

The Position

Chapter 1--Highlights

Structure of the Civilian System.

Evaluating Position Needs.

The Position Description (PD)-What It Is and What It Is Not.

Why Positions Are Classified.

The Factor Evaluation System (FES).

Your Role In Classification Reviews.

When New PD's Are and Are Not Required.

Questions and Answers.

Civilian Positions

Civilian positions have several things in common with the military system of rank and pay grade. Each civilian position is provided an occupational classification (series number) that functions like the military occupational specialty. The classification of a civilian position establishes the job title and primary functions of a job, and sets the appropriate pay grade for it.

The major difference between the military and civilian classification systems is that the civilian system places rank/pay level in the job, rather than the person.

Structure of the Civilian System

The civilian position classification system has two pay schedules:

General Schedule (GS) for clerical, technical, administrative, and professional jobs. These positions have 15 grade levels, GS-1 through 15. Each level has 10 pay rates, called steps, in each level.

Federal Wage System (WG, WL and WS) for blue-collar positions. WG (nonsupervisory) and WL (leader) positions also have 15 levels, but only have five pay-rate steps in each level. WS (supervisory) positions have 18 levels and five pay-rate steps.

Each job has a position title, a pay schedule, a series number, and a grade level. For example:

Secretary, GS-0318-05
Supervisory Civil Engineer, GS-810-13
Painter, WG-4102-08
Painter Leader, WL-4102-08
Painter Supervisor, WS-4102-8

Evaluating Position Needs

Supervisors and managers devote much time and effort to seeking the best-qualified personnel to fill the positions under their control. It is equally as important for them to assure that the positions themselves are truly essential to the successful accomplishment of some portion of the Coast Guard current mission and programs, and that such positions are described fully and accurately.

A "position" represents "the duties, responsibilities; and supervisory relationships assigned to an employee." A "Position Description" is "a written record of duties, responsibilities and supervision received." An understanding of both of those definitions is of value to you.

Each position is critical to the organizational structure of the Coast Guard. Therefore, it is of significant and continuing importance that each position be reviewed, at least every 2 years by the first line supervisor to determine:

- The accuracy of the PDs, and
- The necessity of the positions.

By accomplishing the cyclic surveys of positions, review of position descriptions, and the corrective actions taken as a result of those surveys and review, you, the supervisor, and your supporting HR specialists, assure that the need exists for a position.

The Position Description (PD)

What It Is:

- The legal authorization for the expenditure of public funds as compensation for work performed.
- A clear, concise statement of the kind of work to be done; the knowledge and skill required to do the work; the difficulty of the work; and the types and extent of supervision and guidance the incumbent receives. You, the supervisor, are responsible for the PD.
- The primary basis for identifying and establishing the standards of performance which would be applicable to any incumbent in that position.

What It Is Not:

- A listing of every specific task an employee may be called upon to do.
- A device to prevent supervisors from assigning employees additional duties or changing present duties. (However, if the job becomes significantly different, on a permanent basis, it should be re-described and a new PD prepared.)
- A device to allow employees to refuse to perform a particular assignment because it is not specifically mentioned in the PD.

Why Positions Are Classified

We could say, simply, "because classification is required by law", but that would probably not be an adequate answer. With the law as the basic reason, there are other important reasons. For example, a person may be appointed, reemployed, promoted, reassigned, demoted, or transferred only if there is a position available. And that position must be classified, because classification is the legal basis for paying the employee in that position.

Position classification provides: (The Principles)

- "Equal pay for substantially equal work"-also as required by law.
- For variations in pay in proportion to substantial differences in the difficulty, responsibility, and qualification requirements of the work.
- For an orderly grouping of positions based on their duties, responsibilities, and qualification requirements.
- A basis for recruiting, selecting, placing, promoting, and training employees.
- Adherence to and conformance with Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Government-wide Position Classification standards.

The Factor Evaluation System (FES) Of Classification

FES is a way of assigning grades to nonsupervisory, white-collar positions from GS-1 through GS-15, using standards which have Factor Level Descriptions. (There are still some older classification standards that are in the narrative format.)

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| 1. Knowledge Required by the position. | 5. Scope and Effect. |
| 2. Supervisory Controls. | 6. Personal Contacts. |
| 3. Guidelines. | 7. Purpose of Contacts. |
| 4. Complexity. | 8. Physical Demands. |
| | 9. Work Environment. |

The Factor Level Descriptions have point values. As a match is made for each factor (on the PD written in the FES format) the point values from the Factor Level Descriptions are assigned to the PD. The points assigned for each of the nine factors are then added and the total points are then converted to a specific GS grade by reference to a standard conversion table.

