

5 Mistakes Everyone Makes with Job Descriptions & How to Avoid Them



Vice President, Content and Product Development:	Patricia Trainor, JD, SPHR
Founder:	Robert L. Brady, JD
Senior Managing Editor, HR and Compensation:	Catherine Moreton Gray, JD
Senior Production Manager—CMS:	Matt Sharpe
Content Production Specialist:	Susan Robinson
Quality Control Associate:	Linda Costa
Proofreaders:	Joan Carlson, Brechin Knapp

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought. (From a Declaration of Principles jointly adopted by a Committee of the American Bar Association and a Committee of Publishers.)

© 2006–2016 BLR®—Business & Legal Resources

All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced in part or in whole by any process without written permission from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use or the internal or personal use of specific clients is granted by BLR®—Business & Legal Resources. For permission to reuse material from *5 Mistakes Everyone Makes with Job Descriptions and How to Avoid Them*, ISBN 1-55645-344-2, please go to <http://www.copyright.com> or contact the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc. (CCC), 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, 978-750-8400. CCC is a not-for-profit organization that provides licenses and registration for a variety of uses.

ISBN 1-55645-344-2

Printed in the United States of America

Questions or comments about this publication? Contact:

Business & Legal Resources
 100 Winners Circle, Suite 300
 Brentwood, TN 37024-5094

800-727-5257

www.blr.com

Table of contents

Introduction	1
Mistake #1: Mismanaging the Job Description Program.	1
Set Your Program Goals	1
Who Should Prepare Job Descriptions?	2
The Approval Process	3
Using Unions	4
Accessibility of Descriptions	4
Keeping Job Descriptions Up to Date.	5
Set Up a Formal Review Program	6
Mistake #2: Missing Critical Elements of a Job Description	7
Job Identification	7
Job Summary.	9
Essential Functions.	10
Accountabilities	11
Job Specifications	12
Mistake #3: Failing to Accurately Describe the Job	13
What’s Wrong with This Job Description?	14
Mistake #4: Failing to Use Job Descriptions Correctly (or Not Using Them at All!).	16
Wage and Salary Administration	16
Legal Compliance.	17
Collective Bargaining.	18
Human Resources Administration	18
Other Uses of Job Descriptions	19
Mistake #5: Forgetting Format, Organization, and Grammar	19
Job Description Format	19
Keeping It Straight: Organize the Description to Make It Work.	20
Sentence Structure and Content	21
Choosing Your Words Carefully	22
Writing Guidelines and Style Recommendations	22
Some Final Advice	24
Appendix—Glossary of Action Verbs	25
Sample Job Description Formats and Descriptions	31
Conclusion	38

Introduction

Job descriptions have traditionally suffered a poor reputation among managers and human resources professionals. In fact, job descriptions often end up being ignored—left at the bottom drawer of a file cabinet, neglected and rapidly becoming obsolete. Why? It takes time and considerable effort to create and maintain a job description program. It means that someone must be vested with the responsibility of the program—it's got to be part of someone's job description!

Once vested with the responsibility of either creating or maintaining a job description program, many HR professionals fall victim to the pitfalls that job descriptions present. This report highlights the five mistakes most commonly made when dealing with job descriptions and gives useful tips and tactics on how to avoid mistakes and make your job descriptions a valuable tool in HR management.

Mistake #1: Mismanaging the Job Description Program

Whether you are charged with creating an entirely new job description program or just cleaning up an existing program, there are a variety of stumbling blocks. The issues that most commonly appear in job program mismanagement—setting program goals, assigning responsible individuals, setting an approval process, using unions, determining accessibility standards, and regular review—are discussed in detail in this section.

Set Your Program Goals

When establishing a new program, or revising an existing job description program, many employers fail to determine ahead of time the purposes for which the job descriptions will be written (or revised). The first task in establishing a new, or revised, job description program is to set goals for the program. In setting those goals, you may want to ask:

1. Why do we need new job descriptions?
2. What are the shortcomings of our existing job descriptions?
3. What events or conditions indicate that this is the time to get involved in a job description program?
4. To what specific uses will job descriptions be put?
5. What are the projected costs of the program?
6. Has a budget been drawn up and submitted to top management for approval?
7. Who will be involved in the preparation of new job descriptions?

8. Are these individuals willing and able to put the required time into the project?
9. Is top management committed to the idea?

When establishing a job description program, it is vital to first determine who will manage and who will conduct the process. Generally, the manager charged with overall responsibility for the program would be the person responsible for the compensation department or division.

In a large company, a task force might be set up, comprised of the compensation director, job analysts, and middle-level to high-level representatives from the line department. In a medium-sized company, the compensation manager might be charged with management responsibilities, with the frontline work completed by a job analyst. In a small company, the entire job, from conceptualization through execution, might rest with the HR manager.

Or, at any of these companies, an outside consultant or firm might be contracted to set up or to revise the job description program. How you handle the job depends on such factors as internal expertise, goals of the program, economics, etc.

Who Should Prepare Job Descriptions?

While it is the HR department in most medium-sized and larger firms that performs the job analysis function and coordinates the writing of job descriptions, the entire process usually requires some input from other levels of the company hierarchy. Depending on the size of the company, its organizational philosophy, and the level of the jobs to be described, the actual writing of the job description may be done by any one (or a combination) of the following:

Top management. This is most likely true in a small company, but it usually proves to be a time-consuming and expensive approach. Job descriptions written by high-level company managers have a tendency to be cloaked in secrecy and are often regarded with some suspicion by employees.

Job analyst or wage and salary analyst. The job analyst is generally the most likely choice. If the resulting job descriptions are to be used for wage and salary administration purposes, a wage and salary analyst might also be involved in the project. The big advantage here is consistency; the job analyst or wage and salary analyst usually has some experience in this area and can produce descriptions in a uniform and objective manner. The disadvantage is that they seldom possess the intimate day-to-day knowledge of the jobs involved, and this is information needed to describe them accurately.

Supervisor. The supervisor usually has intimate knowledge of the job, but may lack the requisite objectivity. Lack of objectivity sometimes results in a tendency to inflate jobs for personal or political reasons. This is a major drawback to supervisory involvement, although it would probably be a mistake to leave supervisors completely out of the program. In addition,

supervisors may lack appropriate skills, such as the ability to write, that are required for the job.

Outside consultant. Some employers hire consultants who specialize in the writing of job descriptions. Objectivity and experience are the advantages here; the big drawback is cost. Also, there is always the possibility that employees and supervisors alike will resent the intrusion of an outsider.

Employee. It should be recognized that the job incumbent is always in the best position to know his or her job. There are, of course, problems with the incumbent's participation in the job description program. Again, lack of objectivity and inflated outlook, as well as lack of writing and organizational skills for the job, are issues. Some employers have tried to increase employee involvement, while controlling it as much as possible, by asking workers to fill out detailed questionnaires designed to elicit the information needed for the job description. Other firms have supervisors or HR staffers interview the employee before writing the final job description. This input can then be weighed against other sources and the results used accordingly. The job analysis interview usually serves this purpose well.

Although the employee and the supervisor may help in providing information and in editing a job description, neither of them alone (or even both working together) can be expected to prepare a description properly. This is why most companies depend on a specialist—either a consultant or a member of the personnel department—to do the actual writing. This person would also develop the job questionnaire for response by the incumbents (if such a survey is used), as well as a list of questions for supervisory and incumbent interviews.

Whomever you decide to use, the person should be unbiased and “nonpolitical,” have the ability to grasp quickly and describe clearly job requirements in a variety of work situations, be able to synthesize and generalize information, and have excellent writing, analytical, and organizational skills.

The Approval Process

No matter who does the actual writing of job descriptions, someone is going to have to be responsible for approving the finished product. Approval procedures vary according to the amount of responsibility given to supervisors and job analysts, the extent to which the company favors administrative controls, the purposes for which the job descriptions will be used, and the terms of any relevant union contracts.

A basic approval process would be:

1. The job's supervisor agrees that the job description is a complete, accurate, and clear representation of the job. (At professional, supervisory, and managerial levels, this approval level would often rest first with the job incumbents.)
2. The upper-level manager agrees that functional relationships and responsibility delegations have been represented correctly.

3. The wage administrator (or, in some cases, the job description or compensation committee) approves of the format and content.
4. An HR professional with knowledge of the legal factors, or an employment law attorney, provides agreement that there are no legal “red flags” in the descriptions that would, even without intimate knowledge of the job, be a legal problem.

