# HRDG 4511 - Section B - Position Descriptions

Last Modified:

**Subchapter 4511**
**Position Classification**
**Section B - Position Descriptions**

- Introduction
- When a Position Description is Needed
- Position Description Responsibility
- Position Description Content
- What to Exclude from Position Descriptions
- Position Description Edits

**Return to 4511 Table of Contents**

## Introduction

A position description (PD) is the official record describing management's assignment of duties, responsibilities, and supervisory relationships to a position.

It is important to keep PDs accurate and up-to-date as they are the legal basis for:

- Appointment of employees.
- Payment of salary or wages.
- Establishment of job qualifications and selection criteria to fill a position.
- Development of performance plans and objectives.
- Preparation of Individual Development Plans.
- Review and evaluation of employees’ work.
- The determination of the rights and responsibilities of employees.

PDs are essential for effective staffing, organizational planning/reorganizations, budgeting, position management, and employee utilization:

- They help reveal overlapping responsibilities between employees.
- They inform applicants/appointees about duties, responsibilities, qualifications, and working conditions.
- Serve as the official record of assigned duties and responsibilities in classification appeal cases.
- Establish competitive levels for reduction-in-force.

**When a Position Description is Needed**

All positions in the Federal Government require a PD, with the following exceptions of:

- Collaborators (however a statement of duties is required).
- Experts and consultants not appointed under Title 5 authority (e.g., hired as contractors).
- Volunteers.
- Private sector temporaries.
- Details to unclassified duties.

A PD must be classified and approved before the position can be filled. However, employees may be detailed to a position without a PD, and will be officially assigned to the position when the duties have been described and classified.

**Position Description Responsibility**

Supervisors have the primary role in writing the PD, since they assign the work and know the expectations of the position. The servicing classification specialist is available to offer advice and assistance. For filled positions, incumbent employees are a valuable resource since they understand the duties of positions and are actually performing the work.

When writing a PD, focus should be on the major duties and not everything an employee does. Describe duties using action verbs with an object. Details that need constant revision can be omitted, e.g., step-by-step instructions or number of offices serviced.

A PD should contain an introduction, a major duties section, and supplementary information. For General Schedule (GS) positions, it is recommended that supplementary information in PDs be documented in the nine Factor Evaluation System (FES) factors, since the majority of OPM classification standards are written using the FES format. The table below describes the information needed for nonsupervisory PDs.

**NONSUPERVISORY POSITION DESCRIPTION CONTENT**

| PD SECTION | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| **Introduction** | Summarize the primary purpose for the position and where it resides in the organization. Write a short organizational mission statement and the position's relationship in fulfilling it. |
| **Major Duties** | Major duties assigned that occupy the employee's time on a regular and recurring basis. Also include job qualifications needed when recruiting; required certification or licensure (e.g., drug testing or a commercial driver's license); and nature and extent of responsibility for carrying out assigned duties. If a position contains substantially different kinds of work (mixed position), identify an approximate percentage of time required for each major duty. Note: Ensure that duties to be evaluated in the employee's performance plan are included. |
| **Factor 1 – Knowledge Required** | Type of knowledge or skills needed; qualification requirements. |
| **Factor 2 – Supervisory Controls** | How the work is assigned; level of independence; guidance and instructions; problems referred to supervisor; purpose and extent of review; types of actions not subject to |

| | |
|---|---|
| **What to Exclude from Position Descriptions** | Supervisors should ensure the following information is not included in PDs:<br><br>• Specific training that will be assigned.<br>• Qualitative or quantitative performance measures.<br><br>Individual development plans (IDPs) and performance plans are used for training and performance management. The information in these plans should not be included in PDs. PDs are filed in the employee's electronic official personnel file (eOPF). IDPs and performance plans have their own filing requirements and are maintained separately for various reasons.<br><br>A position is classified, not the employee occupying the position. Classification actions should never measure or reward performance. A position description describes what an employee is asked to do, and does not measure how well the employee does it. |
| **Position Description Edits** | A new PD must be drafted and evaluated whenever a significant change takes place in the major duties of a position, if the duties are performed on a regular and recurring basis. Any change in the position that will affect the title, series, or grade requires a new PD.<br><br>Minor changes in a PD that do not affect the title, series, or grade can be accommodated by minor edits to the existing PD. If the changes involve several paragraphs, the modifications may be typed on a separate page and attached as an amendment. |

---

**Return to 4511 Table of Contents**

Print