



Writing a Job Description (excerpt from Manager's Toolkit)

To assist in writing your job descriptions, the following information is included:

- Quick Tips
- Job Description Template – major headings included in the description
- Explanation of Each heading – including tips for writing your descriptions
- Sample Job Descriptions

Quick Tips

A good job description requires a serious commitment of time and attention both during the initial writing phase and in the future. Periodic review is critical to maintaining current, accurate descriptions. The written descriptions must be consistent, accurate, and acceptable to job incumbents, supervisors, and managers with Human Resource obligations towards employees. The following guidelines are useful in preparing well organized, clearly written job descriptions:

- Be logical. The description must be easy to understand. If the job is repetitive, describe the tasks as they occur in the work cycle. For varied jobs, list the major tasks followed by less frequent or less important tasks.
- Use proper detail. The description should cover the essential and non-essential functions of the job but not in excessive detail.
- Use the active voice. Begin each sentence with a functional verb in the present tense, third person singular (e.g., bends, cuts, or polishes.)
- Quantify the expectation. Instead of “lifts heavy packages” the description might say, “lifts heavy packages weighing up to 50 pounds unassisted at least 5 times per day.”
- Describe rather than prescribe. “Operates copier” is preferable to “must know how to operate copier.”
- Be specific. Break down complex operations into component tasks and mention any equipment used.
- Avoid vague terms. Terms like: designs, handles, operates, etc., do not clearly indicate what the employee does. Use active, action verbs such as cuts, lifts, or sharpens. Define any vague terms like: may, occasionally, or periodically. For example, “may” can describe tasks that only some employees in a job perform; “occasionally” can describe tasks performed once in a while and not by a particular employee.
- Be consistent. The on-the-job observations, interviews, and questionnaires conducted during the job analysis phase provide the data that is to be compiled in a usable form. A person or group, such as the consultant or job evaluation committee, usually edits the descriptions to ensure that they include language consistent with the job analysis.

- Check accuracy. To ensure that the job description is accurate, the incumbent or the supervisor of the incumbent should check the description for accuracy.
- Select the appropriate job titles utilized by your organization. Working titles may be used during the intermediate stages of the description process. Through job analysis, substantially similar jobs are recognized and combined, which can reduce the number of job titles for similar job descriptions.
- Summarize the job. An effective job summary of responsibilities is a brief statement that answers the questions of what, how, and why the job exists.

Job Description Template

Job Title:
Classification: (Exempt or Non-exempt)
Reports to:
Supervises:

- Summary of Responsibilities
- Essential Functions
- Non-Essential Functions
- Job Qualifications
- Working Conditions

Explanation of Headings

Job Title

This describes in one or two words what the job entails. Select a title similar to one the job has had in the past, and keep the title as brief as possible. Indicate the skill or supervisory level of the position where valid distinctions exist; different learning or trainee jobs from standard jobs; and identify various classes of difficulty for jobs of similar content.

Classification

Exempt (salaried) or Non-exempt status. Check with Human Resources if you are not sure about a job's particular status.

Reports To

This stated the individual, by job title, the incumbent will report to.

Supervises

This describes the number, if applicable, of employees who report to this position.

Summary of Responsibilities

A concise description of a job's purpose is useful when hiring, training, and evaluating personnel. While jobs include many activities, employers tend to view most jobs as having only one or two core functions. The job summary is a brief description of the job and should state sufficiently why the job exists as well as its contribution to the organization. Although this section appears at the beginning of the description, it is usually written last. Only after the writer has struggled to understand and describe the job by writing the other sections, will he or she be prepared to summarize the job in two to four sentences.

Essential Functions

Determining the job's essential functions is the first step in writing a description. In this step you focus on the results to be achieved – rather than the individual abilities of the incumbent or the methods for achieving those results.

