



Guide on How to Write a Position Description Questionnaire (PDQ)

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

Treasury Board Secretariat

What is a Position Description Questionnaire (PDQ)?

The Position Description Questionnaire (PDQ) is a tool used for collecting meaningful information that is necessary to evaluate a job against the nine compensable factors of the established Job Evaluation System (JES).

A PDQ should define the tasks as assigned to the position by management. It describes the position as it currently exists, not as it was or how it will be, and focuses on the requirements of the job and not on the skills and abilities of the incumbent. A PDQ should be clear, concise, and easy to understand by someone who may not be familiar with the work. It should be gender neutral and free of judgement or bias. Simple sentences should be used to describe activities. Sentences should begin with action verbs whenever possible. Emphasis should be given to the complexities of the job and not the volume of activity.

PDQs for existing positions that were previously classified must clearly identify change in scope and/or organizational structure since the position was last classified. Please note that for a position to be reclassified, substantive change must have occurred.

If the identified change in the position impacts other positions within the Department/Division, such as scope/responsibilities being absorbed from or allocated to other positions, these PDQs must also be submitted for review and changes identified.

Reminders, considerations and other tips before you start writing your PDQ:

- A Job Class Profile (JCP) is a generic description of a job class, while a PDQ is a description of the specific duties of a specific position.
- Have you reviewed the related JCP and noted any discrepancies between it and the job duties you perform on a day-to-day basis?
- If your position was previously submitted for classification your department is responsible for providing you with a copy of the last classified PDQ for comparison purposes.
- What substantial change has your position experienced since it was last classified?
- Have you spoken with your supervisor regarding the classification process?
- Have you familiarized yourself with the online tools, guidebook and submission process?
- A group of employees can jointly submit a PDQ for review only if the positions are the same.
- It is important to complete all sections of the PDQ and provide relevant examples.
- If your position has direct supervisory responsibility, an official organizational chart showing those reporting relationships must be included in the submission. This would normally be provided by your human resource representative.

The following information explains each section of the PDQ and the type of content that should be included to allow for a fulsome review of the job.

1. Position Identification

This section requires basic information regarding the position, the incumbent, the supervisor/manager, and the permanent head/designate.

- The supervisor/manager is a non-bargaining or management level supervisor.
- Permanent head/designate is the Deputy Minister for a government department or a CEO/Executive for an agency, board or commission.

2. Overall Purpose of the Position

This section summarizes the main objective(s) of the position in three or four sentences – why the job exists and how it fits within the organization.

- Think about how you would explain your position to someone you meet in public.
- Utilize your existing PDQ and/or related JCP to help you complete this section.
- If the position was previously classified, the change in scope and/or organizational structure should be captured here.

3. Key and Periodic Activities

The purpose of this section is to describe the various activities for which your position is responsible, utilizing a degree of detail that would allow someone unfamiliar with the job to have a general understanding of what you do and how you do it. In most cases, 5-7 key activities should adequately describe the work of a position.

- The time spent on each activity will provide an approximation of which activities represent the focus of the job.
- Think in terms of larger/broader categories.
- The percentage of key and periodic activities should total 100 per cent.
- As you work through each section of the PDQ, refer to the key and periodic activities to ensure the information contained within your PDQ is supported by your list of job activities.

4. Knowledge

This section considers the type of knowledge required to perform the activities described and how that knowledge is applied and adapted to complete the job activities. Knowledge may be acquired in several ways (e.g., training, education, on the job).

- Think of knowledge broadly – how do you learn the job and what type of things do you need to know?

- Look at the knowledge required to do the job, not your personal qualifications. Consider the qualifications required as identified by the employer.
- Consider the following: computer-based technology, policies and procedures, regulations and legislation, administrative procedures, instructional methods, and/or technical/operational knowledge.

5. Interpersonal Skills

This section captures information regarding the individuals and groups that interact with the position, how frequently those interactions occur, and the types of communication and interpersonal skills used in those interactions.

- Consider with whom the job interacts, how and why.
- What are the most critical situations and interactions that are an ongoing part of the job?
- Consider the following: effective listening, interviewing skills, presentation skills, teamwork and collaboration, influencing/persuading, conflict resolution skills, moderation/facilitation skills, ability to communicate complex information; and/or advocacy skills.

6. Physical Effort

This section considers the degree to which physical effort is required to complete job activities, including how often physical effort is required, the effect it could have and any controls available to mitigate those effects.

- Consider physical exertion, manual dexterity, body postures and movements and/or body control and reflex requirements needed to effectively perform job duties.
- Types of physical effort include standing or sitting for long durations, working in confined spaces, working with mechanical tools, working with medical instruments, walking, lifting, and/or pushing.

7. Concentration

This section considers information regarding the degree and type of concentration effort required to complete job activities.

