

## Job Description Writing Guide

This guide provides the basics of writing a job description for all staff positions at The University of Southern Mississippi. The use of the job description template is important to ensure the information conveyed is accurate and up to date. This guide covers the following:

- **Job Description Section**

- [Position Details](#)
- [Job Summary](#)
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## **Position Details**

**Job Title:** The title that applicants will see or employees will print on business cards, also known as the business title

**Department:** Department where this position is budgeted

**Date Prepared:** Should be updated with each revision date

**Reports To:** List the job title of the person that directly supervises this position (**Do not** provide the name of the person currently in this role, **only** the Position Title)

## **Job Summary:**

The summary should address the basic purpose of the job and why the position exists. Assume the reader knows nothing about this position and summarize in 3-4 sentences. Consider including key responsibilities or function and how it fits within the department.

### Example of a Job Summary for an Administrative Specialist:

This position exists to provide direct support to the Dean, Associate Deans, School directors, faculty, staff and students in the day-to-day operations in the college. Often serving as a primary point of contact, this position is a vital component in a coordinated effort to effectively communicate with other staff and administrators across the university, as well as college faculty, staff, administrators, students, potential students, and visitors.

## **Primary Duties and Responsibilities:**

This section is the foundation of the Job Description. It conveys the complexity, scope and level of responsibility of the job. We recommend including **six** primary responsibilities (areas of key accountability-think of these as "buckets of work") of this position.

- After each primary responsibility, provide additional information about high-level tasks associated with that primary responsibility (area of key accountability). Do not add every individual detailed task as the job description is not a step-by-step guide of how to do the job. See the example below.
- Primary responsibilities are those duties in which the incumbent would spend most of their time performing.
- Use logical sequence in describing duties and responsibilities starting with the most critical and working down from there. Percentage of time spent on these items should **not** be included.
- Write the duties in terms of what the position requires, not based upon the capabilities of any individual.
- Use [action verbs](#) that accurately describe the position's level of ownership or involvement in the responsibility.
- Include "and performs other duties as assigned" at the end of your last numbered primary responsibility.

- More or less than six items in this section is acceptable, but you are encouraged to use restraint to stay focused on high-level buckets of responsibility. Consult your HR Partner for assistance as needed.

**Example** (Key Responsibility is underlined, supporting tasks related to that key responsibility are in *italics*, and action verbs are **highlighted**):

1. **Coordinates** digital advertising efforts, including social media ads, by identifying appropriate ad formats and audience targeting. **Analyzes** *data directly from social media platforms to evaluate results.* **Advises** *creative team on the development of related digital assets including ad content and landing pages.*

**Example with too many details:**

2. Coordinates all department, school, college, and university digital advertising efforts for recruitment, promotion of events and research efforts as well as other notable university endeavors, including social media ads, by identifying appropriate ad formats and audience targeting. Compiles reports to share with director and analyzes data from social media platforms, Google Analytics, and Sprout Social to evaluate results. Advises creative team on the results of analyzed data to provide input on the development of related digital assets including ad content and landing pages.

**Minimum Qualifications:**

Minimum requirements (education and experience) are used to establish clear and appropriate eligibility standards for a specific position. "Minimum" means --- the cut-off point; the lowest level of acceptable education and/or experience needed to successfully perform the job duties. If an applicant does not meet the minimum qualifications, they are unable to perform the job and cannot be considered as a candidate.

- **Minimum Education.**

- Describe educational requirements including the specific degree and area of study. It is very important to state the educational qualifications in terms of areas of study and/or type of degree or concentration that would provide the knowledge required for entry into this position.
  - For Example: Bachelor's Degree from an accredited college or university in Business Administration or a related field.
  - Be sure to always include "from an accredited college or university."

- **Minimum Experience.**
  - Describe previous work experience required including any specific past responsibilities, number of years of experience, and specific licensure or certifications. Please make sure to specify what type of experience is required.
    - **For Example:** At least 2 years' experience in scheduling, data entry, and business communications in an office setting.
- Should not be so restrictive that they exclude candidates who might reasonably have the ability to do the job.
- Need to tie directly to the job duties.
- It is easy to mistake KSAs as minimum qualifications; however, they are **not qualifications** and should **not** be included in this section of the job description, and are covered in the KSA section.
- Consider adding flexibility here like "or an equivalent combination of education and experience" if you want to consider individuals who may have more or less education or experience.
  - **For Example:** Bachelor's Degree from an accredited college or university in Business Administration or a related field and at least 2 years' experience in scheduling, data entry, and business communications in an office setting **–OR- 4 years of equivalent combination of education, training, and experience in a secretarial/administrative assistant role in an office setting.**

<b>Educational Requirement</b>	<b>Equivalent Experience</b>
High School Diploma/GED	None
Vocational/Technical/Trade Schools	One (1) year of related work experience (plus any additional required experience)
Associate Degree	Two (2) years of related work experience <u>OR</u> Two (2) years of college (plus any additional required)
Bachelor's Degree	Associate's Degree/ Two years of College + Two (2) years of related work experience <u>OR</u> four (4) years of related work experience (plus any additional required experience)
Master's Degree	Bachelor's + Two (2) years of related work experience (plus any additional required experience)

Preferred qualifications will be added in a separate section.

