

The flag statement could also be a separate short sentence which gives the key to the whole paragraph.

For example:

"Receives and places telephone calls: Answers division telephones giving information on division activities and personnel whenever possible, or refers calls to person requested or qualified to answer the inquiry. Places calls upon request of officers of the division to save officer's time in reaching the person in question or to relay information to another officer or clerk."

It is not always necessary to explain why an action is taken or even how it is done in some cases. This occurs most frequently in describing very simple duties when the WHY particularly, and occasionally the HOW, is self-evident. In the foregoing example, WHAT and WHY are covered but not HOW, as every reader is familiar with the manner in which a telephone is operated.

Job description writing is often an exacting and difficult task. It forces the writer to think clearly and to express himself precisely in language which is simple and economical. A competently prepared description looks simple and consequently, it is often assumed that its production was a relatively simple task. This is not the case. A good description is compact, clear and concise, which are all qualities that demand an orderly and disciplined approach. A good job description writer will make a number of drafts before he produces one that is reasonably satisfactory.

The language of job description writing should consist of precise, concise, factual statements which give a clear understanding of actions or activities being accomplished, how they are accomplished and their objectives. Each sentence should begin with a descriptive verb in the third person singular present tense. The verbs may be changed, if desired, to the infinitive form when using job summaries of job descriptions for recruiting and selection purposes, but the third person singular present tense is required for job evaluation purposes. A specific action verb plus an object gives WHAT is done and the sentence should begin with WHAT is done rather than with an introductory HOW phrase: "Cuts wood, using a powerdriven saw....."

The verb is probably the most important word in the whole sentence; therefore, great care must be exercised in its selection. Vague or ambiguous verbs like "prepares", "handles", "assists", "looks after", "is responsible for", "participates in" should be avoided as these verbs give no clear picture of the action or activity. For instance, "prepares estimates", could mean "Types estimates of costs"; or "Assembles cost figures"; or "Estimates future costs on the basis of previous years' costs and other factors such as...."

The job description writer must pin-point the action in his opening phrase by choosing a meaningful action verb like "Checks typed copy for errors"; "Evaluates jobs using a point-rating evaluation plan in order to establish the relative worth of the jobs to the organization"; "Writes (not prepares) a report..."; or again, "Drafts a report for (someone else)..." "Sits on boards..." is an example of an ambiguous phrase. This could be taken to mean either "Sits on a plank" or "Interviews and rates candidates as a member of a selection board".

There are certain conventions of style which should be observed when referring to minor duties. Duties which are rarely performed but which have some real significance and which might require the employee to possess a particular skill, should always be included in the job duties but should be listed after the more time-consuming duties. The paragraph describing such duties should commence with the word "Occasionally", e.g., "Occasionally writes progress reports...."

As stated elsewhere in this manual, a "job" can consist of one or more positions. Sometimes the incumbents of only one or two of the positions are required to perform duties not allocated to the remaining positions in the job. When such duties are of sufficient significance to be shown, they should follow the "occasional" duties and be introduced by "May", e.g., "May take phone messages for visiting officers."

Job Summary

When the job description writer has identified and described the duties and indicated the percentage of time spent on each, he then proceeds to write a short summary of the job duties. This usually consists of one paragraph only and may contain only one or a few sentences. It should describe the job in broad terms but should also conform to the WHAT, HOW, WHY formula. In the federal service it has been agreed that this one paragraph