



WRITING A JOB DESCRIPTION

A REFERENCE TOOL

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OF JOB DESCRIPTIONS



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DESCRIPTION



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WHAT IS A JOB DESCRIPTION



A job description accurately defines the **essential** duties and responsibilities of the job and the qualifications required to successfully perform. It produces a realistic description of a job and answers the question, “***What does the person in this role do?***”



A job description sets the foundation for recruiting, developing, and retaining talent; and sets the stage for optimum work performance by clarifying responsibilities, expected results, and evaluation of performance. It is also an important component of an equitable compensation system and ensuring legal compliance.



The job description contains sufficient information to describe major responsibilities as they exist today. They provide the information necessary to classify the position, **not the person**; thus, they are “***incumbent neutral***”. The document ***should not include every detail*** of how and what work is performed so that it remains useful even when minor changes occur.

WHY WE NEED JOB DESCRIPTIONS



Job descriptions are an integral part of many HR activities:

- A key part of the talent acquisition process
- Used to determine a job's value in the labor market
- Establishes a basis for making reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities and provides documentation needed for workers' compensation illness or injury
- Used in creating organizational structure and developing career development opportunities

HOW TO WRITE A JOB DESCRIPTION



It is the responsibility of the hiring manager to complete the job description template to ensure the most accurate description of the job is captured.

The job description template can be found on the Compensation webpage or by contacting your HR Business Partner.

Consider the job, not the person, when completing the job description.

The following slides provide some helpful tips for completing the job description template.

JOB DESCRIPTION TEMPLATE

Northwestern | OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Job Description

Job Title:		Job Code:	
Job Family:		FLSA Classification:	
Job Sub-Family:		Salary Grade:	
Last Revised Date:			

Job Summary*

Provide a brief description of the general nature of the position; an overview of why the job exists; and what the job is to accomplish.

**Note: Not all aspects of the job are covered by this job description.*

Essential Duties and Responsibilities

List the primary job duties and responsibilities in order of importance. Typically includes 7-9 bullet points.

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**Will perform other duties as assigned.*

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS (EDUCATION, EXPERIENCE, CERTIFICATIONS, SKILLS)

Identify the minimum qualifications required to successfully perform the job. Qualifications include education, experience, specialized knowledge, professional certification.

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PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS (EDUCATION, EXPERIENCE, CERTIFICATIONS, SKILLS)

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WORKING CONDITIONS

Normal office working conditions with the absence of disagreeable elements. If the job requires a person to work in special working conditions this should be stated in the job description.

Northwestern University is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of protected characteristics, including disability and veteran status. View Northwestern's [non-discrimination statement](#). Job applicants who wish to request an accommodation in the application or hiring process should contact the Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance. View [additional information on the accommodations process](#).

In this first section, hiring managers are asked to only provide a recommended job title. While under review the title may change based on external and/or internal considerations. For example, if the title already exists. Some helpful tips:

- Manager job titles are typically used for a job that will manager other staff or a department/function.
- It's useful to include the department name in the title such as Director Student Health Services, Facilities Planner.

All other fields in the first section will be complete upon review with Compensation.

JOB DESCRIPTION: JOB SUMMARY

- The job summary includes a high-level overview of the role describing the level and scope of responsibility. Generally, 2-3 sentences in length.
- Avoid including marketing or informational paragraphs related to the School, Central Unit, or Department. These should be captured in the job posting.
- Job Summary Example – Administrative Assistant 3
 - Coordinates administrative processes and prioritizes, directs, and responds to business matters involving administrative functions associated with education, research, and/or operations. Creates and maintains associated documents, spreadsheets, databases, meetings, special events, etc. and alerts supervisor of critical issues and upcoming events.

Helpful Tip: Although the job summary is the first section of the job description it may be easier to complete it after you've described the essential duties and responsibilities

JOB DESCRIPTION:

Essential Duties & Responsibilities

- Describe the essential duties and responsibilities assigned to the job.
- Consist of 7-9 bullet points that each account for no less than 10% of the job, listed in order of importance.
- Include explanatory phrases which tell why, how, where, or how often the tasks and duties are performed.
- Use action verbs to convey not only the type of action, but also the degree of involvement in the action taken.
- Reference areas of decision-making, where one will influence or impact.
- Identify areas of direct or indirect accountabilities.
- Describe the level and type of budgetary or financial responsibilities.
- Address the type of supervisory responsibility.
 - For example: Authority to hire, discipline, terminate, assign work, train and evaluate performance

JOB DESCRIPTION:

Essential Duties & Responsibilities Examples

Before: Responsible for corrections to problems on ABC data systems.

After: Responsible for correcting data integrity problems on ABC data systems.

Before: Review contracts and reports.

After: Conduct daily review of progress reports to ensure efficiency and contract compliance.

Before: Process requests for access to information on computers throughout the organization.

After: Administer and monitor access control to information to ensure adequate protection of network.



JOB DESCRIPTION: Qualifications

- **Minimum Qualifications**

- Minimum level of qualifications required to successfully perform the job
 - Education: How much education is necessary to perform the role? Can there be an equivalent working experience? Are there specific certifications required to be qualified?
 - Experience: How much prior experience is *required* to perform the role satisfactorily? Minimum length of time needed to effectively perform the duties of the role.
 - Skills: Detail the required skills needed to perform the various functions of the job.

- **Preferred Qualifications**

- Includes additional education, certifications, experience in a specific industry or familiarity with using certain programs. They are not required to successfully perform the job but are desired.

JOB DESCRIPTION: Working Conditions

- The default language:

Normal office working conditions with the absence of disagreeable elements. If the job requires a person to work in special working conditions this should be stated in the job description.

- If conditions exist that are adverse, hazardous or unpleasant it should be noted in this section.

HINTS FOR WRITING JOB DESCRIPTIONS

- Use descriptive action verbs in the present tense (i.e., writes, operates, or performs)
- Avoid abbreviations and acronyms
- Don't use ambiguous terms. If you use terms such as “assists, handles, and performs,” describe “how” the position assists, handles or performs.
- Avoid gender-specific language, such as “He manages,” “She is responsible for”
- Focus on essential activities
- Avoid references to other employee's names, instead, use job title or department
- Only include assigned duties today, do not include potential future duties

AVAILABLE RESOURCES

- Current job descriptions on file
- Recent job postings
- Networking/Job Board sites
- Colleagues in HR and Compensation

HR.Compensation@northwestern.edu

HUMAN RESOURCES
THE COMPENSATION TEAM