



**NATIONAL FOOD SERVICE
MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE**

The University of Mississippi

**COMPETENCIES, KNOWLEDGE, AND
SKILLS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL NUTRITION
ASSISTANTS AND TECHNICIANS**

FOOD PRODUCTION

Sanitation, Safety, and Security

CUSTOMER SERVICE

PROGRAM REGULATIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Equipment Use and Care

PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

APPLIED RESEARCH DIVISION
The University of Southern Mississippi

Competencies, Knowledge, and Skills of Effective School Nutrition Assistants and Technicians



National Food Service Management Institute
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National Food Service Management Institute The University of Mississippi

Building the Future Through Child Nutrition

The National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) was authorized by Congress in 1989 and established in 1990 at The University of Mississippi in Oxford. The Institute operates under a grant agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

PURPOSE

The purpose of NFSMI is to improve the operation of Child Nutrition Programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination. The Administrative Offices and Divisions of Technology Transfer and Education and Training are located in Oxford. The Division of Applied Research is located at The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg.

MISSION

The mission of the NFSMI is to provide information and services that promote the continuous improvement of Child Nutrition Programs.

VISION

The vision of the NFSMI is to be the leader in providing education, research, and resources to promote excellence in Child Nutrition Programs.

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COMPETENCIES, KNOWLEDGE, AND SKILLS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL NUTRITION ASSISTANTS AND TECHNICIANS

Executive Summary

State agencies and local school districts have been faced with the task of training site-level school nutrition personnel since before the passage of the National School Lunch Act (Martin, 1999). Early leaders in school nutrition (SN) recognized the benefits of establishing standards for personnel as well as developing training programs for the various levels of school nutrition personnel. Since its inception, the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) has been in the forefront in the identification of the competencies, knowledge, and skills needed by professionals working in the child nutrition arena. Research studies have been conducted for school nutrition directors and supervisors (Carr, Cater, & Conklin, 1996; Gregoire & Sneed, 1994; Rainville & Carr, 2001), school nutrition managers (Cater & Carr, 2004; Conklin, 1995; Sneed & White, 1993), and sponsor monitors of family day care homes (Carr & Oakley, 2002). This project focused on the SN assistant/technician who works at the local school cafeteria under the direction of a SN manager. The objectives of this study were to identify the functional areas, competencies, knowledge, and skills needed by effective SN assistants in the current SN environment, and determine at what point the SN assistant should be able to know/perform the knowledge/skill statement, at time of hire or after training. To accomplish these objectives, the researchers used the following definitions:

- **SCHOOL NUTRITION ASSISTANTS/TECHNICIANS** are the food service employees who work at the local school cafeteria under the direction of a school nutrition manager.
- **FUNCTIONAL AREAS** are the broad groupings or categories of similar tasks that reflect job duties performed by assistants/technicians within the local SN operation. These categories serve as an umbrella for all tasks that are listed on a work schedule or are done on a daily, weekly, or seasonal basis within the school year.
- **COMPETENCIES** are underlying characteristics within each functional area that lead to successful performance. They may include knowledge and skills as well as various levels of motivation.
- **KNOWLEDGE** is the information a person has in specific content areas that is necessary for successful performance in a competency area.

- **SKILLS** are the abilities to perform certain physical and/or mental tasks that are necessary for successful performance in a competency area.

This research project was conducted in two phases and SN professionals participated in both phases of the project. Phase I utilized an expert panel consisting of state agency personnel, SN directors, and SN managers to bring about agreement on functional areas for job duties performed by SN assistants/technicians. Expert panel participants arrived at consensus on the knowledge and skill statements needed in each functional area. NFSMI researchers grouped the knowledge and skill statements for each functional area into smaller categories and drafted competency statements. The Phase II review panel, consisting of state agency personnel, SN directors, and SN managers, were mailed a survey that asked them to verify whether the knowledge and skill statements are important to the job responsibilities of a SN assistant, determine at what point the SN assistant should be able to know or perform the knowledge or skill statement, at time of hire or after training, and confirm whether the competency statements are consistent with the supporting knowledge and skill statements.