Using Unions

In organizations where a labor union represents employees, and depending on the ultimate use of the job descriptions, the union may also be asked to participate in the review and approval process. The advantages of this type of approval process are obvious. Each individual reviews the completed job description from his or her own unique perspective, evaluating it on the basis of what he or she knows and understands best about the job in question. This is an excellent means of obtaining broad-based participation in the program while at the same time encouraging each group to stay within the limits of its own expertise.

Accessibility of Descriptions

Once the descriptions are written, the question remains of who should have access to them. Company policies vary widely on this, but in most firms, employees have access to their own job descriptions. This is certainly recommended—how else can employees determine whether they’re doing all that is required in their jobs?

It is also standard procedure for managers and supervisors to have access to the descriptions for their subordinates. Beyond this, however, there is a tendency among some employers to keep their description programs relatively “closed.” It seems that organizations that use descriptions primarily for salary administration are less likely to allow all employees free access to them than are companies who use them for other purposes. It is very unusual to allow clerical and production workers to examine managerial descriptions unless they have a legitimate need to do so.

Guidelines for Access. Based on widely accepted personnel practices, the following guidelines seem reasonable for the majority of cases. While your company’s particular needs may demand some deviation from these guidelines, they can be used as a starting point for establishing company policy:

1. Employees should have access to, and preferably a copy of, their own description.
2. Supervisors, managers, and executives should have access to the descriptions of their subordinates.
3. Nonmanagerial employees should not have access to managerial descriptions.

4. There may be instances when managers or executives (but usually not supervisors) would have access to the descriptions of employees who do not report to them. This may be appropriate during reorganizations, long-range development, or other situations. In addition, it might be appropriate for managers to view the job descriptions of employees from other departments vying for open positions in the manager's department.
5. When employees are applying for internal transfers or promotions, it may be appropriate for them to receive copies of the description of the open job. If this procedure is abused, access could be limited to viewing only by final candidates for the open job.
6. HR staffers should have access on a "need-to-know" basis. This means that the HR vice president, director, or manager would generally have unrestricted access to any description. The same generally would be true for most professional and managerial compensation, employment, employee relations, training, and related personnel. Other HR staffers, such as benefits managers, as well as clerical and administrative staff not specifically designated to work in the job descriptions area, would have more restricted access.

Keeping Job Descriptions Up to Date

A crucial factor in the success of any job or position description program is the procedure for keeping descriptions up to date. Next to inaccurately phrased job descriptions, failure to maintain descriptions is the most frequent reason job description programs fail. Now, because of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the importance of a serious maintenance program cannot be overemphasized. An obsolete job description is not only worthless, but it may actually be harmful to the company and the incumbent.

Change in essential functions. To assure that persons who are disabled have equal access to jobs, it is vital that they be familiar with all the current essential functions of the position. An old job description may include functions not currently required in the job that may keep a person with a disability out of the running for the position. Or, the opposite may occur when new functions may not be reflected in the job description. Either scenario may be an invitation to a lawsuit by a disabled job applicant kept out of the position because a job is described inaccurately.

Similarly, the company may suffer if an obsolete job description prevents an employee from making the best possible contribution to the job. Changes in jobs take many forms and occur for a variety of reasons. For example, a change in the job's physical surroundings might affect the level of hazard or fatigue, creating the need for protective garments or equipment and/or creating a need to accommodate an otherwise qualified individual in the job.

Change in technology. A technological change, either in the product itself or in the equipment or process used to manufacture it, might make the job

easier or more difficult to perform; it might also create or eliminate a need for special knowledge. For example, a change in supervisors might result in a reorganization of several jobs into completely new combinations of essential functions.

Some of these changes are abrupt, making it fairly obvious that the job should be reviewed and the description revised. However, others are more gradual, and frequently go unnoticed for long periods of time. It can be very difficult to decide when a change in a job is significant enough to merit the time and effort involved in rewriting the job description and sometimes minor changes are ignored. Even small changes can accumulate over a period of time to the point where they can't be ignored any longer.

The promptness with which such action is taken will depend on the nature of the change.

Obviously, anything affecting the rate of pay for a job should be dealt with as soon as possible. Other changes can be processed as time allows, but even these should not be unduly postponed.

Set Up a Formal Review Program

Today, every company should have a formal schedule for reviewing all job descriptions in the company. Preferably, because of the legal climate, a review should occur at least once a year. These days, it would be “penny-wise and pound-foolish” for employers to contend that they cannot afford the time and resources required for annual reviews.

If a yearly review is not possible for every job, then at the very least, certain jobs should be classified as benchmark positions for the purposes of review. These jobs, then, would be reviewed (and updated as appropriate) yearly. Other jobs in the same family would then be reviewed on an as-needed basis, based on the findings of the benchmark job reviews, as well as on some other predetermined interval. In addition, as a general rule, a job or position description should be reviewed and (if necessary) revised when:

1. The job content changes.
2. There is an organizational structure change.
3. The employee or his or her supervisor requests a review.
4. There is only one incumbent in the job, and that person leaves the job.
5. There are continuous problems in a department or division—the validity of job descriptions in the area should always be considered when there are internal problems.

Most organizations follow essentially the same procedures when revising their descriptions as they did when they wrote the originals. If, for example, an employee's supervisor writes the first draft, and approval must be obtained from the HR/personnel manager and the department head, then this same approval process is followed for revisions.

Assigning responsibility for review. But who is responsible for noticing when revisions are needed and for initiating the appropriate action? Under some circumstances—for example, when the change might lead to an increase in pay—the employee or the labor union will be quick to call attention to the need for a revision. But generally speaking, it is the immediate supervisor who should arrange for a review of the job description.

Unfortunately, most supervisors are not aware of this responsibility, or they are reluctant to say anything for fear of creating an awkward situation. Supervisors and job incumbents alike must be trained to recognize the mutual advantages of keeping job descriptions up to date. This can be integrated into the orientation phase of the program, with periodic follow-up in the form of memos, small group meetings to review updating procedures, etc.

Supervisors, employees, and the union must all understand that the company gives top priority to job description maintenance. Supervisors in particular should know that they may be held accountable for any undesirable consequences that might occur as a result of their failure to act promptly.

Mistake #2: Missing Critical Elements of a Job Description

Most job descriptions contain the following elements:

1. Job identification,
2. Job summary or purpose,
3. Essential functions and additional responsibilities,
4. Accountabilities, *and*
5. Job specifications.

This framework may vary from employer to employer and from job to job. The basic elements and the overall format of the job description will be discussed further in this section. One important thing to remember is that all job descriptions within an organization should follow the same format. Those individuals responsible for writing them should receive similar instructions and follow the same guidelines so that valid comparisons can be made among jobs.

Job Identification

This is the part that almost everyone takes for granted. It usually looks something like this:

Job Title /Job Code

FLSA Status Plant/Division

Immediate Supervisor (Title) Department

Written by /Date

Approved by /Date

This information may be arranged in a number of ways. For example, a smaller company may simply ask for the job title, department, supervisor's title, and the date. One thing to remember in designing the job identification section is that you want to include only items of information that are relatively permanent. For example, if you include the name of the incumbent's supervisor, and a month later, the supervisor is promoted or leaves the company, all the descriptions with that name will have to be pulled from the files and revised.

What's in a Title?

The most important element in this section is the job title. A job title that identifies the job accurately and precisely is valuable: (1) to the jobholder, or to someone new coming into the job, (2) for purposes of establishing the relationships among jobs, and (3) for purposes of comparing the job with others in the organization. A good job title:

- ◆ Describes the job in a word or two.
- ◆ Indicates the job's specific field of activity, its relationship to that field, and its professional standing.
- ◆ Accurately reflects the job's content, purpose, and scope of responsibility. (For example, if you have about 20 employees in your organization, and one person is responsible for office and clerical support functions, it's more appropriate to title that job "Office Manager" than it is to term it "Operations Director.")
- ◆ Should be as brief as possible, and if it consists of more than one word, it should be in natural order (for example, "Computer Operator," not "Operator, Computer") so that it will be easy to use in written or spoken form.
- ◆ Should indicate skill level or supervisory level, where valid distinctions exist.
- ◆ Should be similar or identical to one of the titles the job has had in the past, so employees and supervisors won't have to learn a completely new vocabulary every time job descriptions are written or revised.

