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| **Specialist Trainee Position Description** |
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| ***What does a Disability Specialist do?*** |
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| Disability Specialists (1) gather information about applicants and their medical conditions, and (2) decide if the applicants are able to do substantial work. The gathering of evidence is done by mail, telephone or computer. The Specialist needs to know what the applicant believes to be the reason(s) he is unable to work, how the impairment(s) limit(s) his activities, what medical treatment and studies have been done and where, what type of work the applicant has done in the past, and the educational level of the applicant. In addition to the applicant, the Specialist may also contact family members, employers, third parties (such as neighbors, friends or relatives), and doctors and hospitals where the applicant has been treated. In some instances, the Specialist would decide that additional evidence would be needed and would request consultative medical examinations at government expense. |
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| When the Specialist determines that sufficient evidence has been gathered, she would decide if the applicant’s medical condition would be severe enough to prevent him from doing substantial work. In making this decision, the Specialist would consider the severity of the medical condition, any physical or mental limitations imposed by the impairment(s), and the applicant’s age, education, and past work experience. |
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| The Specialist position requires a unique blend of medical knowledge and understanding of vocational issues. For example, the Specialist could review one case in which the medical condition was so severe that it would be reasonable to assume that anyone with that impairment severity would be unable to work, regardless of the vocational factors of age, education, and work skills. An example of such a case would be an applicant who had had a stroke that left him permanently paralyzed on one side of the body. |
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| In another case, the Specialist might have to consider more than just the objective medical findings. An example of this type of situation would be an applicant who had had back surgery for a disk problem and now had minimal neurological abnormalities on a physical examination. The factors that would have to be considered in this case would include the severity of the applicant’s symptoms, any restriction to the applicant’s activities, the age and education of the applicant, and the type of work, which the claimant had performed previously. Taking into consideration all of these factors plus the medical findings, the Specialist would decide if the applicant would be unable to do substantial work for a period of a year or more. |
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| ***Must I have a medical or rehabilitation counseling background to be eligible to apply?*** |
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| No, Specialists are hired as trainees and are trained in the medical and administrative aspects of the job. All trainee applicants must have a four-year degree from an accredited college or university. A specific major is not required, although a successful applicant must demonstrate the ability to learn highly technical legal and medical terminology. |
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| Excellent verbal skills (both oral and written) and analytical skills are important in this position. An ability to organize one’s work and to handle a large volume of work is also a must. Disability applicants depend on Specialists to give accurate decisions as quickly as possible. |
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| ***What are the pay and benefits?*** |
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| Currently, starting pay is at the yearly rate of $35,827. Trainees who make satisfactory progress in learning the job progress to the rate of $36,544 at five months. At the end of the first year, trainees are promoted to the Specialist I position at the rate of $39,468. If specified criteria are met, a Specialist I with a minimum of eighteen months of experience can progress to the Specialist I.5 position to handle appellate level claims and receive a 5% salary increase. |
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| Other progression opportunities beyond the Specialist I.5 position are available if specified criteria are met with minimum experience levels of 24 and 30 months. Promotional opportunities beyond those described, are available on a competitive basis. Benefits are the same as for all North Carolina State employees, and that includes free health insurance for the employee unless a health maintenance plan is voluntarily selected. Vacation time is earned at the rate of 2.3 weeks per year for the first two years and increases 3 days per year at 2 years, 5 years, 10 years, 15 years, and 20 years, for a maximum or 5.15 weeks per year. Please see [www.ncgov.com](http://www.ncgov.com/asp/basic/employee.asp) for more information about state benefits. |

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| ***When should I apply?*** |
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| The NC DDS hires Specialist Trainees in small groups. You may apply at any time a position is posted if you already have a bachelor’s degree. If you are still in school, we will accept an application for a posted position prior to your expected graduation as long as you will have graduated by the time the class for which the position was posted begins. **All college degree requirements must be completed before you actually begin work.** |
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| ***How will Trainees be selected?*** |
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| All trainee applicants who meet the educational requirement will be invited to test for the position. The test is a multiple choice test which does not require previous knowledge of the disability program or medical terminology, but will test your ability to learn the types of information used on the job and your writing skills. Applicants who pass the test will be invited to interview. Offers of employment will be made following interviews and reference checks. |