Six functional areas were identified that encompass the job duties of the SN assistant/technician: food production; sanitation, safety, and security; customer service; program regulations and accountability; equipment use and care; and professional excellence. In addition to these functional areas, 12 competencies, 45 knowledge statements, and 105 skill statements were confirmed by the Phase II review panel. From these knowledge and skill statements, the Phase II review panel only identified 37 statements as being necessary when SN assistants are hired. These findings suggest that training of SN assistants occurs after hire as few individuals are fully competent in all aspects of the job when hired.

SN administrators can use the knowledge and skill statements and the Sample Job Description Template in preparing job descriptions for school nutrition assistants. Although job requirements for a school nutrition assistant may differ from state to state and sometimes from school district to school district, the findings from this research project provide needed information for defining the role an effective school nutrition assistant plays. Having an understanding of the functional areas and the supporting competencies, knowledge, and skills provides a clear image of the role of the SN assistant.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL STATEMENTS

Functional Area 1: Food Production

COMPETENCY 1.1

Maintains high standards of control for quality food production and service.

WHEN HIRED

Knowledge Statements

- None

Skill Statements

- None

AFTER TRAINING

Knowledge Statements

- Knows importance of portion control.
- Knows importance of and how to evaluate food quality during preparation and service.
- Knows basic food preparation techniques that are used in producing large quantities of food items.

Skill Statements

- Follows standards for holding and serving food to maintain nutritive value and food quality.
- Follows instructions in using appropriate portion control tools to serve menu items.
- Prepares food products following standardized recipes and evaluates products to ensure quality standards are met.
- Completes meal set-up and replenishes serving line(s) to maintain properly-cooked food items during the serving period.
- Assures appropriate quantity of food item portions are prepared and distributed according to established procedures.
- Uses appropriate quantity food production techniques to produce appealing and nutritious foods.
- Cooks food using batch cooking methods, when appropriate.
- Prepares meals for special diets according to recipes or other instructions provided.

COMPETENCY 1.2

Follows operational procedures for efficient and effective food production and service.

WHEN HIRED

Knowledge Statements

- Knows units of measurement (pound, cup, etc.) used in food production.
- Knows basic math related to quantity food preparation and service.

Skill Statements

- None

AFTER TRAINING

Knowledge Statements

- Knows importance of using resources such as production records and standardized recipes in order to control food quality, yield, portion size, and cost.
- Knows importance of following production/work schedules to meet established deadlines.
- Knows importance of and procedures for maintaining an accurate inventory system.
- Knows principles of work simplification related to food preparation.

Skill Statements

- Assists with all phases of food preparation in the kitchen in a timely, safe, and sanitary manner.
- Reviews recipes and menus, estimates needed ingredients, and the time required for the production of a variety of food items.
- Reviews menu and production records for the following day to ensure needed ingredients are available, verify food items are thawed, and suggest menu substitutions, as appropriate.
- Reports accurately the amount of food used and leftover food.
- Assists with meal clean-up as directed by unit manager.
- Follows assigned work schedules to minimize production challenges.
- Completes advance food preparation for next day when necessary.
- Organizes hot and cold food for delivery to other food service units, as appropriate.
- Organizes tasks when assembling food, supplies and utensils necessary to prepare recipes.

COMPETENCY 1.2 continued

- Follows established procedures and completes required records for removing food and supplies from storage areas.
- Follows procedures for checking and documenting quantity, quality, and price of items ordered against receiving document/invoice.
- Assists in taking physical inventory of food supplies to determine needed quantities for ordering.

Functional Area 2: Sanitation, Safety, and Security

COMPETENCY 2.1

Maintains an environment conducive to protecting the health and well-being of the school's children through high levels of food safety and sanitation standards.

WHEN HIRED

Knowledge Statements

- Knows importance of practicing safe food handling.
- Knows established rules for personal hygiene and grooming, including dress, appearance, and personal habits.

