

Safety topic

Job Descriptions: Best Practices

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Written job descriptions are an important risk management tool.

They affect everything from hiring the right people to training new employees, establishing performance expectations, getting desired results, and accommodating workers with temporary or permanent disabilities.

An effective job description is produced from an objective analysis of a job. It should clearly communicate why a job exists. It should accurately describe major duties and responsibilities and the minimum competencies and requirements necessary to successfully perform the job.

The information included in this publication is designed to give you an idea of how you can develop effective job descriptions. You should also contact your legal counsel or human resources professional to assist you in this process.

Guidelines for writing job descriptions

1. Job analysis/position summary

To create a job description, begin with an objective job analysis. The Position Summary is a job analysis tool to assist you in compiling information and creating a succinct, accurate Job Description. (We have included a Position Summary template at the end of this publication.)

The Position Summary will assist you in determining the order of presentation of job duties and the “essential functions.” It is also a good starting point for listing job duties. When listing job duties, list one job task per line (e.g., cashiering, administering medication, stocking shelves) or group similar tasks (“Administrative Duties” could include typing, filing, answering phones).

Instructions for completing the position summary

General instructions:

The Position Summary is a tool to gather basic information about a job’s duties. This includes primary duties, the percent of time spent performing them, their relative importance to the overall job, and their ADA status as “essential” or “non-essential” job functions.

If the job currently exists, consider having one or more individuals performing the job complete the Position Summary. Interview the occupants if you have questions or there are discrepancies in information. It should then be reviewed by a supervisor or manager. It is a working document, not a final document.

Job duties and responsibilities:

The Position Summary is an outline of a job. It is not necessary to provide every detail about every duty performed. Only the key elements of the most important duties need to be described. Job duties listed in the Position Summary should individually represent at least five percent of the job. Duties representing less than five percent of the job should be listed only if they are critical to successfully performing the job.

Percent of time:

After listing the key job duties, estimate the percent of time spent performing them. The estimate can be based on a weekly or monthly measure, whatever best represents the flow of work for the job.

Percent of time should be rounded to the nearest five percent increment and should add to 100 percent. If there are a number of small duties that make up the last five percent, they can be grouped together under "other duties and responsibilities."

Priority ranking:

Priority ranking represents the importance of a particular duty to the overall job. It is possible for a duty to require only a small percent of time but be highly important to the job. After job duties have been reviewed, numbers representing the order of importance should be placed in the priority ranking column. (If there are 10 duties, they should be numbered 1 through 10, with 1 indicating the most important duty.)

ADA essential:

The ADA Essential Function indicator will either be a "yes" or a "no" for each duty. Use the "Essential Functions Checklist" included below to help you determine your answers.

2. Job description format

A job description contains:

- A standard "header": listing the Job Title, Job Department or Location, Grade/Level, and Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) Status (Exempt/Non-Exempt). It may include additional elements—such as work schedule, reporting relationships, or whether the job has supervisory responsibilities—but should be consistent for your organization. It is helpful to include the date it was created or last revised.
- A job summary: one or two sentences listing the position's purpose. Why does the job exist?
- Job duties and responsibilities: listed either in order of time spent (most time to least time) or order of importance (most important to least important).
- Description of required minimum competencies: listing of knowledge (body of information applied directly to a job duty), skills (present, observable competence to perform a learned activity), and abilities (present competence to perform an observable behavior). List minimum education and experience requirements
- Approvals: space for management or personnel representatives to sign and date indicating approval of the job description.
- Include physical elements/requirements, such as lifting, repetitive bending/reaching, etc., when they are "essential" to the job. Adding weight requirements for lifting may also be appropriate, i.e. "Must be able to lift up to 50 lbs. 10 to 15 times per day/shift." Make sure that force and frequency requirements are based on objective measurements rather than subjective assessments or guesses. Do not overestimate or underestimate.

3. ADA elements

Identify all duties as “essential functions” or “non-essential functions” using the checklist below.

“Essential functions” checklist

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regulations provide information to help employers determine whether a function (job duty) may be considered “essential.” This information provides both the reasons why a function (job duty) can be considered “essential” and examples of the type of evidence an employer may use to document that a function (job duty) is an “Essential Function.” The EEOC “Essential Functions” information is summarized below and can be viewed in its entirety at this web address:
http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/cfr_2008/julqtr/pdf/29cfr1630.2.pdf

A job duty is generally considered an essential function if:

- The reason the job exists is to perform that duty.
- A large percentage of work time is spent performing the duty.
- There are no (or a limited number of) other employees available to whom to assign that job duty.
- The work is so highly specialized that the person filling the job is hired for his or her expertise and ability to perform that job duty.
- The employer judges the job duties to be essential to the job.
- Serious consequences would result if the employee were not required to perform the job duty.
- Terms of a collective bargaining agreement require the job duty to be performed.
- Individuals in that job in the past performed the job duty and/or individuals in similar jobs currently perform the job duty.

