

Writing Functional Statements: Some Considerations

1. Do NOT reinvent the wheel. Do not depart from the official Qualification Standards in any way.
2. DO use the language of the Qualification Standards in the Functional Statement, especially when you write the grade determining elements. This will help HRM and the Professional Standards Board.
3. Each Functional Statement can be thought of as having two parts: the grade determining part, and the other parts. Make sure the grade determining part is written simply and clearly, using the language from the standards themselves. Make sure that part is designated as “grade determining” in the Functional Statement. Make sure that it explicitly states that this part occupies at least 25% of the employee’s time.
4. Each Qualification Standard, at each grade level, has a set of required KSAs. There need to be explicitly documented for the board. Placing that documentation in the Functional Statement is recommended. Ensure that they are clearly labeled and described fully. Do not rely on the board to infer the presence of these KSAs.
5. Make the other parts of the Functional Statement as varied and as reflective of the array of complex assignments the employee is engaged in as possible. In the templates we created, we tried to give examples of other activities that ought to be included if relevant. The list is meant to be illustrative rather than inclusive. These parts of the Functional Statement are to reflect the rich and varied professional experience of each psychologist. The Functional Statements are meant to replace the old Position Descriptions.
6. Describing those activities completely is important for two reasons: first, the scope, significance, and impact of what one does can be grade determining. This is particularly true about the difference between the 14 and 15 grades. Second, sometimes an individual may demonstrate what HR classification experts have referred to as “the impact of the person on the position”; the person may have more impact than the position strictly warrants. In rare instances this might be grade determining, so that someone whose responsibilities are on the borderline of a higher grade may be promoted based on other factors. For example, a grade 14 manager in a relatively small hospital may demonstrate that their work has national significance and thus qualify for grade 15. For that reason, it is best that the other parts of the Functional Statement reflect all regional and national tasks.
7. In addition to the templates, which are more generic, we have included some examples of actual Functional Statements for the purpose of illustrating how these principles may be applied in concrete cases.
8. Note that managers and supervisors are NOT synonymous. Managers are responsible to manage programs and the activities of people in those programs; supervisors do performance appraisals for their supervisees. Being either a manager or a supervisor may qualify one for grade 14 or 15. If one performs both functions, it is important to describe each function completely and note the percentage of time devoted to each.
9. Please take note of the following statement in the Qualification Standards under the heading “Deviations”:

“The appointing official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for psychologists in VHA whose composite record of accomplishments, performance, and qualifications, as well as current assignments, warrants such action based on demonstrated competence to meet the requirements of the proposed grade.”

This is another compelling reason to have the functional statement reflect all of the psychologist’s national, regional and otherwise “complex and wide in scope” activities and accomplishments.