Skill Statements

- None

AFTER TRAINING

Knowledge Statements

- Maintains standards of personal appearance and hygiene according to district/department policies and procedures.
- Knows the importance and basic procedures to prevent foodborne illness and infection during food handling and production.
- Knows importance of time and temperature relationships (temperature danger zone) for food handling and preparation.
- Knows safety standards and sanitation practices used in school nutrition operations.

COMPETENCY 2.1 continued

- Knows the importance of appropriate sanitation procedures when using and cleaning food service equipment.
- Knows how to use a food thermometer to check for appropriate temperatures of food items being served.
- Knows procedures for storing food and supplies that maximize sanitation and quality and avoid loss.
- Knows importance of state, local, and district sanitation code requirements for food service establishments.
- Knows the importance of following established receiving and storage procedures.

Skill Statements

- Practices correct sanitation procedures and uses appropriate chemicals when using and sanitizing equipment and cleaning the facility.
 - Follows rules of time and temperature relationships for food handling and preparation and reports deviations, as appropriate.
 - Serves menu items in accordance to health and sanitation requirements.
 - Follows health and sanitation requirements when preparing and serving food items.
 - Uses and calibrates thermometers correctly.
 - Follows established procedures for storing and disposing of leftover food from meals.
 - Checks temperature of menu items on serving line and reports deviations as appropriate.
 - Follows procedures to ensure appropriate temperatures of hot and cold food are maintained during delivery to other food service units, as appropriate.
 - Records daily temperatures of dry storage areas, refrigeration equipment, and dishwashing equipment and reports deficiencies, as appropriate.
 - Follows established procedures for receiving food and supplies and assists manager, as appropriate.
 - Follows procedures for using, cleaning, and disinfecting approved garbage and trash receptacles and area regularly.
 - Follows established procedures to maintain an effective insect and rodent control system.
 - Follows established procedures related to the protection of the environment, including waste disposal, grease disposal, and water conservation.
-

COMPETENCY 2.2

Maintains a safe facility for performance of work.

WHEN HIRED

Knowledge Statements

- None

Skill Statements

- None

AFTER TRAINING

Knowledge Statements

- Knows procedures for use of fire extinguishers and/or fire extinguishing systems.
- Knows accident prevention practices, first aid procedures, and accident/injury reporting.

Skill Statements

- Maintains food service facilities, equipment, and utensils in a clean, organized, and sanitary condition.
- Reports accidents and potential safety hazards to unit manager or immediate supervisor.
- Follows safety rules for employees, equipment, and facilities.
- Maintains clean and organized storage areas.
- Keeps work and storage areas organized and uncluttered.
- Demonstrates ability to use a fire extinguisher.
- Assists with preparation for fire, health, and safety inspections.

Functional Area 3: Customer Service

COMPETENCY 3.1

Maintains quality standards for the presentation and service of food in a pleasant environment.

WHEN HIRED

Knowledge Statements

- Knows the importance of teamwork and cooperation with nutrition and school staff.

Skill Statements

- Provides positive, professional, and friendly service.
- Uses a caring approach when interacting with students.

AFTER TRAINING

Knowledge Statements

- Knows the importance of the appearance of the serving line and dining room during the meal period.
- Knows the importance of student feedback on food items served in cafeteria.
- Knows district procedures for reporting customer complaints.

Skill Statements

- Encourages students to make healthy menu choices.
- Maintains the appearance of the serving line and dining room during the meal period to create a pleasant environment.
- Demonstrates ability to handle customer complaints effectively.
- Provides timely feedback on menu item preferences of students.
- Recommends appropriate menu modifications in response to customer requests, as appropriate.
- Garnishes menu items and serving lines attractively.
- Reports amount of plate waste from returned trays to unit manager, as assigned.

Functional Area 4: Program Regulations and Accountability

COMPETENCY 4.1

Maintains integrity and accountability of the school nutrition program (SNP) through compliance with all federal, state, and local regulations.

