



# HR TIP SHEET

## Writing Job Descriptions

**Job descriptions are an HR management tool that helps to increase both individual and organizational effectiveness. Job descriptions help employees understand their specific duties and responsibilities, the relative importance of their job, and how it contributes to the mission, goals, and objectives of the organization. They are the foundation for many HR management activities such as Recruitment, Selection, Orientation, Training, Compensation, and Performance Management.**

A well written job description can be concise if it is properly planned. It must clearly identify job content without providing a long list of duties. A job description serves to collect information relating to a position's scope of responsibility, the major challenges, and the complexity of the duties.

### A new job description should be completed when:

- A new job is created.
- Job responsibilities have changed significantly. (May be due to a realignment of work or organization design initiatives). The responsibility change must be permanent and not based on temporary staff vacancies.

### Why are job descriptions important?

- For an employee, a good job description helps them understand:
  - Their duties and responsibilities.
  - The relative importance of their job.
  - How their position contributes to the overall mission, vision and objectives of the organization.
- For an organization, a good job description ensures that:
  - Work activities are clearly aligned with the mission, vision and objectives of the organization.
  - The division of work is reasonable.
  - The organization can clearly link job responsibilities and requirements with the most appropriate employee within the organization.
  - There is a tool to inform recruitment activities, job interview questions, new employee orientation, the identification of training requirements, compensation and performance management activities.
  - The organization can defend a termination decision based on poor job performance.

### Language of the job description:

- Job descriptions should consist of precise, concise, and factual statements which are easily understood.
- The statements are to provide a clear picture of actions and activities being accomplished, how they are accomplished, and their objectives.
- Acronyms should not be used unless they are defined. Each sentence should begin with an action verb plus an objective to describe "what is done", rather than "how it is done". A specific verb is the most important word in the sentence: vague or ambiguous words such as "handles" or "is responsible for" should be avoided, as these verbs do not provide a clear picture of the action or activity.

#### Common Action Verbs

Advise	Appraise	Assign	Check	Control	Counsel
Demonstrate	Direct	Estimate	Formulate	Investigate	Inspect
Instruct	Interpret	Organize	Plan	Review	Resolve

### Tips for choosing the language of the job description:

- Use a present tense direct writing style throughout the description.
- Keep sentence structure as simple as possible; omit all words that do not contribute necessary information.
- Avoid imprecise words such as "situation", "interface", "facilitate", etc. Consider how the word will be interpreted by others.
- Qualify / quantify wherever possible. For example: IT Help Desk addresses client calls within 15 minutes.

Note: the length of a job description does not indicate the importance of the job.

### How to collect information for the job description:

If your job descriptions are out of date, or you have a new position that requires a description, the first step is to conduct a Job Analysis. Job Analysis is a process for collecting job information and to help describe the duties, responsibilities, knowledge, skills, and competencies required to do the job. Job analysis provides the information necessary for writing the job description.

## Job analysis answers the following questions:

- What are the specific duties for the position?
- What are the critical tasks and key result areas for the position?
- What is the percentage of time spent on key job tasks?
- What are the outcomes of the job for which the incumbent is held accountable and evaluated upon?
- What tools, resources, materials, and equipment are required to complete the work?
- What are the specific processes used to perform the required tasks?
- What knowledge and experience is required to be fully competent in the job?
- What technical and behavioural competencies are required for the incumbent to be successful?

## Approaches for job analysis:

- Interviews: the employee and/or supervisor are asked a series of questions about the job, the essential tasks of the job and abilities required to perform.
- Questionnaires: the employee is asked to fill out a standard questionnaire about the job.

- Observation: the person collecting the job data will observe the employee at work.
- Activity Logs: the employee is asked to keep an activity log describing each activity and the portion of time spent on each.

## Common mistakes in job description writing:

- Responses are too long and include irrelevant details.
- Responses are too brief and superficial, and do not document the full scope of the job.
- The job is described in some form other than how it currently exists. The job must be described as it exists now.
- There is an incorrect emphasis on the minor aspects of the job.
- The importance of the job is inflated by using grandiose language.
- Personal judgements or conclusions are included.
- The incumbent's skill, knowledge, or experience is included. The focus is on the job, not the incumbent.
- There are too many vague generalities rather than clear and concise language. If a statement does not add to the reader's knowledge of the job, it should be left out, or explained further by an example.

<b>Job Description Content</b>	<b>Description</b>
Job Title & Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The title of the position and the supervisory / managerial job title that the position reports to.</li> <li>■ This should not include the incumbent's or supervisor's name—only position titles.</li> </ul>
Job Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A brief overview of why the position exists.</li> </ul>
Primary Duties and Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A brief explanation of the essential duties of a position.</li> <li>■ Generally 4–6 major responsibility statements should be adequate to describe the position.</li> <li>■ The usual format consists of describing what the employee is required to do. This may be followed by why the responsibilities are performed.</li> <li>■ Start each accountability statement with an action verb.</li> </ul>
Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Qualifications should reflect the minimum required educational and experiential requirements to perform the job.</li> <li>■ Consider the question: "What would I need if I was hiring for this position tomorrow?"</li> <li>■ It is irrelevant to include the incumbent's specific level of experience or education.</li> </ul>
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Designed to focus on experience and knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform the work to the required standard.</li> <li>■ Skills should be specific and measurable.</li> </ul>
Competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Competencies are the observable abilities, skills, knowledge, motivations or traits defined in terms of behaviours needed for successful performance.</li> <li>■ They are "what is needed to get the job done".</li> </ul>
Working Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Common or typical working conditions.</li> </ul>

For more tools and tips on how to document your ICT positions, go to the Information and Communications Technology Council website [www.ictc-ctic.ca](http://www.ictc-ctic.ca) and inquire about their HR tools to help you manage your ICT human resources more effectively. Look for the *ICT Competency Profiles framework* to inform you of the competencies needed for 36 ICT work streams or ask about their latest version of the *Human Resources Management Guide*.