## **Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA):**

KSAs are the knowledge, skills, and abilities that a person must possess in order to perform the duties of the position. KSAs serve as the competencies required to perform the job successfully. Generally, a job description should have between 5-10 KSAs.

- **Knowledge** – The subjects, topics, and items of information that an individual should know at the time they are hired into the job. Knowledge represents bodies of information that are applied directly to the performance of work functions.  
**Example:** Knowledge of accounting, budgetary, and management principles, practices, and procedures
- **Skills** – Technical or manual proficiencies, which are usually learned or acquired through training. Skills should be measurable and observable.  
**Example:** Skill in timely communication and providing effective feedback  
**Example 2:** Skill in creating spreadsheets and pivot tables
- **Abilities** – The demonstrable capacity to apply several knowledge and skills simultaneously in order to complete a task or perform an observable behavior. Abilities may also relate to personal or social attributes, which tend to be innate or acquired without formal instructions. Abilities are enduring talents that can help a person do a job.  
**Example:** Ability to demonstrate sensitivity, respect, and be discreet when dealing with confidential matters  
**Example 2:** Ability to type 40 WPM

See the [KSAs examples](#) within this guide or consult your HR Partner for assistance with these criteria. Please note that the KSA section comes before Preferred Qualifications as these too serve as minimum requirements- KSAs are “musts” in order to perform the job successfully.

## **Preferred Qualifications:**

Preferred or desirable criteria that enhance a person’s capacity to do the job. These qualifications are “extras” that can help set applicants apart and can be used to establish the primary and secondary candidate pools. Preferred Qualifications are those an applicant does not have to possess in order to be considered a “candidate” for the position; however, they are seen as “good to have” qualities that will lead to a higher level of success for the applicant. Include the preferred education, experience, certifications, and/or licenses here.

**For Example:** Master’s Degree from an accredited college or university in Business Administration or a related field and experience in a university office setting.

## Supervisory Responsibilities:

The section includes the job title of each business title that this position will directly supervise. Direct supervision refers to the formal reporting structure and should not include indirect supervision. Each business title that this position supervises should be listed along with the number of positions within that title. No names should be included.

**For Example:** Custodians (5), Foreman (1)

If this position does not supervise others, then state N/A.

## Physical Requirements:

The physical requirements or demands associated with the position are the strength guidelines, motion parameter, work environment, and vision and hearing requirements necessary to be able to perform the job, with or without accommodations.

Identify the physical requirements of the position utilizing the codes in the included chart:

Frequency Ranking	Percent of Time	Range of Hours Worked Given Length of Shift:			
		8 Hours	9 Hours	10 Hours	12 Hours
<b>Not Required Or Never (NR)</b>					
<b>Occasionally (O)</b>	0 - 33%	0 to 2.5	0 to 3	0 to 3.5	0 to 4
<b>Frequently (F)</b>	34 - 66%	2.5 to 5.5	3 to 6	3.5 to 7	4 to 8
<b>Continuously (C)</b>	67 - 100%	5.5 to 8	6 to 9	7 to 10	8 to 12

## For Example:

Maximum Required Frequency	Functional Activities (Typical)
C	Sitting - able to remain in a stationary position
F	Standing - able to remain standing in a stationary position
NR	Exposure to solvents or chemicals

If you have any questions about this section, please contact your HR Partner and/or the Office of AA/EEO.

## **Job Description Dos and Don'ts**

Before writing a job description, here are some helpful hints to consider:

### **DO:**

- Refer to the Job Description Writing Guide and use the approved Job Description Template
- Attend a Job Description Workshop offered by your HR Partner
- Use a factual and impersonal style when writing the job description
- Base the job description on the department's needs
- Write an accurate, concise and complete job description
- Focus on the most pertinent responsibilities of the role
- Keep sentence structure as simple as possible, omitting unnecessary words that do not contribute pertinent information
- Begin each duty/responsibility with an action verb (see [example list](#))
- Be consistent when using terms like "may" and "occasionally." If these are tasks that are preformed once in a while or tasks that only some employees perform, question whether or not this is pertinent to be included
- Refer to job titles rather than names of people
- Call your HR Partner for guidance

### **DON'T:**

- Use the narrative form when writing a job description
- Base the content of the job description on the capabilities, skills, and interests of the incumbent or a potential candidate
- Write the job description based upon a desired compensation range
- Write the job description as a step-by-step guide on how to do the job
- Include minor or occasional tasks

## **Action Verbs for use in Job Descriptions**

Verb usage is important as it relays the level of responsibility of the position. For instance, assisting with project work is very different than managing project work. Choose a verb that best describes the actual responsibilities of the role.