WHEN HIRED

Knowledge Statements

- None

Skill Statements

- None

AFTER TRAINING

Knowledge Statements

- Knows the importance of preserving confidentiality of students receiving free and reduced price meals.
- Knows USDA meal component requirements for a reimbursable meal.
- Knows the federal, state, local and district policies, rules, and regulations regarding SNP, i.e., USDA meal pattern and reimbursable meals.
- Knows the importance of proper collection procedures for the school.
- Knows basic principles of nutrition as applies to school-age children.

Skill Statements

- Maintains confidentiality of students receiving free or reduced price meals.
- Follows the collection and recording procedures approved for point of service at the school.
- Demonstrates ability to identify a reimbursable meal on the serving line.
- Serves menu items to students and staff according to established guidelines.
- Monitors and ensures that reimbursable meals meet requirements.
- Assists with maintaining SN vending machines, as appropriate.

COMPETENCY 4.2

Maintains accountability of recorded documentation for compliance with federal, state, and local regulations.

WHEN HIRED

Knowledge Statements

- None

Skill Statements

- None

AFTER TRAINING

Knowledge Statements

- Knows the importance of completing accurate production records.
- Knows the importance of accurate record-keeping.

Skill Statements

- Counts money, balances cash drawer correctly, and completes cashier reports with all transactions properly recorded.
- Maintains accurate records in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations.
- Maintains and completes required forms and records accurately, as assigned by manager.
- Assists in preparing and maintaining various records related to inventory, collected monies, and assigned activities.

COMPETENCY 4.3

Assures compliance with school/district policies and procedures.

WHEN HIRED

Knowledge Statements

- None

Skill Statements

- None

AFTER TRAINING

Knowledge Statements

- Knows school district's procedure for reporting accidents and injuries.
- Knows school, SNP, and district policies and procedures.

Skill Statements

- Maintains confidentiality regarding school and workplace matters.
- Complies with all School Board policies, state and federal regulations, and School Nutrition handbook.
- Follows district procedures in personnel matters.

Functional Area 5: Equipment Use and Care

COMPETENCY 5.1

Implements administrative policies for proper use and care of all equipment.

WHEN HIRED

Knowledge Statements

- None

Skill Statements

- None

AFTER TRAINING

Knowledge Statements

- Knows correct methods for operating food service equipment.
- Knows procedures for cleaning and maintaining equipment.
- Knows school district's policies and procedures regarding equipment repair.

Skill Statements

- Follows sanitation procedures when using and cleaning food service equipment.
- Demonstrates ability to safely operate food service equipment.

COMPETENCY 5.1 continued

- Uses small equipment items such as dippers, ladles, spoons, and knives appropriately.
- Demonstrates ability to understand safe equipment operation procedures.
- Selects food service equipment suitable for the food product being prepared.
- Demonstrates ability to take apart and re-assemble food service equipment.
- Follows school district procedures for reporting equipment problems.
- Monitors food service equipment to ensure that is maintained in good working order.

Functional Area 6: Professional Excellence

COMPETENCY 6.1

Performs all duties and responsibilities in
an ethical and professional manner.

WHEN HIRED

Knowledge Statements

- Knows importance of ongoing training to improvement of job skills.

Skill Statements

- Demonstrates ability to meet work schedules and time lines.
- Demonstrates ability to add, subtract, multiply, and divide accurately.
- Demonstrates willingness to be flexible.
- Uses school/district resources (time, supplies, services, technology, etc.) in an ethical manner.
- Demonstrates ability to interpret detailed written instructions, such as schedules and recipes.
- Demonstrates willingness to help out when emergencies arise.
- Attends and participates in job-related training.
- Assists other staff as needed to meet established schedules.
- Demonstrates ability to work under the pressure of deadlines and interruptions.
- Performs work-related activities efficiently with limited supervision.
- Demonstrates ability to accurately and rapidly make correct change.