Establishing Order in Your Organization

In the intermediate stages of preparing job descriptions, "working titles" may be used to identify jobs. You may in fact have several titles for some job descriptions. Choosing a final title is important because it is the last step in defining the job and establishing a rank order with other jobs. It will be used for department, division, or functional group; as a guide for promotions and transfers; and as an indicator of training and development requirements. Job titles are especially important when it comes to comparing the job with similar jobs in other organizations. Such comparisons are critical when developing a wage and salary structure, conducting wage and salary surveys, and recruiting new employees.

Job titles should set each job apart from the other jobs. For example, the title “machine operator” indicates in a general way what the job is. Differences in degrees of skill required should be clarified by adding prefixes indicating the purpose for which the machine is used or the kind of machine operation (for example, “pneumatic drilling machine operator”). Another point to remember is that job titles should be consistent within the company. If “junior,” “intermediate,” and “senior” designations are made in one department, they should be used to make similar distinctions in other departments.

Job Code

Another major item in the job identification section is the job code. This refers to the employer’s unique combination of numbers or letters that the company has assigned to the job. Some companies set up a set of numbers and letters to denote various categories for internal HR use. For example, the first letter of the code might be 1 for exempt or 2 for nonexempt; the second might be 3 or 4 for supervisory or nonsupervisory; the third, 1 through 9 for job categories under the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (used in form EEO-1); the fourth might denote which, if any, bonus compensation program the job is part of, etc.

Other Identification

The next item, FLSA status, simply refers to the exempt or nonexempt status of the job under the Fair Labor Standards Act. The other two items are for the names and signatures of the author of the job description and the final approval of the job description.

Job Summary

The second section of a good job description format is known as the “job summary.” It is a brief narrative of the job that highlights its general characteristics. It is especially valuable to the reader who wants to obtain a quick overview of the job.

The job summary should provide enough information to differentiate the major functions and activities of the job from those of other jobs. Since brevity, accuracy, and objectivity are primary goals in writing the job summary, it is wise to follow these three basic rules:

1. Start the job summary with an action word (verb).
2. Explain the job’s requirements; in other words, tell what is done.
3. If necessary, explain the why or how of the job—its purpose. If it is necessary or helpful to do so, use an example.

The choice of words is a crucial factor here. Although the same rules apply in the job summary as elsewhere in the job description, a few of them are worth repeating. The meanings you establish for certain words here in the job summary should be applied consistently throughout all your job descriptions.

You should also try to avoid ambiguous words or those that leave themselves open to a number of possible interpretations. Finally, stick to simple terms and phrases with which everyone in the company is familiar.

It is often in the job summary section that the phrase “performs other assignments (or duties) as required” is included. A job description should not limit or restrict the worker, and it is not meant to be an all-inclusive document. However, it is difficult for some employees to understand why this phrase is so important. They may regard it as a convenient excuse for the supervisor who wants them to take on additional duties. One way of overcoming such objections is to explain that jobs evolve over time, with some duties added, as well as some being eliminated, as needed. This conveys the message that certain things that must be done are not always included in the job description.

Essential Functions

This section is important. Essential functions are common to all job description formats and represent a summary of those functions associated with the job. The essential functions should represent those duties that must be performed in the job. The essential duties section will often be followed by a section on “Additional Responsibilities,” which are nonessential or marginal job functions.

Focus on Function

When trying to identify the essential job duties and responsibilities, it is vital to focus on the function of the job, rather than on the means used to achieve that function. If you can leave the process of achieving the end result open, you will be better prepared to meet the requirement to provide reasonable accommodation to otherwise qualified job applicants and employees.

For example, it might be an essential function for a loading dock job to load four tractor trailers in 2½ hours. This doesn’t necessarily mean that the load must be manually accomplished. Use of hand trucks and forklift trucks might be appropriate, allowing persons who cannot lift heavy loads for long periods of time to be able to do the job.

Here are some of the items that might be included in this section:

- ◆ Regular day-to-day functions
- ◆ Duties that occur at irregular intervals but that are of a recurring and essential nature
- ◆ Quantity and quality of supervision received
- ◆ Quantity and quality of supervision exercised
- ◆ Amount of human interaction required (in teaching, counseling, coaching, training, etc.); extent of contacts made both inside and outside of the company
- ◆ Responsibility for maintaining records
- ◆ Requirements for following instructions or orders

- ◆ Responsibility for company funds
- ◆ Degree of accountability for human and material resources
- ◆ Office machines or equipment that must be operated
- ◆ Physical demands
- ◆ Emotional demands
- ◆ Other unusual demands

Of course, you will want to include many more of the details that characterize this particular job in your particular type of company.

Avoid the Tasks

In developing this section, don't fall into the trap of trying to do a task analysis or breakdown. This section should focus on the required outcome, the requisite product, etc., of the job tasks, rather than on the tasks themselves. Don't attempt to set down every little detail of the job, unless it is an essential function of the position. You only need whatever information is necessary to define the level of skill, responsibility, and knowledge required by the job.

While writing style will be covered in detail later, here are a few important points to remember when preparing the job duties section:

- ◆ Use brief, to-the-point sentences or phrases.
- ◆ Begin each sentence or phrase with an action verb.
- ◆ Use the present tense.
- ◆ Avoid verbs that do not specifically indicate the action involved.

The 80/20 Rule

Probably the most difficult aspect of preparing job descriptions is deciding what functions, duties, and responsibilities to include. It may be hard for someone not intimately familiar with the job to determine which job activities are truly "essential" and which are marginal or incidental.

One rule some employers have followed states that 80 percent of what comes out of a job is the result of 20 percent of what goes into it. In other words, only about 20 percent of what the employee actually does is responsible for achieving 80 percent of the job's results or objectives. The significant point to remember here is that it is this 20 percent of the job's content that you are trying to capture in the essential functions of the job description.

There is no substitute for experience when it comes to writing job descriptions. All the advice, rules, guidelines, and suggested formats presented thus far will be meaningless until they are applied. And because jobs themselves vary so widely, it is impossible to provide a step-by-step guide to writing the "ideal" job description. The best approach is to reread and assimilate what has been said up to this point and then tackle the first job, preferably a low-level one that is limited in scope and that lends itself to fairly concrete description.

Accountabilities

Once job objectives have been made clear and responsibilities and duties have been defined, the incumbent is accountable to his or her superior for success or failure in accomplishing these objectives. The section on “accountabilities” not only describes the end results achieved when job duties are performed satisfactorily, but also mentions specific standards for measuring performance. It is therefore particularly useful when preparing for performance appraisal.

The concept of accountability is easily misunderstood. It is important for the manager or supervisor to realize that when authority is delegated, the person to whom it has been delegated is held accountable. The subordinate must consciously accept the authority and exercise it in making decisions and seeing that they are carried out. In lower-level jobs, this section states to whom the incumbent is accountable in carrying out the duties and responsibilities that have already been outlined.

In a sense, job descriptions form the basis for the company’s disciplinary system. When an employee fails to fulfill the responsibilities or to meet the standards specified in the accountabilities section of the job description, he or she can be disciplined in a number of ways, including termination of employment.

Job Specifications

Job specifications describe the specific job requirements in terms of “compensable factors.” This factor-by-factor breakdown of the job also gives enough supporting data to select a particular level or degree for each factor. During job evaluation, a point score is assigned and a wage rate or salary level is set accordingly.

Because the job specification is used chiefly as the basis for rating jobs in the job evaluation process, the factors selected depend on what the company has designated as “compensable factors” for all the jobs in the organization. Most fall under the four broad headings of skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions. Skill, for example, might be broken down into the education, experience, initiative, and ingenuity required for the job. Effort might be subdivided into the physical and mental effort required.

But what has happened in many firms is that job specifications have become confused with “person (or employee) specifications”—that is, the minimum qualifications that an employee must possess to be considered for hire. The distinction between job specifications, which are used for wage and salary purposes, and person specifications, which are used for employment purposes, is an important one.

Some job descriptions also include a section dealing specifically with “relationships.” This describes the major relationships between this job and other jobs or positions either within or outside the company. It includes subordinate positions directly supervised by the job being described, as well as contacts with outside vendors, government agencies, etc.

It should be remembered that the basic format outlined in the preceding pages is by no means the most widely used. It is, however, a comprehensive approach that will ensure widespread application. You may wish to incorporate some of these six basic elements in your own job description format while omitting others. Just make sure that you aren't leaving out a section that might serve a vital purpose.

Mistake #3: Failing to Accurately Describe the Job

Beyond the essential elements of a job description just described, perhaps the biggest mistake made when crafting a job description is actually failing to describe the job. One of the most common reasons a job description isn't used is because it isn't useful. In other words, it lacks validity, and therefore it fails to achieve its potential. A carefully conducted job analysis will go a long way toward heading off validity problems, but in the end, the responsibility rests with the individual who actually writes the finished product.

