**Common Pitfalls: Describing the Job**

* Description exaggerates or downplays the importance of the job
* Fails to pinpoint the critical elements that differentiate between successful and unsuccessful job performance
* Ignores the decision-making aspects of the job.
* Describes worker requirements or characteristics that are not really needed to succeed in the job
* Too many duties listed (should be between 8-15, depending on job level)

**Organize the Description to Make it Work**

* The “essential duties” section should not be too numerous and complex. Organize the duties in one of three ways:
  + “Sequence of Operations” – follows the sequences in which the functions are carried out (if there is such a sequence)
  + “Major Duty” – organized into major job segments or duties, the most essential listed first, with specific duties outlined below each of the broader headings
  + “Relative Importance” – organizes information about job duties and responsibilities on the basis of their relative importance. A variation would be to arrange functions in order of the amount of time spent on them.

**Sentence Structure and Content**

* Avoid using the “responsible for”. Any employee can be “responsible for” any number of tasks and never do anything to accomplish them. “Responsible for” duties cannot be classified of graded
* Relative adjectives such as “extremely complex” or “moderately difficult” should be avoided unless their meaning is clarified by a comparison. “Extremely complex” to one person may be “moderately complex” to another
* Avoid other vague language such as “exercises good judgment in handling personnel problems.” Who is to say exactly what constitutes “good” judgment
* A terse, direct style should be used throughout the description.
* Begin each section with an active verb, third person singular. Always use present tense
* Whenever possible, describe the desired outcome of the work, rather than the method for accomplishing that outcome. For example instead of “writes down phone messages” say “accurately records phone messages”
* Focus on essential activities. A task that is performed frequently throughout the day may not be as essential or as critical to the job as something done once or twice a week.