



BC Housing

JOB DESCRIPTIONS
WHY ARE THEY NECESSARY?

USES OF JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Besides its basic uses as a means of evaluating a job, a job descriptions has significant impact across the whole range of Human Resources Management, including:

Staffing / Recruitment

- A job description provides the employer with job information for posting or advertising the job and for the selection criteria used to test and interview candidates.
- This ensures that applicants who apply have a full understanding of the job and it fit's their career goals.

New Employee Orientation

- A job description is a good tool for a employers to explain and clarify the duties, responsibilities and reporting lines of a job to a new employee.

Staffing Objectives and Performance Appraisal

- A job description is a basis of agreement between the employer and incumbent about work goals and objectives. It serves as a means of communication for improving work planning and feedback.
- Providing expectations.

Job Evaluation

- A systematic method of ranking jobs in an organization.
- Forms the basis for negotiating appropriate pay rates.
- Prior to job evaluation, a job description must be prepared.

Labour Relations

- A formal and current job description available to both management and the incumbent clarifies what the work is all about and reduces misunderstandings which could lead to disputes. If a dispute arises regarding job duties, a referee places a lot of importance on the most recent authorized job description. It will almost always take precedence over any informal assignment of duties.

Safety

- Job description help the employer to recognize risks and hazards present in work situations, and may be used in situation such as WCB hearings.
- Assist in investigation of accidents.
- Return to work planning.
- Duty to accommodate issues.

Training

- The Employer analyzes training requirements for a job-holder by examining the job description and / or as a result of the employee appraisal process. A change of duties may mean a need for more training or updating of skills.

Other Uses

- The Employer may also use job descriptions for Organization Planning, Wage and Salary Surveys, Human Resources Planning and Development, and Occupational Studies for Statistical Purposes.

WHO SHOULD WRITE A JOB DESCRIPTION?

A job description can be written by:

- an **incumbent** describing his or her own job;
- a **supervisor** or **program manager** describing a subordinate's job;
- a **job analyst** (a specialist in job analysis and job description writing) describing a position with which the analyst may not be initially familiar.

Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages:

- An incumbent who has worked a long time in the same job will be most familiar with the work, as it has been done. However, over time the incumbent may have tailored the job to his or her own working style. The job may no longer be the same work originally assigned, which management still expects and assumes is being done. For example, a highly experienced incumbent may, without being told, assume responsibility, which exceeds the job's requirements.
- A new incumbent, on the other hand, may not have performed the full range of duties, which have been assigned and may leave out important details or describe them inaccurately.
- A Supervisor / Program Manager not totally familiar with the work being done, may leave out important details of the job which could have an effect on the classification assigned.
- A job analyst brings an independent, professional expertise to job analysis and job description writing, but it is rare that an organization has the budget to be able to afford such a specialist.

Regardless of which of these approaches is used, the first product must be seen as a draft that all parties review. The goal is a complete and accurate statement of the position's duties and responsibilities. Elimination of errors or omissions at this point will contribute to faster, more accurate job evaluation.

The task will require a collaborative effort to complete a comprehensive, accurate and precise description of the job.

WHEN WE PREPARE JOB DESCRIPTION

Organizations are made of positions just as machine are made of parts. A job description is a kind of blue-print of one of the parts of an organization.

As long as circumstances remain the same, a job description may accurately reflect the job for a considerable time. However, job descriptions are not static documents and various circumstances can occur which require a new or updated job description. For example, the following circumstances will usually require new or updated job descriptions:

- Creation of new jobs / positions;
- Program changes resulting in a realignment of job responsibilities (eg. reduction of responsibilities; redistribution of responsibilities);
- Organization restructuring;
- Changes in job characteristics due to technological change (eg. introduction of mini-computers to perform basic economic modeling or financial forecasting);
- Cyclical reviews
 1. positions based on management expectations – six months after appointment of incumbent
 2. positions subject to gradual change – 3 years
 3. positions rarely subject to change – 5 years (eg. automobile mechanic, janitor)

NOTE: The majority of positions fall into “2”.

- Prior to staffing a vacancy.