If the final written job description fails to accurately reflect the job, consider some of the possible consequences:

- ◆ Candidates without the proper qualifications may be referred to department heads for hiring or promotion.
- ◆ Jobs may be ranked improperly with others in terms of their worth to the organization.
- ◆ Employees may end up struggling to achieve unrealistic standards of performance.

Common Pitfalls: Describing the Job

It is unfortunate that the typical job description is often deficient in at least one of the following ways:

4. The description exaggerates or downplays the importance of the job.
5. It fails to pinpoint the critical elements that differentiate between successful and unsuccessful job performance.
6. It ignores the decision-making aspects of the job.
7. It either fails to focus on the job incumbent's actual behavior or it defines required behavior in ambiguous terms.
8. It describes worker requirements or characteristics that are not really needed to succeed in the job.

Above all, many job descriptions (an example of which follows) fail to answer some of the most basic questions that someone coming into the job might have. Suppose that you are a newly hired administrative assistant for the position described. Would you have enough information about the job to feel confident about what was expected of you and about your ability to meet the job's performance standards? Read on to see what we mean.

What's Wrong with This Job Description?

It lists the general duties performed by many administrative assistants. Because this company is probably using the same job description for a wide range of administrative assistant positions, it does not specify the nature of the reports, meetings, and correspondence involved. The employee could be working in an insurance office or a textile factory. The last item—"Other duties as assigned"—leaves the job description open to any additional duties the supervisor may want to include. An approach like this obviously simplifies the process of preparing job descriptions, but it isn't very useful.

Typical (But Not Terrific) Job Description

Job Title: Administrative Assistant

Responsibilities: Works under the direction of supervisor, Customer Service Department

Duties:

- Creates and compiles reports
- Maintains inventory and supplies
- Handles routine correspondence
- Answers phones and takes messages
- Other duties as assigned

Qualifications:

- High school diploma or equivalent
- Two years' experience as administrative assistant or equivalent position

A more specific description would answer these questions:

- ◆ What are the essential functions of the job? Am I able to perform them, with or without reasonable accommodation?
- ◆ What are the standards for acceptable job performance? How often must I "compile reports" (for example), and how much time will I be given to do so? How promptly must I answer the phone? How often will it ring? How many errors (if any) are allowed in typing correspondence?
- ◆ What are the conditions under which this job is to be performed? What kind of computer or typewriter is available? How large is the filing system? Is it up to date? How much correspondence is there to answer? What working conditions might make certain tasks easier or harder to accomplish? Do certain duties require more work at certain times of the day, month, or year?
- ◆ What "other duties" might be assigned fairly regularly?
- ◆ Why is 2 years' experience necessary? What skills, knowledge, or abilities is this experience supposed to represent?

As you can see, specific job descriptions, regularly updated, are very helpful. However, organizations may have legal liability if job descriptions are not used correctly.

Mistake #4: Failing to Use Job Descriptions Correctly (or Not Using Them at All!)

Many organizations with job descriptions don't value them enough because they aren't aware of the many uses to which they can be put. Some employers think of job descriptions only in terms of wage and salary administration, or as a necessary evil when it comes to complying with certain employment laws. But these are only two of the many practical uses for job descriptions, most of which can be grouped under one of the following four headings (discussed in this section): wage and salary administration, legal compliance, collective bargaining, and human resources administration.

Wage and Salary Administration

Any compensation system requires that jobs be classified and evaluated in terms that make comparisons possible. Job descriptions are especially valuable in the following compensation-related activities:

- ◆ **Job evaluation.** The job description makes it possible to evaluate one job in relation to others. Determining a job's worth to the organization is not only important in developing an equitable wage and salary structure, but also in determining employee benefits and bonuses that relate employee performance to the performance of the company.
- ◆ **Job classification.** Job descriptions make it possible to identify common job elements and requirements, which in turn make it possible to group jobs into families, grades, or classes for wage and salary purposes.
- ◆ **Wage and salary surveys.** Wage and salary surveys enable companies within a certain area or industry to compare pay levels for the jobs they have in common. Job descriptions provide the basis for such comparisons.
- ◆ **Pay structure.** An equitable pay structure means that jobs are rewarded according to their contributions toward the achievement of organizational goals. Before each job's contribution can be evaluated, however, its content must be accurately described.
- ◆ **Performance appraisal.** While performance appraisal enables managers and supervisors to make decisions in many areas other than compensation, the link between describing the job and developing appropriate performance standards cannot be overlooked. These performance standards, in turn, are critical factors when it comes to evaluating an employee's readiness for raises, promotions, etc.

Legal Compliance

Job descriptions have proven to be key evidence of legal compliance (or non-compliance) under a number of federal employment laws. Consider how the following laws affect employers and their job descriptions:

- ◆ **The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).** Although the ADA does not require job descriptions, it does require that applicants and employees are able to perform the “essential functions” of the job, with or without reasonable accommodation. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has said that one of the things the agency will look at when determining essential functions are job descriptions written before an employer advertises to fill an opening. Therefore, most companies—whether they are rewriting old descriptions or developing them for the first time—want them to reflect essential functions of the job.
- ◆ **Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).** This law is familiar territory for most employers. Court cases have forced employers to take a second look at its impact. For example, recent court cases involving many large companies have involved misclassification of who is “exempt” and who is “nonexempt.” Job descriptions are often used as supporting documents when it comes to establishing a job’s exempt status.
- ◆ **Equal Pay Act (EPA).** The job description should clearly identify the level of skill, effort, and responsibility required by the job as well as the conditions under which it is performed. This can be a vital piece of evidence when a company is accused of paying an employee of one sex less than an employee of the opposite sex, for work requiring equal skill, effort, and responsibility, performed under similar conditions.
- ◆ **Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.** This Act makes it unlawful for an employer to discriminate against any individual with respect to hiring, compensation, or other terms, conditions, and privileges of employment because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It does not prohibit an employer from hiring or promoting on the basis of qualifications and merit. The job description defines the requirements of the job and sets the standards for job performance, both of which are crucial considerations in such cases. The job description is also important as far as testing regulations are concerned. Any employment or preemployment tests that are administered must be strictly in line with job requirements, which, in turn, are spelled out in the job description.
- ◆ **Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act.** Many job descriptions have a section that discusses working conditions, especially when these conditions are considered uncomfortable or dangerous. It is important that any unusual or adverse job condition be specified within the job description so that an employee coming into the job knows what to expect. Job descriptions can also serve as a useful starting point for an examination of existing safety practices and working conditions.
- ◆ **Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA).** The job specifications section of the job description, which states what the job requires of the jobholder in terms of education or work experience, skills, physical

characteristics, personal characteristics, etc., should not discriminate on the basis of age unless there is a valid reason for doing so.

Collective Bargaining

The issue of varying pay rates for similar work has often been raised by unions, who may point to job descriptions as a basis for standardizing these pay rates. Job descriptions have also been used by employers to defend themselves against what they feel are unjustified union demands for uniform rates.

Good job descriptions can clarify which jobs are truly similar and which jobs warrant different pay levels because they require different levels of skill, knowledge, or responsibility, or because they contribute to company goals in different ways.

Human Resources Administration

There is probably no better tool when it comes to human resources planning than a well-written set of job descriptions. Consider:

- ◆ **Staff planning.** Job descriptions help in pinpointing staffing requirement gaps as well as in identifying overstaffing or superfluous positions. They are also valuable when decisions regarding centralization or decentralization must be made.
- ◆ **Employment.** Accurate job descriptions are an invaluable source of information during the entire employment process, from job posting, to recruiting and screening, to hiring and placement. They can provide the foundation for job posting programs because almost all the information required for a job posting can be garnered from the job description. They make recruiting and screening more efficient, and they are vital in spelling out the job requirements to achieve a good match between the candidate's qualifications and the job's demands.
- ◆ **Orientation.** The importance of orientation and adjustment to a new job can't be overstated. A newly hired worker with an accurate, well-written job description to review and analyze has received a good introduction to the job and is therefore able to understand more fully what the company and the supervisor expect. All new employees should be instructed to regard the job description as a framework or starting point, not as an upper limit to their own abilities and interests.
- ◆ **Training and development.** Well-written job descriptions identify the education, experience, and skills required for the position. They can therefore help employees pinpoint their own weaknesses and help their supervisors tailor a training program accordingly. As the job and the job description change, training and development must keep pace. In addition, the job description provides a basis for teaching each employee as much as possible about his or her job and its relationship to other jobs as well as to the company as a whole.
- ◆ **Career planning.** Accurate job descriptions are essential in developing upward mobility and career development programs. A study of

job descriptions can reveal the relationships among certain jobs and the education, experience, or skills needed to advance from one job to another.