Employers may use these items to document that a job duty is an essential function:

- Written job descriptions designating the essential job duties (prepared before advertising or interviewing applicants for the job) *
- Measurements of the percentage of time spent performing the job duty
- Collective bargaining agreements

***Employers must take a careful look at their job descriptions and determine whether all functions identified as “essential” represent essential job duties or are just unexamined lists of what an individual may be called upon to do.**

Position summary

Name: _____ Job title: _____

Date: _____ Locations: _____

Job duties and responsibilities	% of time ranking	Priority	ADA

Manager's approval:

I have reviewed the above information and concur that it accurately represents the duties of this job.

Signature_____
Date

Sample job description format

Job description

Job title: _____ grade/level: _____

Location: _____ status: _____

Job summary: _____

Job duties and responsibilities:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

Essential job functions: *Duties _____ through _____ are designated as ADA Essential Functions and must be performed in this job. All other job duties are secondary functions.*

Minimum requirements

Knowledge: _____

Skills: _____

Abilities: _____

Education: _____

Experience: _____

Approvals: _____

Manager / Date

Personnel Division / Date

Sample job description format

Job description:	Custodian
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Summary: Maintain sanitary conditions in all areas. Provide support for all extra curricular activities authorized by the district. Maintain good rapport with staff and the public. Adhere to conduct and appearance standards prescribed by district policy.

Essential functions:

- Provide custodial care of buildings and grounds as required.
- Be responsive to needs of faculty, staff and students.
- Stay abreast of established safety practices and hazardous materials awareness.
- Maintain acceptable appearance and conduct standards.
- Maintain confidentiality.

Supervisory responsibilities: None

Qualifications:

- Possession of current Oregon State driver's license.
- Two years prior custodial experience.
- Complete physical exams as required.
- High school diploma or equivalent.

Physical demands:

- Ability to continuously stand or walk.
- Ability to bend, squat, climb stairs and lift frequently
- Ability to lift up to 50 pounds occasionally.

Work environment:

- May occasionally work in temperatures above 100 degrees and below 32 degrees.
- May occasionally walk on slippery or uneven surfaces.
- Will climb ladders and work off elevated surfaces on an occasional basis during each shift.
- Noise level in the work environment is frequently loud.

Sample job description format

Job description: **Cook**

Summary: To assist the Food Services Director in operating a clean, sanitary and orderly kitchen to provide wholesome and nutritious meal selections.

Essential functions:

- Properly operate and care for kitchen equipment.
- Establish and maintain cooperative relationships with fellow staff members, students and the general public.
- Understand and carry out oral and written directions.
- Assist in cleaning kitchen area.
- Prepare, cook, and serve nutritious, attractive and appetizing meals.

Supervisory responsibilities: None

Qualifications:

- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Knowledge of and ability to prepare, cook, and serve nutritious meals.
- Knowledge of proper nutrition, sanitation and safety laws and standards.

Physical demands:

- Ability to continuously stand or walk.
- Ability to bend, climb stairs and lift frequently.
- Ability to lift up to 10 pounds frequently.
- Ability to squat occasionally.

Work environment:

- Work will be conducted in a kitchen environment.
- May encounter temperatures ranging from 32 degrees to 425 degrees around equipment.
- May occasionally walk on slippery surfaces.
- Noise level in the work environment is frequently loud.

Sample job description format

Job description:	Supervisor
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Summary: A supervisor performs various tasks to assist with the management of the operation. The supervisor acts as the liaison between management and the crew.

Prerequisites:

- Have extensive knowledge of the business operation and the equipment used.
- Have first-aid training.

Essential functions:

- Report and record work activity or progress.
- Maintain equipment in proper operating condition.
- Assist subordinate employees in performing specific duties.

Supervisory responsibilities:

- Train employees on equipment and procedures.
- Ensure company policies are followed.
- Hire or fire employees.
- Enforce company safety policies.
- Record and maintain time sheets.

Qualifications:

- AA degree in related field or equivalent work-related experience.
- Bilingual in English and Spanish.

Physical demands:

- Climb up onto and down from equipment.
- Lift up to 50 pounds.
- Climb up and down ladder.
- Able to manipulate small hand tools.

Work environment:

Generally works in an office environment but may occasionally be required to perform job duties outside of the typical office setting.