position. It is based on discussions about assigned duties and responsibilities. A PD form can be completed by the incumbent or the supervisor.

Typically, when the incumbent writes the PD, he/she completes all fields in the form based

on the discussions mentioned earlier. The supervisor then reviews and edits the form. Some agencies specify that PDs must pass through the division's administrative manager or other designee for a final review, and then the document is routed for division approval (typically the division director). Next, the PD is forwarded for department review and approval (typically the Administrative Services Director) and then submitted to the Division of Personnel for processing.

(4) Where do I describe the position's duties?

Section 2.2 is the heart of the OPD form and is comprised of a concise description of the position's assigned duties.

(5) How do I figure out which duties to describe in the PD?

Focus on regular, recurrent responsibilities. What 3-5 major functional areas does the job cover? In a draft Word document, make a **bulleted list** of those functional areas and reorder them from most important to least important.

Example:

- Management
- Supervision
- Classification Studies
- Position Allocations

(6) What should I include in the description of duties?

First, flesh out the bulleted list by itemizing the specific tasks performed within each functional area. Add enough detail to each for the description to be clear and meaningful. These may either be in a narrative or itemized list format.

Eliminate anything that does not add to the clarity of the description, or that sounds more like a procedure manual than a description of work. Use a separate paragraph/list for each major functional area assigned (to be copied and pasted into the OPD version once the draft is finished). Double-check – is it complete? Have you left out any important key duties?

Examples:

- **Management**  
In consultation with the Classification Manager (PCN 022033) and the Allocation Supervisors (PCNs 065031 and 124300) determine the allocation of staff resources within the Classification Section to meet the needs of the statewide classification function. Assess current methods and procedures and approve or effectively recommend changes to improved efficiency. Determine how unique and sensitive issues will be resolved. Provide assistance and guidance to department executives and managers. Identify and resolve problems or special needs related to reorganizations and new programs and offer solutions consistent with the merit system. Work collaboratively with other Division of Personnel section managers and staff to provide efficient and effective human resource services to executive branch agencies. Develop and maintain good working relationships with Commissioners,

Division Directors, managers and supervisors in all agencies. Work closely with the Classification Manager and Allocation Supervisors to identify and resolve issues related to classification and pay.

- **Supervision**

Take action regarding appointing, promoting and transferring staff and acts independently on minor disciplinary issues (for example- writing letters of instruction, verbal reprimand of staff for being tardy, etc.). In consultation with supervisor, effectively recommend major disciplinary actions against staff, up to and including discharge and settling grievances.

(7) How do I write clear and meaningful duty descriptions?

Give details about **who, what, when, where, why** and **how**. Remember that you are describing the work to others who may not be familiar with the work environment and its operations.

Examples:

- Provide recording services (what) for the director's office (for whom) by recording, distributing, and maintaining (how) minutes of weekly staff meetings to assist in providing accurate information to affected staff (why).
- Design database system requirements (what) shared by the department, Division of Motor Vehicles, and the municipalities of Anchorage and Fairbanks (for whom) in implementing the Vehicle Inspection and Maintenance Program to control/reduce carbon monoxide emissions in Alaska (why)
  - Determine how to collect and compile emissions data to provide information necessary to generate compliance reports, and track certificates and financial data (how).
  - Conduct user and stakeholder interviews, surveys and examines the current systems documentation (how).
  - Complete the market research and prepares cost/benefit analysis of system options with recommendations to the Director (how).

(8) What else do I need to know when describing duties in the PD?

Although PDs must be complete and accurate, be aware that neither length of document nor fanciness of word choice bears a relationship to the job class or range assigned. Be straightforward and direct. Strive for Shortness, Simplicity, Strength and Sincerity:

- **Shortness** – Limit section 2.2. Avoid repetition. Avoid the use of statistics and other program information that isn't a duty and could equally apply to others in the unit. If you want to provide brief information about the organization or the work environment, place this at the beginning of section 2.2 as an introductory statement without a percentage. Fully describe the essential duties and responsibilities, but cover marginal duties with only a sentence or two.
- **Simplicity** – Use plain everyday words. Avoid acronyms and office jargon not readily understandable by others outside the work unit. Avoid vague, non-descriptive words and

phrases or those that may have multiple meanings.

- **Strength** – Use clear, concrete, definitive action verbs that say what you mean without further explanation. For example, “types” instead of “prepares” or “composes correspondence” instead of “handles correspondence.” Use the action verb-object sentence format: “assembles applicants’ licensure packets,” “repairs V-8 engines,” “serves meals and snacks.”
- **Sincerity** – Avoid meaningless (qualitative, intangible) words and phrases such as “performs with the widest latitude of independent judgment” or “fullest extent possible.” Do not draw conclusions by giving your opinion on how difficult or important the duties are. Such phrases as “most difficult,” “highly complex,” or “initiative of the highest order,” add little if anything to the description of work.

(9) What is the next step after I have completed the duty descriptions?

Once you have completed the duty descriptions, read the instructions on page 2 of the OPD form. Review Section 2.2 and designate each major functional area as Essential (E) or Marginal (M) in the far left column. You have already ordered the functional areas by importance. Next, estimate the percentage of your time you spend on each area, and double-check to be sure your percentages total to 100%. OPD will not allow you to advance the PD form until the duties section percentages equal 100%.

Double-check sections 2.1, 2.2, 3.4, and 5 are internally consistent. If supervisory or lead level responsibilities are assigned to the position, then make certain Section 5 is consistent with what is stated in the other sections (specifically 2.2).