Other Uses of Job Descriptions

While most practical uses for job descriptions are included in the preceding four categories, a few others deserve mention.

Organizational development and strategic planning. The process of preparing job descriptions serves a useful purpose in itself, particularly if it starts at the upper levels of the organizational hierarchy. The preliminary drafts of managerial and executive descriptions can be used as a basis for productive group discussion, where managers and executives get together to talk about one another's responsibilities. Such discussions often reveal areas where overlapping responsibilities or confusion about the limits of responsibility are a problem, or where the organizational structure is faulty. When these problems have been solved, each manager can then repeat the process with his or her own subordinates in reviewing and discussing their job descriptions.

A side benefit of this approach is that managers and supervisors are more likely to feel committed to supporting a system they have helped to create. They are also more likely to use job descriptions for some of the purposes outlined here, rather than letting them collect dust in a drawer.

Grievance procedures. Good job descriptions can settle many grievances before they develop into real problems.

Work flow analysis. Job descriptions that focus on the "who-what-when-where-and-why" aspect of jobs provide an ideal basis for analyzing work flow.

Organizational studies. Studies on almost any aspect of organizational life—affirmative action, hiring policies and practices, promotion patterns, etc.—must begin with a close look at the appropriate job descriptions.

Mistake #5: Forgetting Format, Organization, and Grammar

Job Description Format

Job description formats vary widely, and there is no single "right" format to follow. Length can range from a half page to two or three full pages, depending on the nature of the job and the company's program goals. Whatever the length, the finished job description should be detailed enough to give a clear picture of the job to someone not familiar with it.

The written information should make it possible for the reader to compare the demands and contributions of this job with those of other jobs in the company. It must tell why and how job duties are performed, and it must indicate

the job's scope, complexity, authority, and accountability. It is just as important to understand what *doesn't* belong in a job description as it is to know what information does belong there. Above all, the job description should state the functions as they're observed and the situation as it exists (assuming the incumbent is performing the job satisfactorily), not the way the job might or should be done theoretically. In other words, opinions or recommendations concerning work methods or procedures have no place in the job description, even though they may be valuable for improving efficiency and productivity.

Keeping It Straight: Organize The Description to Make It Work

A good job description format makes organizing the information fairly simple. Some sections, for example, the "Job Identification" section, automatically will present the desired information in a useful and logical sequence, and all you have to do is fill in the blanks. (That is, assuming you have done the necessary work to determine whether the job is exempt or nonexempt, etc.)

The "Essential Functions" section presents more of an organizational and writing task. If the functions are numerous and complex (and for many jobs they are), you'll want to decide ahead of time how to organize them. Here are some alternatives:

1. The "sequence of operations" approach. This is a simple way to organize job information—it follows the sequence in which the functions are carried out (if there is such a sequence). This approach is best suited to jobs where tasks tend to be repetitive and usually performed in a particular sequence over and over again.
2. The "major duty" approach. Many jobs, particularly those of a supervisory or administrative nature, have no daily sequence of functions and duties. In this case, the information can be organized into major job segments or duties, the most essential listed first, with specific duties outlined below each of these broader headings.
3. The "relative importance" approach. This approach organizes information about job duties and responsibilities on the basis of their relative importance (as judged by the incumbent, the supervisor, and the job analyst or human resources specialist). A variation on this idea would be to arrange the functions in order of the amount of time spent on them.

These are just a few of the organizational frameworks that you can follow. The most appropriate choice depends to a large extent on the job analysis method used and on the nature of the job in question. For example, if you use a structured job analysis procedure, such as function inventories, you may want to arrange duties in alphabetical order in the job description. Or, if you are trying to describe a job that consists almost entirely of interpersonal contacts, you will naturally want to organize the job description on the basis of these relationships.

Sentence Structure and Content

The content of sentences used in a job description will also vary greatly with the nature of the job and the job analysis method being used. The sentences may be very simple, consisting of only a verb (in the third person, present tense) and an object (possibly modified by an adjective), as in “Operates power saw” or “Installs thermostats.”

However, most jobs demand somewhat more complicated sentences, examples of which are:

- ◆ **Compound sentence** (contains two or more main clauses and no subordinate clauses). “Greets customers at Information Desk and ascertains reason for visit to Credit Office.”
- ◆ **Complex sentence** (contains one main clause and one or more subordinate clauses). “Contacts customer to obtain delivery address when address is omitted from letter.”
- ◆ **Compound-complex sentence** (contains two or more main clauses and at least one subordinate clause). “At end of year, when requisitions for coming year are submitted, prepares report on supplies used by each department and suggests areas for cost reduction.”

Note that all unnecessary words must be eliminated. There is no stated subject (it is understood that the subject is “incumbent” or “jobholder”) and words like “a,” “an,” “the,” “their,” etc., are left out when they are not absolutely essential for clarity.

Avoid the negative. Sentences in a job description should always be positive, never explaining what the worker doesn’t do. But sometimes this rule may pose problems. When it does, the writer can give an example illustrating the limitation rather than using a negative statement.

Responsibility trap. Another trap to avoid is using the words “responsible for.” An employee can be “responsible for” any number of tasks and never do anything to accomplish them. Furthermore, “responsible for” duties cannot be classified or graded.

Relative adjectives. Relative adjectives, such as “extremely complex” or “moderately difficult,” should be avoided unless their meaning is clarified by a comparison. Such terms are occasionally found in classification or grading standards, but only to compare levels of difficulty or work within a certain occupation. In a job description, judgmental words of any type should be strictly avoided. “Extremely complex” to one person might be only “moderately complex” to another.

Another example of vague language would be “exercises good judgment in handling personnel problems.” Who is to say exactly what constitutes “good” judgment? Similarly, to say that the incumbent “is allowed wide latitude for the exercise of independent action” is not as meaningful as it would be to state exactly how much discretion the incumbent has through specific examples of the circumstances under which it is exercised. All other sentences in

the job description—that is, the job summary, accountability, job specifications, etc.—follow the same general rules.

Choosing Your Words Carefully

To achieve the two primary goals of job description writing—accuracy and brevity—you must check and double-check the words you have chosen to describe each job activity. Sometimes it is helpful to have someone who is not as familiar with the job read over what you have written. If an outside consultant is preparing the job descriptions, a professional in human resources also should check them over carefully.

Here are a few guidelines regarding the use of words in a job description:

- ◆ Use a simple word rather than a sophisticated one. For example, never say “metropolis” when “city” will work.
- ◆ Use a single word rather than three or four.
- ◆ Avoid technical words unless you are sure they will be easily understood. If you must use them anyway, explain.
- ◆ Use few adjectives.
- ◆ Keep the use of gerunds and participles to a minimum. A gerund is a verb used as a noun; for example, “Handles processing of change-of-address forms.” A participle is a verb used as an adjective. Of course, there are times when gerunds and participles provide the most effective means of describing a task, but there are many more times when they merely clutter up the sentence. In the first example above, why not just say “Processes change-of-address forms”?
- ◆ Avoid imprecise words such as “situation,” “facilitate,” “interface,” etc. Ask yourself if the word you have used might be interpreted differently by two different people.
- ◆ Use words that focus on the outcome of the job function, rather than on the process used to create the outcome.

Writing Guidelines and Style Recommendations

The following recommendations are vital because the way in which job descriptions are written can make or break the success of your program, and they deserve to be repeated here. It is strongly suggested that you copy this list of writing guidelines and distribute it to anyone who might be involved in the writing process.

- ◆ A terse, direct style should be used throughout the description.
- ◆ Keep sentence structure as simple as possible; omit all words that don’t contribute necessary information.
- ◆ Begin each sentence with an active verb, third person singular. Always use the present tense.
- ◆ Wherever possible, describe the desired outcome of the work, rather than the method for accomplishing that outcome. For example, instead

of “writes down phone messages”—a task-oriented approach—you might say “accurately records phone messages.”