- Indicate the type and frequency of concentration effort that is required of the job.
- Consider the effect that exerting a particular form of concentration has (i.e., stiff back/neck, headaches, physical or mental fatigue) and what steps can be taken to mitigate those effects.
- Consider the effect on the job, task, or result if concentration is broken.
- Types of concentration include staring at a computer screen, reviewing drawings/graphics, frequent or prolonged telephone use, repetitive tasks, tasks that require precision, completing multiple tasks within tight deadlines, attentiveness required and the effects of interruptions.

8. Complexity

This section focuses on the amount and difficulty of analysis, problem solving, creativity and/or reasoning required to perform the job. The conceptual demands of the job are measured as characterized by breadth and depth of job scope, mental challenge, and the degree of position structure and planning requirements.

- Consider the problems and/or challenges that need to be resolved or dealt with on a regular, on-going basis.
- Identify routine/non-routine issues and challenges that the job is required to resolve and what resources are available to help resolve those issues.
- Think about the mental effort required to address issues and challenges in terms of existing processes or procedures; the extent to which data/information is known, readily available and/or easily accessible; the degree of analysis, assessment and/or interpretation required for problem solving; and the level of innovation and/or creativity in problem solving.

9. Accountability and Decision-Making

This section measures information regarding the level of accountability and decision-making authority associated with the job.

- Include examples of decisions made in relation to the job's key and periodic activities.
- Consider the decisions and actions the job can make independently versus requiring approval from others and how the job assists the organization in making decisions. Consider the decisions for which the job is ultimately accountable versus those for which the job offers advice and input.
- Characteristics to be considered include level of work review or supervision required; nature of delegated authorities and prescribed decisions and processes; extent to which discretion and independence of action are required; and overall accountability given the nature of the work.

10. Impact

Information throughout this section considers the type of outcomes that result from the decisions and actions for which the job is responsible and accountable and the impact of those decisions and actions.

- Include examples from the key and period activities that illustrate the impacts of your position.
- Consider the policies and procedures that are in place and the consequences that are the result of the choices made.
- Think about where the results of those choices are typically felt. Do the decisions made impact other employees, programs/operations and processes or have a direct impact on customers or stakeholders?

11. Development & Leadership of Others

This section captures information regarding the activities and behaviors for which the job is responsible that contribute to the development and/or leadership of other employees.

- Use examples from your key and periodic activities that demonstrate how the job contributes to the development and leadership of others.
- How does the job lead, help to lead or develop people in the organization? Are the responsibilities formal or informal?
- Focus on responsibilities of the job. Consider things such as providing advice and guidance, scheduling or directing work of others, or providing training and orientation to new staff.

12. Environmental Working Conditions

The following section covers information regarding the working environment in which the activities performed by your position must be completed. This factor recognizes the physical and psychological environment in which the work must be performed.

- Consider how frequent these conditions are experienced and what kind of precautions can be taken to mitigate adverse effects.
- This factor is intended to measure working conditions that have a potential adverse effect on the job but are still essential aspects that are inherent in the job and cannot be avoided.

13. Your Comments

Throughout this section you will be able to make any additional comments regarding the job, the questionnaire, and/or the process of collecting job relevant information.

14. Supervisor/Manager Comments

This section allows the Supervisor/Manager to make any additional comments regarding the job. It is recommended you make time to meet with your manager to review any comments they have on the PDQ.

15. Employee, Supervisor/Manager, Human Resources and Permanent Head/Designate Discussion Notes

This section is used for comments arising from the Employee and Supervisor/Manager review and discussion of the PDQ. Any conflicting information or points of clarification needed due to PDQ content should be captured in the comment section.

16. Employee, Supervisor/Manager, Human Resources and Permanent Head/Designate Signatures

Once the Supervisor/Manager and Employee have completed and reviewed each section, the final page of the PDQ must be signed and provided to the HR Representative and Permanent Head/Designate for final review, comment, and signature. Signatures acknowledge that the document has been reviewed and any relevant comments have been included.

17. Other Tips and Reminders

- The PDQ should take approximately three to six hours to complete. If it takes longer, it is possible too much information is being provided.
- JCPs and/or the last classified PDQ for the position are useful tools to help write a PDQ; however, you are cautioned against using these tools exclusively. If you need a copy of your PDQ you can request it from your department.
- PDQs must not include personal information. Limit your answers to necessary information about the job.
- When you complete the PDQ ensure that the information you provided is detailed, accurate and up to date.
- Take your time in completing the questionnaire. Some of the questions are a “checkbox”, while other questions will be free-form answers. There is sufficient space provided for responses.
- Use simple sentences or point form when describing position details and start sentences or points with action words whenever possible (i.e., cleans all areas; types reports and letters; builds shelving; designs forms; treats patients).
- Answer all the questions in a way that will allow someone unfamiliar with the job to understand.
- When answering questions, provide one or two examples to support your selections; multiple examples and not required. If examples are not provided it will be assumed the selection was made in error.