COMPETENCY 6.1 continued

- Exercises independent judgment and initiative to resolve problems.
- Displays willingness to upgrade job knowledge and skills.
- Uses appropriate methods of problem solving and decision-making.
- Avoids problem situations and intervenes to avoid conflicts.

AFTER TRAINING

Knowledge Statements

- Knows when decisions can be made independently or consultation with supervisor is needed.

Skill Statements

- Follows instructions of unit manager relating to safety measures, sanitation practices, personal standards, work techniques, and methods of performing duties.
- Performs tasks stated in job description.
- Works independently to complete food preparation and cleaning tasks within assigned time frame.
- Applies knowledge and/or skills obtained from training activities to performance on the job.
- Assists in training less experienced personnel regarding equipment use and food preparation, as appropriate.
- Demonstrates ability to organize and establish priorities to complete job responsibilities to meet deadlines.
- Demonstrates ability to use a cash register, calculator, and/or computerized POS systems.
- Demonstrates ability to effectively mentor new employees.

COMPETENCY 6.2

Communicates effectively with unit manager and other employees.

WHEN HIRED

Knowledge Statements

- Knows the importance of helping inexperienced employees.

COMPETENCY 6.2 continued

- Knows importance of giving and receiving constructive criticism.
- Knows methods of effective communication skills.

Skill Statements

- Demonstrates ability to follow oral and written directions.
- Listens effectively to school nutrition manager and other staff.
- Responds appropriately to supervision and constructive criticism.
- Informs manager of potential problems or unusual events, as appropriate.

AFTER TRAINING

Knowledge Statements

- None

Skill Statements

- Explains instructions/guidelines clearly to others.

COMPETENCY 6.3

Provides leadership as a team member of the school community.

WHEN HIRED

Knowledge Statements

- Knows the importance of having a positive attitude and creating a positive image for school nutrition.
- Knows importance of working with a diverse school community.

Skill Statements

- Uses a professional manner when interacting with co-workers, school staff, students, and others.
- Works with a varied population in a meaningful, respectful, and appropriate manner.
- Establishes and maintains cooperative and effective working relationships with others.
- Demonstrates ability to work with a varied population in a meaningful, respectful, and appropriate manner.

AFTER TRAINING

Knowledge Statements

- Knows the lines of communication within the school and school district, including chain of authority and levels of job responsibilities.

Skill Statements

- Uses appropriate lines of communication within the school and school district.
 - Participates in opportunities for improving professional status as a member of the education team.
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SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION TEMPLATE

SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION TEMPLATE

School Nutrition Assistant/Technician

General Function and Scope

The school nutrition assistant/technician performs a variety of job functions essential to the successful operation of the local school nutrition cafeteria. The job functions include food production; sanitation, safety, and security; customer service; program regulations and accountability; equipment use and care; and professional excellence. The school nutrition assistant/technician works under the supervision of an assigned manager/supervisor and in partnership with others in the school nutrition program and school district to support a sound nutrition assistance food program while following federal, state, and local guidelines. The local school nutrition program is to provide an environment that supports healthy food habits while maintaining program integrity and customer satisfaction.

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONAL AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Food Production

- Maintains high standards of control for quality food production and service.
- Follows operational procedures for efficient and effective food production and service.

Sanitation, Safety, and Security

- Maintains an environment conducive to protecting the health and well-being of the school's children through high levels of food safety and sanitation standards.
- Maintains a safe facility for performance of work.

Customer Service

- Maintains quality standards for the presentation and service of food in a pleasant environment.

Program Regulations and Accountability

- Maintains integrity and accountability of the School Nutrition Program (SNP) through compliance with all federal, state, and local regulations.
- Maintains accountability of recorded documentation for compliance with federal, state, and local regulations.
- Ensures compliance with school/district policies and procedures.

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONAL AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITIES continued

Equipment Use and Care

- Implements administrative policies for proper use and care of all equipment.

Professional Excellence

- Performs all duties and responsibilities in an ethical and professional manner.
 - Communicates effectively with unit manager and other employees.
 - Provides leadership as a team member of the school community.
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