- ◆ Focus on essential activities. A task that is performed frequently throughout the day may not be as essential or as critical to the job as something done only once or twice a week.
- ◆ Disregard minor or occasional tasks that are common to all jobs or are normally taken for granted, unless they are still essential to the job. If nonessential, list under “Other Responsibilities or Functions.”
- ◆ Avoid the narrative form. You are writing a job description, not a story. When possible, eliminate adjectives and articles (a, an, the).
- ◆ Be consistent when using terms like “may” and “occasionally.” Their meanings should be spelled out to avoid confusion. For example, make sure that if the word “occasionally” is used in the essential functions section of the description, the occasional work performed truly is essential to the job.
- ◆ Avoid words, such as “handles,” that don’t tell specifically what the employee does. Others you may want to avoid: “checks,” “prepares,” “examines,” “sends.” If these words are the most accurate and specific ones available, it may be acceptable to use them. But if a more specific term would describe the task more clearly, use it.
- ◆ Be clear and use nontechnical language whenever possible. A good job description explains the objectives, duties, and responsibilities of a job so that they are understandable even to a layperson.
- ◆ Refer to job titles rather than people. For example, “Reports to Human Resources Director” instead of “Reports to Estrella Simpson.”
- ◆ Be precise in defining responsibility. The degree of responsibility given indicates the importance of the job and is a vital factor in evaluating it.
- ◆ Use parentheses to indicate qualifying or incidental explanatory details, as opposed to actual job duties.
- ◆ Discriminate between important and trivial facts. If an item is really trivial, perhaps it should be omitted.
- ◆ Qualify whenever possible. Don’t just say that a file clerk “files” materials; say that the clerk “files alphabetically.”
- ◆ Stick to a logical sequence in describing duties and responsibilities whenever possible.
- ◆ Keep the user’s needs in mind. While the point has been made that job descriptions should never be limited to one particular use, it is wise to keep the primary goals of the job description program in mind when writing. For example, if this is part of an effort to improve recruiting and hiring procedures, you will naturally want to stress specific job duties and job specifications.
- ◆ Remember that the length of a job description does not indicate the importance of the job. The job description for the president of a firm can be put into one sentence: “Responsible for the successful operation of the company.”

The writing style of your job descriptions may vary widely because they've been prepared by a number of different staff members. Someone should be made responsible for editing all the descriptions when they are done to make sure there is a consistent style throughout.

If these guidelines are followed closely, editing for consistency should not be difficult. The "ideal" job description is written in a very impersonal style. The emphasis on conciseness and the use of very specific terminology encourages a finished product that reveals little of the writer's personal style. If the editing process turns out to be a difficult one, it may be a sign that not everyone has followed the necessary guidelines, or that the guidelines themselves are inadequate.

Some Final Advice

Here are a few additional tips to keep in mind when writing job descriptions:

- ◆ A good description takes time to write. A rough estimate would be 4 to 5 hours to gather the information and write a careful first draft. This will vary, of course, from job to job and will depend on the amount of experience you've had in describing jobs in the past. But don't make the mistake of underestimating how long it's going to take and then end up rushing to meet an unrealistic deadline.
- ◆ The uses to which jobs descriptions will be put should be kept in mind while you're writing them.
- ◆ Don't express opinions; stick to facts and quantitative terms.
- ◆ Stay away from technical jargon and aim for a writing style that is clear and easily read.
- ◆ Job descriptions must have a certain amount of flexibility built into them. At lower levels of the organization, an employee's job behavior must conform to fit the job description. But a manager or executive must be given a certain amount of latitude to shape the job to his or her particular skills and experience. This latitude should be reflected in the job description, or if appropriate, in the position description for the middle- to upper-level manager.
- ◆ The completed description should be accessible to the appropriate people, including the incumbent.

Appendix—Glossary of Action Verbs

The following pages list a number of active verbs and other words that form a useful glossary for use in preparing job descriptions:

Act: To exert one's powers in such a way as to bring about an effect; to carry out a purpose.

Add: To affix or attach; to perform mathematical addition of figures.

Administer: To manage or direct the application or execution of; to administrate.

Adopt: To take and apply or put into practice; to accept, as a report.

Advise: To give advice to; to recommend a course of action (not simply to tell or inform).

Affirm: To confirm or ratify.

Align: To arrange or form in a line.

Amend: To change or modify.

Analyze: To study the factors of a situation or problem in order to determine the solution or outcome.

Anticipate: To foresee events, trends, consequences, or problems.

Apply: To adjust or direct; to put in use, as a rule.

Appraise: To evaluate as to quality, status, effectiveness.

Approve: To sanction officially; to accept as satisfactory; to ratify (thereby assuming responsibility for). Used only in the situation where an individual has final authority.

Arrange: To place in proper order.

Ascertain: To find out or learn for a certainty.

Assemble: To collect or gather together in a predetermined order; to fit together the parts of.

Assign: To fix, specify, or delegate; legally, to transfer or make over to another.

Assist: To lend aid; to help; to give support to.

Assume: To take to or upon oneself; to undertake.

Assure: To confirm; to make certain of, to state confidently.

Attach: To bind or fasten; to tie or connect.

Attend: To be present for the purpose of making a contribution.

Audit: Final and official examination of accounts.

Authorize: To empower; to permit; to establish by authority.

Balance: To arrange or prove so that the sum of one group equals the sum of another.

Batch: To group into a quantity for one operation.

Calculate: To ascertain by computation.

Cancel: To strike out, cross out, or revoke.

Carry: To convey through the use of the hands.

Center: To place or fix in or at the center; to collect to a point.

Chart: To draw or exhibit in a chart or graph.

Check: To examine; to compare for verification.

Circulate: To disseminate; to distribute in accordance with a plan.

Classify: To separate into groups having systematic relations.

Clear: To obtain the concurrence, dissent, or agreement of other officers prior to signature.

Collaborate: To work or act jointly with others.

Collect: To gather facts or data; to assemble; to accumulate.

Compile: To collect into a volume; to compose out of materials from other documents.

Compose: To make up; to fashion; to arrange.

Consolidate: To combine into a single whole.

Construct: To set in order mentally; to arrange.

Consult: To seek the advice of another; to confer; to refer to.

Control: To directly exercise guiding or restraining power over.

Cooperate: To act or operate jointly with others; to collaborate.

Coordinate: To bring into common action, condition, etc.

Correlate: To establish a mutual or reciprocal relation.

Copy: To make a copy or copies of; to transfer or reproduce information.

Correct: To rectify; to make right.

Delegate: To entrust to the care or management of another.

Delete: To erase; to remove.

Determine: To fix conclusively or authoritatively; to decide; to make a decision.

Develop: To evolve; to make apparent or bring to light; to make more available or usable.

Direct: To regulate the activities or course of; to govern or control; to give guidance to.

Discuss: To exchange views for the purpose of arriving at a conclusion.

Disseminate: To spread information or ideas.

Distribute: To divide or separate into classes; to pass around; to allot.

Divide: To separate into classes or parts; to subject to mathematical division.

Draft: To write or compose papers or documents in rough, preliminary, or final form. Often for clearance and approval by others.

Edit: To revise and prepare as for publication.

Effectively recommends: Person recommending the action or procedure initiates the action or procedure, subject only to the routine or administrative control of some other person.

Establish: To set up; to institute; to place on a firm basis.

Evaluate: To appraise; to ascertain the value of.

Examine: To investigate; to scrutinize; to subject to inquiry by inspection or test.

Execute: To give effect; to follow through to the end; to complete.

Exercise: To bring to bear or employ actively (e.g., exercise authority or influence).

Expedite: To hasten the movement or progress of; to remove obstacles; to accelerate.

Facilitate: To make easy or less difficult.

Feed: To supply material to a machine.

Figure: To compute.

File: To lay away papers, etc., arranged in a methodical manner.

Fill in: To enter information on a form.

Find: To locate by search.

Follow up: To check the progress of, to see if results are satisfactory.

Formulate: To put into a systemized statement; to develop or devise a plan, policy, or procedure.

Furnish: To provide, supply, or give.

Implement: To carry out; to perform acts essential to the execution of a plan or program; to give effect to.

Inform: To instruct; to communicate knowledge of.

Initiate: To originate; to begin; to introduce for the first time, as a plan, policy, or procedure.

Insert: To put or thrust in; to introduce, as a word in a sentence.

Inspect: To examine carefully and critically.

Instruct: To impart knowledge to; to supply direction to.

Instructions: Directions; procedural information.

Intensive: Exhaustive or concentrated; extreme; high degree.

Interpret: To explain the meaning of; to translate; to elucidate.

Interview: To question in order to obtain facts or opinions.

Inventory: To count and make a list of items.

Investigate: To inquire into systematically.

Issue: To distribute formally.

Itemize: To state in terms or by particulars; to set or note down in detail.