Job functions can be defined in both essential functions and nonessential functions. Essential functions (core duties), when performed under certain working conditions and successfully completed, justify the job's existence within an organization. The essential job functions identify the task to be performed and the expected results of that performance.

Estimated percentages of the time devoted to each essential task are helpful to an employee in understanding the time required for each category of tasks and the employer's perception of the relative importance of each task. Alternatively, a job description could arrange the job tasks by their frequency (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, occasionally.)

➤ **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Considerations**

Each individual possesses different abilities to accomplish the same result. The ADA bars employers from discriminating against a disabled employee by requiring a specific method of achievement, which is different from requiring the employee to achieve the desired end. The employer's judgment of a function's importance typically is considered key in determining whether a job function is essential. An employer, therefore, need not sacrifice performance standards to comply with the ADA and similar nondiscrimination requirements.

Non-Essential Functions

To be essential, the function must be both job related and based on business necessities. Therefore, a function may be non-essential if the function is unrelated to the other job tasks; a failure to perform the task would not materially affect the business; or personnel in other jobs could easily perform the function without disruption.

- **Tip:** Writing a complete but not overly detailed function statement is difficult. Common errors in drafting functions statements include:

Incomplete function statements. Many times the author of a function statement will omit the expected result. A useful function statement includes both the action and the expected result.

Overly detailed function statements. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the author may explain the job procedures in such great detail that the function statement becomes an instruction book. A description does not need to include detailed procedures on how to perform each action. Instead, it identifies only the knowledge necessary for successful performance.

Imprecise descriptions. Jobs that require readily identifiable tasks are easier to describe than other jobs. For example, clerical and manual jobs typically require readily identifiable, observable tasks (e.g., driving, welding, or typing.) Conversely, managerial and executive jobs are more difficult to describe. The expected results of the job have more influence on the job description than do the activity to be performed. The author of the description should attempt to write, in action words, the decisions for which the executive is responsible. They should also explain in the description the expertise required for successful job performance and include a clear statement of the expected results of that performance.

Job Qualifications

➤ **Knowledge, Skills and Abilities**

This specifically identifies the critical knowledge, skills and/or abilities needed to do this job.

➤ **Educational and Work Experience**

This indicates the minimum experience and education, or the equivalent, needed to perform this job. This is not necessarily the same as the experience and education the current jobholder had when he or she started the job; a jobholder often brings MORE than the minimum necessary education or experience.

➤ **Physical Effort and Dexterity**

This indicates whether lifting, climbing, extended sitting or standing, or other physical efforts are normally required. Candidates whose disabilities make them unable to meet these requirements will still be considered fully qualified if they can perform the essential functions of the job with reasonable accommodation.

➤ **Visual Acuity, Hearing, Speaking**

Candidates whose disabilities make them unable to meet these requirements will still be considered fully qualified if they can perform the essential functions of the job with reasonable accommodation.

Working Conditions

The working conditions portion of the job description lists any unusual conditions that may be involved in a particular job. This section includes aspects of the physical environment such as exposure to heat, cold, dust, noise, chemicals, and demands for frequent travel, overtime, or shift work. Working conditions also include performing the requirements under certain time and resource constraints, in difficult surroundings, or while dealing with uncooperative people. An understanding of a job's working conditions is vital to properly defining the job's requirements.

Here are two very different examples:

1. The working conditions of a sales representative position may include out-of-town travel at least two days per month, driving a personal car at least 60 percent of working hours, and attending sales meetings one Saturday per month. An employee frequently is able to perform the tasks of a job adequately but is unable to adjust to the job's working conditions.
2. A secretary could have performed the job tasks satisfactorily in a previous position, but would be unable to handle those tasks in a position requiring performance under a tight time schedule. When placed in a high-pressure environment, the employee may experience a sense of failure or unfair treatment. In addition, the employer is likely to become frustrated because the employee cannot handle the work. Therefore, stating the applicable working conditions in the job description helps prevent problems when selecting applicants and evaluating their performance.