



Untying Knots – Defining Specialized Experience

- Three managers walk into the HR Office. The first one says, “I need to hire a GS-11 accountant who has done cost accounting.” The second one says, “I need to hire a GS-12 HR specialist who has experience developing recruitment strategies.” And the third manager says, “I need to hire a statistician to conduct analyses of retirement data.” While these managers are looking for very different skill sets, the starting point to fill their jobs is the same—conduct a job analysis to **define the specialized experience required to perform the duties of the job.**
- Because OPM’s Governmentwide qualification standards cover positions found in many Federal agencies, they must be broad enough to cover all of the work classified to the occupational series. But the standards also allow us (for jobs above the entry-level) to pinpoint the **specialized experience necessary for performing the work of the particular job.**
- **Hiring Managers**, this is your opportunity to serve in an active role to narrow the field of applicants to those who meet your position-specific requirements. Of course, you cannot add specific experience that is not required or that is so specific that only one or a handful of people could possibly qualify!
- How does the **HR Specialist** determine whether or not a job requires specialized experience? By using the **position description, job analysis, discussion with the hiring manager, position classification standard and qualification standard** to make this determination.
- **Specialized experience has to be outlined in the job opportunity announcement.** For multi-grade vacancies, it must be defined at each grade level. So if you are recruiting for an accountant, GS-9/11, then specialized experience has to be defined at both the GS-9 and GS-11 levels.

Successful Practices and Tips

- **Think of specialized experience like a funnel.** If the experience criterion is too broad, everyone will get through. But **if it is too narrow, you will not be able to get the full pool of applicants who could do the job!**
- **Avoid describing specialized experience only in terms of Federal work.** Think of it this way—when recruiting from all sources, it does not make sense to require experience that can only be acquired in the Federal Government. People who have done the work in the private sector or military, or people who have done something similar, will still be able to perform the duties!
- **Clearly differentiate the experience required for each grade level.** When writing specialized experience requirements, start with “Experience...” and then fill in the blank with **what someone at the next lowest grade level would be expected to do.** For example, “Experience applying procurement regulations, procedures, and techniques.” More general phrases like “Knowledge of...” or “Familiarity with...” make it harder for the applicant to understand how their experience measures up to the specific requirements of the grade level standards.
- **If a new hire can learn something in a reasonable period of time, it generally is not included as a specialized experience requirement—the focus is on what is absolutely required to “hit the ground running.”**