Line: To cover the inside surface; to rule.

List: To itemize.

Locate: To search for and find; to position.

Maintain: To hold or keep in any given condition; to keep up to date or current, as records.

Make: To cause something to assume a designated condition.

Manage: To control and direct; to guide; to administer.

Measure: To determine length or quantity of.

Merge: To combine.

Mix: To unite or blend into one group or mass.

Multiply: To perform the operation of multiplication.

Nonroutine: Irregular or infrequent—referring to situations that arise relating to business or official duties. Characteristic of higher-level jobs.

Note: To observe or notice; to heed.

Notify: To give notice to; to inform.

Obtain: To gain possession of; to acquire.

Observe: To perceive or notice; to watch.

Open: To enter upon; to spread out; to make accessible.

Operate: To conduct or perform an activity.

Organize: To arrange in interdependent parts; to systematize.

Originate: To produce as new.

Outline: To make a summary of the significant features of a subject.

Participate: To take part in.

Perform: To carry on to a finish; to accomplish; to execute.

Plan: To make ready for a particular purpose.

Post: To transfer or carry information from one record to another.

Process: To subject to some special treatment; to handle in accordance with prescribed procedures.

Program: To make a plan or procedure.

Provide: To supply for use; to furnish; to take precautionary methods in view of a possible need.

Purchase: To buy or procure.

Purpose: To offer for consideration or adoption.

Rate: To appraise or assess; to determine the rank or quality of.

Read: To learn or be informed of by reading.

Receive: To take as something that is offered.

Recommends: Suggests courses of action or procedures to other persons who have the primary responsibility for adopting and carrying out the action or procedures recommended.

Reconstruct: To construct again; to restore.

Record: To register; to make a record of.

Refer: To direct attention; to make reference as in referring to record.

Register: To enter in a record or list.

Release: To permit the publication and dissemination of, at a specified date but not before.

Remit: To transmit or send as money in payment.

Render: To furnish; to contribute.

Report: To furnish information or data.

Represent: To take the place of.

Request: To ask for something.

Requirement: That which must be accomplished.

Requisition: To make a request for (usually records or supplies).

Responsibility: Accountability for decisions.

1. Complete responsibility: Individual has complete authority to take whatever action he or she deems advisable or necessary, subject only to the policies or general rules laid down by his or her immediate supervisor.

2. Delegate responsibility: Individual has the authority to take whatever action he or she deems advisable or necessary and may initiate and carry out the action but is required to advise superiors of the action taken when deemed necessary. Must inform superiors of nonroutine situations.

3. General responsibility: Individual is required to get supervisor's approval before taking action that she or he believes is required or advised.

Review: To go over or examine deliberately or critically, usually with a view to approval or dissent.

Revise: To make a new, improved, or up-to-date version of.

Route: To prearrange and direct locations to which an article is to be sent.

Routine: Regular or normal (with regard to procedure, course of business, or official duties).

Scan: To examine point by point; to scrutinize; to read hastily or to glance at.

Schedule: To plan a timetable; to set specific times for.

Screen: To examine closely, generally so as to separate one group or class from another.

Search: To look over and through for the purpose of finding something.

Secure: To get possession of; to obtain.

See: To make certain of; to learn through observation.

Select: To choose from a number of others of similar kind.

Separate: To set apart for others for special use; to keep apart.

Sign: To affix a signature to.

Sort: To put in a definite place or rank according to kind, class, etc.

Study: To consider attentively; to ponder or fix the mind closely upon (a subject).

Submit: To present information to others for their decision and judgment.

Summarize: To make an abstract; to brief.

Supervise: To oversee; to inspect with authority; to guide and instruct with immediate responsibility for subordinate's performance; to superintend; to lead.

1. Direct supervision: Involves guidance and direction over individuals who report to and are directly responsible to the supervisor. Includes supervision of work, training, and personnel functions.

2. Close supervision: Individual does not use own initiative. Is instructed by supervisor as to the solution and selection of the proper procedures to follow.

3. Limited supervision: Individual proceeds on own initiative in compliance with policies, practices, and procedures prescribed by immediate supervisor.

4. General supervision: Involves guidance and direction actually carried out by the immediate supervisor.

5. Supervision of work: Includes work distribution, scheduling, training, answering of questions related to work, assisting in solving problems, etc. Does not include any personnel functions such as salaries, discipline, promotions, etc.

6. Training responsibility: Involves advice, information, and guidance on specialized matters; involves no authority. Gives instruction in regard to procedures.

Survey: To determine the form, extent, position, etc., of a situation, usually in connection with gathering of information.

Tabulate: To form into a table by listing; to make a listing.

Trace: To record the transfer of an application or document; to copy as a drawing.

Train: To increase skill or knowledge by capable instruction, usually in relation to a predetermined standard.

Transcribe: To make a typewritten copy from shorthand notes or a dictated record; to write a copy of.

Transpose: To transfer; to change the usual place of order.

Type: To typewrite.

Underline: To emphasize or identify by drawing a line under the characters or subject.

Verify: To prove to be true or accurate; to confirm or substantiate; to test or check the accuracy of.

Write: To form characters, letters, or words with pen or pencil; to fill in, as a check or form; to express or communicate through the use of the written word; to compose or to create as author.

Sample Job Description Formats and Descriptions

On the following pages you will find sample job description formats and corresponding full job descriptions taken from BLR's comprehensive *Job Descriptions Encyclopedia*. They will give you some idea of the variety of formats currently in use and the overall appearance of the finished product.

Sample Job Description Format #1

Reports to: _____ Department: _____
Classification: _____ Division: _____
Date: _____ Approved: _____

Job Summary:

Describes the general purpose of the job; why the job exists.

Essential Functions:

Series of statements, each outlining a particular duty, task, or responsibility and identifying "what," "why," and "how." All statements should be related to the work to be performed, and should identify only the most significant or essential duties.

Additional responsibilities:

Description of nonessential functions or functions performed only occasionally.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:

Experience and basic knowledge requirements.

Education and Experience:

Educational requirements, certification or licensing standards,

Sample Job Description #1 **Licensed Practical Nurse**

Reports to: _____ Team Leader _____ Department: _____ Patient Care _____
Classification: _____ Nonexempt _____ Division: _____ West _____
Date: _____ January 1, 20XX _____ Approved: _____ J. Mellon _____

Job Summary:

Works under the direction of a qualified professional nurse. Participates in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of nursing care, within the objectives, standards, and policies of the department and within the

parameters of his or her preparation. Cooperates with the members of the nursing and medical staffs and other hospital departments.

Essential Functions:

1. Provides direct and individualized nursing care to an assigned group of patients based on the application of scientific principles, under the supervision of a registered professional nurse.
2. Assists in preoperative, postoperative, and relevant health teaching for patient and family.
3. Shares responsibility for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of nursing care plans and nursing care.
4. Participates in team conferences, sharing knowledge, information, and ideas among team members.
5. Prepares, administers, and records medications in accordance with the policy regarding the administration of medications by a Licensed Practical Nurse.
6. Performs more complex nursing activities as competence increases.
7. Participates in emergency care.
8. Communicates frequently with the team leader regarding patients' physical and mental conditions.
9. Records information concisely, accurately, and completely.
10. Identifies and utilizes appropriate channels of communication.
11. Constructively participates in appropriate committees within the Nursing Department and/or the hospital.

Additional Responsibilities:

1. Floats as requested by the team leader and/or supervisor/staffing coordinator.
2. Assists in the orientation of new personnel when requested.
3. Performs other related duties as assigned.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:

1. Demonstrates clinical competence.
2. Assumes responsibility for own continued personal and professional growth.
3. Appropriate manner, conduct, and grooming.
4. Ability to work cooperatively and communicate effectively.
5. Good health and consistent attendance.
6. Membership and participation in Licensed Practical Nurses Association encouraged.

Education and Experience:

1. Completion of a formal education program in practical nursing.
2. Current state licensure.
3. One (1) year of clinical practice preferred.

Sample Job Description Format #2

Job Title: _____ Job Grade: _____
Division: _____ Department: _____
Job Code: _____ Date: _____

Essential Functions:

Numerical listing of specific duties and responsibilities that are essential to the job.

Additional Responsibilities:

Description of nonessential functions or functions performed only occasionally.

Qualifications:

Educational requirements, certification or licensing standards, experience and basic knowledge requirements.

