

## **THE 4-S FORMULA**

### **WRITING POSITION DESCRIPTIONS**

At some time in your career with the State of Alaska, you will be called upon to write or assist in writing a Position Description (PD). Although PDs must be complete and accurate, remember neither the length nor fancy words bear a relationship to the job class or salary range assigned.

For the sake of those who must read, understand and carry out what you write, **PLEASE** make your descriptions brief, clear, concise and simple. With this in mind, here are some suggestions in applying the 4-S Formula to PD writing:

#### **Shortness, Simplicity, Strength, Sincerity**

##### **1) S = Shortness**

- a) Try to limit the duty section (#13) to 2 or 3 pages
- b) Avoid repetition
- c) Avoid the use of functional statements, statistics and other program information that isn't a duty and could apply equally to everyone in the unit. If you want to give this information about the organization and work environment, put it in an attachment or at the beginning of #13 as an introduction without a percentage.
- d) Describe fully the essential duties and responsibilities of the position. Marginal duties can be covered in a sentence or two.

##### **2) S = Simplicity**

- a) Use short, plain, everyday words. For example, "Issue" instead of "promulgate", "after" instead of "subsequent," "about" instead of "approximately."

##### **3) S = Strength**

- a) Use concrete, specific action words that say what you mean without further explanation. To illustrate: "types" instead of "prepares", "composes correspondence" instead of "handles correspondence."
- b) Tell all the essential facts about the duties and responsibilities of the position.

##### **4) S = Sincerity**

- a) Avoid meaningless (qualitative, intangible) words and phrases such as "performs with the widest latitude for independent judgment" or "fullest possible extent."
- b) Do not draw conclusions by giving your opinion on how difficult or how important the duties are. Such phrases as "most difficult," "highly complex," or "initiative of a high order," add little if anything to the description of the work. If you find you must use these phrases, then you must go on to explain and put it into a relational context: "what is less and what is more", "what is low and what is high."