

# Writing a Job or Position Description

Job or position descriptions serve a variety of purposes. They help to distinguish positions, specify work tasks, and determine compensation levels. They are necessary to recruit applicants and later to develop and evaluate the employees.

In general, job/position descriptions describe:

- Who (usually the incumbent or the supervisor)
- Does what work (including review of the work of others)
- Where the work is done (in office or off-site)
- When (or how often)
- Why (the purpose or impact of the work)
- How (it is accomplished). ❶

## Content

NDE uses a specific format for its position and job descriptions. The [Position Description Form Template](#) is found under the “HR Forms” section on HR’s web page on Inside NDE and includes the following information:

- Date of description creation/revision,
- Position title (per classification specification) & working title if desired,
- Pay grade of position per class spec,
- Section/team,
- Reports to (title or individual’s name),
- Prepared by,
- Position number (per posting),
- Job code (per class spec),
- FLSA status (as designated by HR),
- Positions reporting to incumbent (number and/or titles),
- Purpose of position,
- Essential functions,
- Other duties and responsibilities,
- Minimum qualifications (per class spec),
- Preferred qualifications (as desired and relevant to the position),
- Supervisory responsibilities,
- Knowledge and abilities required,
- Fiscal responsibility (authority to commit funds),
- Extent of public contact,
- Working conditions and environment (percentage of time spent in office vs. travel), &
- Examples of physical demands.

The completed job description is intended to establish what the “best qualified” candidate looks like. This helps potential applicants decide whether or not they are a good fit for the position.

## Essential Job Functions

Essential job functions are defined as the primary job functions or tasks that an individual must be able to perform with or without a reasonable accommodation. In deciding whether or not a task is an essential job function, consider the following reasons offered by Beth Loy, Ph.D. in her article, *Job Descriptions*:

- A. The position exists to perform the function. For example, a person is hired to proofread documents. The ability to proofread accurately is an essential function, because this is the reason that this position exists.
- B. There are a limited number of other employees available to perform the function, or among whom the function can be distributed. For example, it may be an essential function for a file clerk to answer the telephone if there are only three employees in a very busy office and each employee has to perform many different tasks.
- C. A function is highly specialized, and the person in the position is hired for special expertise or ability to perform it. For example, a company wishes to expand its business with Japan. For a new sales position, in addition to sales experience, it requires a person who can communicate fluently in the Japanese language. Fluent communication in the Japanese language is an essential function of the job. ❷

According to the EEOC, several types of evidence are considered in determining whether a function is essential. This list is not all-inclusive, and factors not on the list may be equally important as evidence. Evidence to be considered includes: (a) the employer's judgment, (b) a written job description prepared before advertising or interviewing applicants for a job; (c) the amount of time spent performing the function; (d) the consequences of not requiring a person in this job to perform a function; (e) the terms of a collective bargaining agreement, if it lists duties to be performed in particular jobs, the terms of the agreement may provide evidence of essential functions; (f) work experience of people who have performed a job in the past and work experience of people who currently perform similar jobs; and (g) nature and scope of the work operation and the employer's organizational structure. ❷

If any special rules and regulations apply to the position (e.g., state disability and federal and state safety and health laws), this should be documented in the job/position description. For example, to comply with OSH Act regulations, any handling of, or exposure to, human body fluids, biological agents, laboratory chemicals, or hazardous materials such as noise, asbestos, or carcinogens must be documented. ❸

## Other Duties and Responsibilities

Duties that do not meet the definition of *essential job function* should be listed under the heading of Other Duties and Responsibilities. This section can include job functions that occur infrequently and/or could be transferred to another employee without materially changing the position.

## Disclaimer

While a job/position description is intended to specify the duties that an employee is to carry out, the description can and should be updated on a regular basis to reflect any changes in work duties. In that regard, each NDE job/position description should include the following disclaimer:

“Nothing in this job description restricts management’s right to manage, direct, and assign duties and responsibilities to this job at any time. “

## Writing Tips

Here are some tips for writing descriptions from *Writing a Job Description* by Jeff Garton:

- Use action verbs in the present tense. For a good listing of action verbs, check out <http://www.college.ucla.edu/personnel/jobdesc/funcverbs.asp>.
- Make certain the explanatory phrase adds meaning and clarifies the why, how, when or how often.
- Eliminate bias terminology by structuring sentences in such a way that gender pronouns are not required.
- Spell out acronyms. Avoid subjective modifiers or words that might allow for misinterpretations—words such as sometimes, several, high level, occasionally, etc.
- Keep it practical (within a person’s ability to do the job), flexible and current. A confining or inflexible description may inhibit effort or growth. ❹

## Need More Help?

Feel free to contact Human Resources for assistance. We can send you some sample position descriptions or provide input on your draft.

## Resources

- ❶ Job Descriptions – An Overview, by Kenneth Pritchard, April 1995, Reviewed July 2002
- ❷ EEOC (1992). A Technical Assistance Manual on the Employment Provision (Title I) of the Americans with Disabilities Act, <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/links/ADAtam1.html>.
- ❸ Job Accommodation Network (2008). Job Descriptions, by Beth Loy, Ph.D., <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/JobDescriptions.html>.
- ❹ Writing a Job Description, by Jeff Garton, February 2003

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