Sample Job Description #2 **Human Resources Assistant**

Job Title: Human Resources Assistant Job Grade: 15
Division: Manufacturing Department: Human Resources
Job Code: 4-22-200 Date: January 1, 20XX

Essential Functions:

1. Performs diversified duties in the processing and monitoring of the employee benefits program, and maintains all employee personnel files. Assists the assistant human resources manager, under the direction of the director of human resources.
2. Processes group insurance claims covering company employees and dependents. Forwards claims to specified carrier; reconciles claim payments if needed. Checks and verifies dental insurance bills and authorizes payment. Answers employee questions concerning benefits; refers to various resources for information as needed. Enrolls new employees in programs; conducts short orientation to explain benefits. Explains additional benefits at the end of the probationary period.
3. Sets up files on all new employees and assigns employee numbers. Records changes on employee status as necessary (e.g., change of address, depart-

mental transfers, rate increases, terminations) and forwards to Accounting for payroll update. Verifies payroll changes with computer printout.

4. Performs clerical functions; types, posts, and distributes letters and memos. Updates bulletin boards. Answers phones for department and others. Signs invoices authorizing payment for various office and first-aid supplies for the company. Verifies employment and medical insurance of employees.
5. Attends meetings for the company newsletter. Writes articles for the newsletter and follows up on production.
6. Prepares the individual retirement account (IRA) contributions report and forwards to the Accounting Department. Takes statements from injured employees for workers' compensation; updates OSHA report.
7. Completes wage and salary reports and surveys as needed. Updates targeted job tax credit file and keeps balance of savings.

Additional Responsibilities:

1. As needed, screens applications/résumés and tests applicants. Orders temporary help for various departments.
2. Performs other similar or related duties as requested or assigned.

Qualifications:

High school graduation, or equivalent, with at least 2 years' business experience of a clerical nature.

Sample Job Description Format #3

Job Title: _____ Date: _____
Dept. or Division: _____ Status: _____
Reports to: _____ Job Code: _____
Written by: _____
Approved by: _____

Position Description:

Short statement of the job's purpose.

Essential Functions:

Series of statements, each outlining a particular duty, task, or responsibility and identifying "what," "why," and "how." All statements should be related to the work to be performed, should identify only the most significant or essential duties.

Principal Accountabilities:

Lists the end results that the job should achieve.

Additional Responsibilities:

Summary of typical nonessential duties and responsibilities of the job; may be generic for unassigned duties.

Interaction:

When relevant to the job, a statement describing the relationships and degree of contact with internal and external individuals or groups.

**Sample Job Description #3
Programmer**

Job Title: Programmer Date: January 1, 20XX

Dept. or Division: MIS Status: Nonexempt

Reports to: Manager of Systems Development Job Code: 15-6-03

Written by: Director, Human Resources

Approved by: J. Chaney

Position Description:

Performs maintenance and modifications of programs currently in production to keep them responsive to user needs and to ensure efficient operation in the production environment.

Essential Functions:

The person in this position reports to the manager of systems development and is responsible for the financial, human resources, and manufacturing computer systems. The incumbent in this position has no direct reports.

The systems development group is a service organization for the division whose primary responsibility is to plan, design, and install integrated data processing systems to support management control and decision-making activities.

The incumbent in this position performs maintenance and modifications of programs currently in production. This individual is responsible for analyzing existing program logic to determine best method of accomplishing required changes or cause of program malfunction. In addition, this person designs program logic to eliminate problems, accomplish needed changes, or increase operational efficiency. The incumbent modifies or expands coding to accomplish specified processing changes.

Also required is testing modified programs to ensure that changes operate correctly and that changes have no adverse impact on programs or systems operations.

The incumbent updates programs' historical and procedural documentation to reflect modifications.

The incumbent creates special reports and file extracts from existing databases using generalized routines or report writers.

The incumbent in this position is governed by corporate policies and procedures as well as division goals.

Typical decisions made by the incumbent include determining the method of how to resolve problems as well as determine the impact the method used will have.

Day-to-day directions on a project basis are given by the Senior Programmer Analyst. Any problems or situations that users may be experiencing will be referred to the Senior Programmer Analyst. Among the requirements of this position is a working knowledge of programming languages, systems analysis and designs, and database designs.

The person's principal challenge is to resolve a user's problem within limited time constraints. The incumbent is often on a 24-hour emergency need basis to resolve and correct any malfunctions that may occur.

Principal Accountabilities:

1. Analyze and design program logic to eliminate problems and to ensure efficient operation in the production environment.
2. Test modified programs to ensure user data accuracy and that modifications have no adverse impact on systems operation.
3. Provide documentation for operations and system development to reflect system and job flow.
4. Provide administrative reports to ensure up-to-date and accurate information.

Additional Responsibilities:

May work on special projects from time to time.

Interaction:

Success in this position also requires interpersonal skills for frequent interactions with users, managers, and vendors.

Sample Job Description Format #4

Reports to: _____ Department: _____
Classification: _____ Division: _____
Date: _____ Approved: _____

Job Function:

Describes the general purpose of the job; why the job exists.

Essential Functions:

Statements related to the work to be performed, should identify only the most significant or essential duties.

Additional Responsibilities:

Nonessential functions that may also be required of the incumbent.

Qualifications:

Educational requirements, certification or licensing standards, experience and basic knowledge requirements.

Sample Job Description #4
Telemarketing Representative

Reports to: Telemarketing Supervisor Department: Marketing
Classification: Nonexempt Division: Sales
Date: January 1, 20XX Approved: K. Long

Job Function:

Represents the company with customers and prospects by soliciting orders for merchandise or handling customer questions or complaints over the telephone.

Essential Functions:

1. Develops a list of prospects from resource material or company records.
2. Calls or receives calls from prospective customers, explaining type of service or product offered.
3. Quotes prices, delivery dates, and payment terms and tries to persuade customer/prospect to buy, using knowledge of company products and services.
4. Enters into computer the names, addresses, purchases, and comments of prospects solicited.
5. Completes order form, including delivery date and credit information. Confirms with credit department acceptability of the order.
6. At end of shift prepares summary report of activity as required by company telemarketing operations manual, and e-mails report to corporate telemarketing operations.

Additional Responsibilities:

1. May be required to contact customers on miscues (delayed shipments, shortage of materials, etc.) and explain circumstances.
2. May crossreference prospect lists with actual customer lists to avoid duplication of calling.
3. In slack hours may perform other duties as assigned by telemarketing supervisor.

Qualifications:

1. Friendly, persuasive telephone manner.
2. Ability to read, write, and understand English well. Proficiency in Spanish or French also a plus.
3. Three-week training program will offer knowledge of company products or services.

Probationary period will include satisfactory passing of this training course.

Conclusion

We hope that you have enjoyed this special report and that you found the information contained in this report useful. BLR strives to provide human resources professionals with practical and easy-to-use information on a wide variety of topics. If you would like to see the complete library of publications available through BLR, please visit our website at <http://hr.blr.com> or call our Customer Service Department at 800-727-5257.

Delivering the HR management resources you need every day

From hiring practices and writing job descriptions, to training managers to understanding the ever-complicated leave laws, HR's day-to-day compliance challenges can trip up even the most seasoned professional.

Keep your organization in compliance and your employees productive with a subscription to **HR.BLR.com**

When you subscribe to **HR.BLR.com**, you can:

- **Comply with federal and state laws:** Plain-English, side-by-side analysis of both federal and state employment laws. Create customizable, exportable reports.
- **Master Job Descriptions:** Thousands of searchable, pre-written, legally-reviewed job descriptions. All editable descriptions include suggested grade and salary levels for your state.
- **Access Training Tools:** Detailed training presentations for managers, supervisors, and employees on key HR topics — including slides, speaker notes, quizzes, and more.
- **Ask the Expert:** Consult our team of legal experts with your HR questions – and get your answers directly and quickly.
- **Manage Wage and Salary needs:** Access salary data for over 2,900 job titles at the national, state and local level. Create custom profiles and benchmarks for your organization.
- **Streamline your responsibilities and save time:** HR white papers, checklists, calculators, and daily news updates answer your questions, keep you informed and make your life easier.
- **Become an HR leader:** Learn more about what **HR.BLR.com** has to offer by checking it out for yourself! Take a FREE 14-day trial and get immediate access to tips and real-world advice for handling your most complex HR compliance challenges.

Save time. Save money. Stay in compliance.
So what are you waiting for?



“ Love it! We learn more features all the time that we can use. Thank you!”

- Kimberly Enebo,
Avera McKennan

“ We are very pleased with HR.BLR.com. It is full of information that is an enormous help to HR and management.”

- Janice Dettman,
A Plus Home Health Care