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| ***What training would I receive?*** |
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| You should expect to be in class for the first three months. This class is an accelerated learning environment in which you would learn Social Security Law and Regulations as well as medical terminology and information about a number of more common impairments. For example, you would learn about ischemic heart disease -- what it is and how it might affect a person’s ability to stand and walk, lift and carry, bend, stoop, kneel, etc. You would also learn about mental impairments as well as physical. For example, you would learn what bipolar disease is and how to evaluate the severity of the impairment and how it might affect a person's ability to concentrate, work with others, and sustain work, etc. |
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| After class, you should expect to receive an additional month of caseload management training while receiving actual cases assigned to you. After successful completion of the initial four-month training period, you would be assigned to a case processing unit and have additional cases assigned to you. At first, you would work very closely with a case consultant, but you would become more independent as your skills increased. You would learn how to obtain information from applicants and medical sources, how to manage a caseload, and how to make the decisions on your cases. You would be considered a Trainee for the first year, and during that time, your primary responsibility would be to learn this complex job so that you could serve your claimants well -- giving them accurate information and making the correct decisions on their cases as quickly as possible. |
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| ***Where would I work?*** |
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| All NC DDS employees work in Raleigh, NC. |
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| ***Does this job require any travel?*** |
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| No, Specialists rarely see applicants face-to-face. Specialists all work in an office in Raleigh. Their work is done by mail, phone, and computer. |
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| ***How can I tell if this is a job for me?*** |
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| Here are some of the things that we think make a good Specialist: |
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| **Intellectual curiosity** (Do you want to know more -- learn new things? But can you be satisfied at some point that you have sufficient information and stop gathering more?) |
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| **High energy** (Can you sustain attention for a lot of cases all day? Will the claimants you deal with at the end of the day receive as good service as if you had worked on their cases in the morning?) |
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| **Good communication skills** (Can you adjust your style to communicate with people of varying educational levels? Can you prepare a concise, but thorough written explanation of your decisions?) |
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| **Ability to learn technical and medical information** (Can you learn new material easily and use that information to solve problems/make decisions?) |
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| **Ability to work quickly and to change tasks** (Can you work efficiently, and be organized in your approach to work? Can you work at a faster pace when needed? Can you handle interruptions and different tasks without losing focus?) |
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| ***What are the physical and mental demands of the Specialist position?*** |
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| This position requires reading detailed medical records, interviewing applicants by telephone about their medical conditions and past work, eliciting medical information from physicians by phone, inputting data into a computer, evaluating the facts in the cases, and is typically done while sitting at a desk in a cubicle with partial walls in a sometimes noisy environment. Other requirements of this work include: |
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| * Sitting for prolonged periods * Lifting and handling claims folders (weight under 5 pounds maximum) * Ability to perform keying of information on a computer and handwriting information in case files * Ability to use a computer system to input information into files and to read information in files * Gross and fine manipulation involving paper, writing instruments, and a computer keyboard * Ability to manipulate multiple pages of both loose and prong-filed materials and to use bound and loose-leaf manuals * Ability to insert and retrieve materials from a file cabinet * Ability to move to different locations within office complex (most of a Specialist's time is spent in his/her individual work cubicle and/or within the assigned case processing unit) * Ability to communicate effectively, oral and written, in English * Ability to hear and speak on the telephone and in face-to-face exchanges * Ability to scan written materials to select pertinent information * Ability to read handwritten, typed and computerized information, including photocopied materials and faxed materials of varying print quality and legibility as well as materials sent to you on a computer system * Ability to sustain attention to details and concentrate * Ability to deal with several tasks simultaneously, to prioritize work, and to be flexible in dealing with conflicting demands * Ability to work quickly and move rapidly from one task to another * Ability to work under the mental stress and pressure of strict production and quality requirements |
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| If you have any questions about your ability to meet any of the above demands of the job, we ask you to contact our Human Resources Department at (919) 814-3222. |