1-The Position

FES was developed because it is relatively simple to apply and is flexible enough to accommodate new occupations and major changes in positions. HR Specialists, supervisors, and employees also more easily understand it.

Both classification systems, current narrative and FES, are based upon the same principles. A side-by-side comparison of the two systems follows.

Traditional System

- Includes 8 factors, not all of which apply to all occupations.
- Standard written in narrative format.
- Different formats of standards, some with points, some without.
- Position description formats inconsistent.
- Narrative format makes classification process time-consuming.
- Difficult for employees and supervisors to relate the narrative standard of classification to their position descriptions.
- Often requires a re-description of the standards.

Factor Evaluation System

- Includes 9 factors, all of which apply to all occupations covered by FES.
- Standards written in factor format.
- All standards written in uniform factor format with points.
- Position descriptions written in uniform factor format.
- Factor format reduces position classification time.
- Easier for employees and supervisors to understand and relate to a standard in the same format as their PD's.
- **Allows flexibility in updating standards by adding benchmarks without need to re-describe the occupation.**

The position description process is a joint responsibility of line management (usually you, the supervisor) and the Civilian Personnel Office. Employees are responsible for reading and understanding their position descriptions and for assisting supervisors in updating position descriptions as necessary.

As a supervisor, you determine what work is required and how and by whom it is to be done. You are the key to position classification. It is your job to:

- Assign duties and responsibilities to each position.
- Maintain accurate and current PD's for each employee.

1-The Position

- Inform employees concerning their duties and responsibilities, the content of their PD, availability of position classification standards, and their right to request classification review of their positions.

1-The Position

- Review, revise, and approve PD's for use in determining classification.
- Initiate recommendations for personnel actions based on classification concerns.
- Apply employee detail procedures promptly when an employee is assigned temporarily to other duties.
- Implement promptly the results of cyclic classification surveys.

Your servicing Civilian Personnel Office will assist you in accomplishing the many requirements of position classification.

Your Role In Classification Reviews

You should neither encourage nor discourage employee requests for a classification review, but make sure that they know that they can ask for a review. Your best course of action is to avoid the need for classification reviews by doing promptly what you are supposed to be doing. That is, keeping PDs current and in line with the work that is actually being done: rewriting them when it is appropriate and having your servicing Civilian Personnel Office insure proper classification after major changes. It is recommended that you review and verify each employee's PD at the time you are establishing or reviewing Performance Standards and Critical Job Elements. (Chapter 5-Performance Appraisal)

When New Position Descriptions Are and Are Not Required

You Need A New PD:

- When you want to establish a new position not previously described and classified.
- When the duties and responsibilities of an existing position have changed sufficiently so that they constitute a "different" job-either more or less difficult than the former PD reflected.

A New PD Is Not Required:

- If you want to recruit, promote, or reassign an employee to a previously classified position which is now vacant.
- If you are adding employees to positions already filled (increasing staffing) and their work will be identical.
- If a position (without any change in duties and responsibilities) is transferred to another organizational element as a result of reorganization.

Questions and Answers

1. **Q. I know employees who, when they are asked to perform some duty or function that is not specified in their PD, will say, "That's not in my job description, and I don't have to do it." How should a situation such as that be handled?**

A. Legally, any Federal employee may be asked to perform any work for which qualified-for short-term, temporary periods. It does not matter whether or not the work is mentioned in the PD. "Only principal duties need appear in the PD", and a principal duty requires a significant portion of the workweek on a regular, recurring basis. Also, PD's are not "contracts" attesting to what work an employee will or will not do.

2. **Q. If the same standards are being used throughout the Coast Guard, why will one command classify a position at one grade and another classify the same position at another grade?**

A. First of all, positions in different commands are different positions. The positions may be established to perform similar functions in similar organizations but it is highly unlikely that the duties and responsibilities described would be identical because the decisions on position content are made by different supervisors who are likely to assign duties and responsibilities differently.

3. **Q. Aren't there some "magic words" which should be used in writing position descriptions?**

A. Yes. The "magic" is associated with words and statements that are clear and concise. The work that is required of the position is what determines the grade of the position. Write the duties and responsibilities as clearly and concisely as possible-and make sure that your words mean the same to others as they mean to you. If they don't, rewrite until they do! Write to communicate exactly what you intend the position to accomplish-and nothing else. You want to communicate with your employees and classification specialists, not confuse them with meaningless words or phrases.