<b>Manages</b>	<b>Communicates</b>	<b>Creates</b>	<b>Leads Projects</b>	<b>Improves</b>	<b>Supports</b>	<b>Researches</b>
Cultivate	Authors	Builds	Controls	Accelerates	Advises	Analyzes
Directs	Briefs	Conceptualizes	Coordinates	Customizes	Advocates	Assesses
Enables	Collaborates	Designs	Delivers	Modifies	Coaches	Calculates
Facilitates	Composes	Develops	Executes	Redesigns	Counsels	Evaluates
Fosters	Determines	Devises	Heads	Reorganizes	Consults	Forecasts
Inspires	Documents	Formulates	Orchestrates	Restructures	Educates	Gathers
Mentors	Edits	Implements	Organizes	Revitalizes	Promotes	Interprets
Oversees	Illustrates	Launches	Plans	Streamlines	Recommends	Measures
Supervises	Prepares	Spearheads	Prepares	Updates	Secures	Tracks



## **Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSA) Examples**

*Note: These are **only examples**. You are **not** limited to only the use of the KSA examples provided.*

### **General / Universal:**

- Skill in managing one's own time and the time of others
- Skill in using mathematics to solve problems
- Skill in completing assignments accurately and with attention to detail
- Ability to work under pressure and meet close deadlines
- Ability to analyze, organize and prioritize work while meeting multiple deadlines
- Ability to analyze and prepare documents, reports, and correspondence
- Ability to prepare concise reports
- Ability to review work for accuracy
- Ability to obtain a driver's license prior to employment
- Ability to work evenings, nights and weekends as necessary
- Ability to process and handle confidential information with discretion
- Ability to engage students and to create and enhance their connection to the institution and each other
- Ability to communicate and interact effectively with a diverse group of people.
- Knowledge of, or the ability to learn, University policies and procedures
- Knowledge of accounting, budgetary, and management principles, practices, and procedures

### **Administrative:**

- Adept in Microsoft Office
- Excellent written and oral communication skills and the ability to communicate with a diverse group of individuals
- Excellent organization and time management skills
- Resourceful and determined to provide a positive experience for others.
- Detail-oriented
- Ability to anticipate needs

### **Social Science/Health Professions:**

- Must have excellent communication skills and the ability to be compassionate and empathetic while working with a diverse population
- Must demonstrate adaptability and persistence while working with individuals, their treatment plans and University students
- Must maintain currency on relevant research, professional certifications and continuing education
- Must demonstrate sensitivity, respect, and discretion when dealing with confidential matters.

- Must be detail-orientated and timely with all required notes, files and documentation

**Research/Scientific:**

- Demonstrated scientific, analytical, and numerical skills
- Knowledge of research methodologies and techniques
- Project management experience
- Thorough knowledge of laboratory practices, procedures, and the ability to ensure compliance with applicable safety protocols
- Ability to implement research projects
- Analysis experience
- Ability to be flexible
- Exhibit individual initiative and the ability to work independently
- Ability to be technically proficient and accurate
- A logical and independent mind
- Meticulous attention to detail and accuracy
- Patience and determination
- Ability to work collaboratively as a member of a team
- Excellent written and oral communication skills and the ability to communicate with a diverse group of individuals.

**Lead/Supervisory/Managerial Level Leadership:**

- Demonstrates the ability to deliver accurate, concise and quality communication (verbal and written) in a timely manner and provide quality feedback
- Resourceful and determined to provide a positive experience for others.
- Ability to establish goals and objectives
- Ability to effectively plan and delegate the work of others
- Takes initiative to seek opportunities for development for both self and the team

**Senior Level Leadership:**

- Business Strategy & Acumen: Understands higher education and can use industry/professional terminology fluently. Thinks strategically and seeks to align department services and goals with institutional strategic goals. Asks critical questions to delve to root cause to identify solutions. Understands the interconnection of decisions, actions, outcomes and measures.
- Professional Knowledge and Application: Takes initiative to develop and apply professional knowledge and skills in order to enhance individual effectiveness and improve organizational performance. Creates opportunities to apply new learnings and best practices into innovative solutions that positively impact results. Seeks opportunities for development for both self and the team.

- **Business Execution:** Leverages professional expertise and University knowledge to assess areas of opportunity, identify solutions and effectively execute the plan. Demonstrates a high level of planning and organizational skills and the ability to move projects forward to completion. Self-motivated and accountable for results. Seeks advice and input from others and recognizes when to escalate issues or seek help.
- **Communication:** Demonstrates the ability to deliver accurate, concise and quality communication (verbal and written) in a timely manner. Encourages an open exchange of ideas and differing perspectives. Adapts communication style to meet the needs of diverse audiences and situations. Listens to understand others. Provides quality feedback.
- **Relationship Management:** Works to build and manage productive relationships with peers, leaders and customer groups. Effectively engages and interacts with others to collaborate and provide value-added support that enhances department results and team effectiveness. Affects outcomes and direction of customer's decisions through effective relationships, trust and credibility.
- **Leadership:** Demonstrates an openness and flexibility towards new ideas and concepts and effectively influences or facilitates during times of change. Helps others become more effective through development and coaching. Utilizes candid feedback, knowledge, resources and opportunities to improve the performance of others and to increase their contributions. Sets clear expectations for performance, provides meaningful feedback, holds employees accountable and recognizes successes.