INFORMATION THE JOB DESCRIPTION WRITER NEEDS TO BEGIN

The first step in writing a job description is to gather all of the general information and specific job data about the position to be described.

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Classification Plan Compensable Factors

Every Classification Plan includes Compensable Factors that are used by the Evaluator to assign a classification level to the job. A basic knowledge of these factors will help ensure that relevant issues are covered clearly in your description.

For example, a Classification Plan, may contain compensable factors such as: Motor Skills, Job Knowledge, Monetary Responsibility, Supervision. Evaluation of a job may include measuring the duties against these factors.

2. Objectives, Environment and Organizational Relationship

Make sure that you know the goals and objectives of the organization within which the job is located. Depending on the position the writer has in the organization you may be familiar, but it helps to refresh your memory by re-reading the mission statement for your program.

Study the Organization Chart for your organization, paying particular attention to the positions around the job you are going to describe, such as the supervisor's job, any jobs reporting to the "subject" position, and any other jobs reporting to the supervisor of the "subject" position.

REMEMBER – JOB EVALUATION REQUIRES EXPLANATION AND JUSTIFICATIONS OF ANY DUPLICATION OR OVERLAP BETWEEN ONE JOB AND ANOTHER, so be sure to have the work performed in related jobs firmly in your mind while writing a job description.

B. SPECIFIC JOB DATA

There are a number of techniques, which can be used to obtain information about a job. Some are relatively straightforward. Others are more suitable to job analysis carried out by a professional job analyst. We will concentrate here on those techniques which you, as an employer will find most useful.

1. Old Job Description

The last written job description should be carefully reviewed, and additions or deletions to the duties noted. Many older job descriptions will need format changes in order to make them more understandable, comprehensive and concise.

2. List of Tasks Prepared by the Incumbent

The incumbent of the position should be asked to describe WHAT he or she is doing, and HOW it is being done. Unless the incumbent is familiar with job description writing conventions, you will usually get a list of tasks performed in the job. This list may be almost incomprehensible to anyone not totally familiar with the job and its environment. It will, however, be an excellent reference for an employer writing a formal job description.

3. Observation

This method involves visual observation of the incumbent at work. It allows the writer to become familiar with working conditions, skills required and equipment used. It is best when applied to jobs that are simple and / or repetitive.

4. Interview

Effective interviewing for job description purposes requires a cooperation between the interviewer and the person being interviewed (respondent). An atmosphere of trust is important. Any interview requires preparation, so have your questions about the job prepared beforehand. Do not, however, become a slave to your questions, because you will miss valuable opportunities to explore aspects of the job you didn't anticipate when you were preparing them.

BASIC FORMAT OF JOB DESCRIPTIONS

The basic format of a job description includes:

Identifying Information

Position Summary

Job Detail (Duties and Tasks)

Organization Chart

Although the format above is the order information is *presented* in the job description, it's not the best order for *preparing* the job description. You will find it easier to gain an overall perspective of the job if you prepare it in the order of: Identifying Information; Organization Charts; Duties and Tasks; Position Summary; Supplementary Data.

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

This information places a job in its organizational context and provides such basic data as the job title, position number, classification assigned, supervisor's job title, work location. Although the basic information required will be governed by the Job Description format for the Classification Plan applied to the job being described, it will usually include the following information:

- **Society and Organization Identification**

If the position is located in a branch, which is part of a larger Division within the Society, the Division should be named here, as well as the Branch, Section and Unit Program.

- **Geographical Location**

The location of the position. Give street address and municipality if appropriate, or its equivalent.

Descriptive Work Title

Working title of the position. Indicate the title associated with the particular job; for example, "Payroll Clerk". Use a title, which is the same for all other similar jobs, if possible. For instance, do not use "Senior Clerk" if it is basically the same job as all other jobs you have titled "Office Manager."

- **Approved Classification**

Present classification of the position, include classification name and level; for example "Clerk 3" or "Building Manager I".

- **Supervisor's Descriptive Work Title**

Supervisor's title

- **Supervisor's Classification**

Present classification title of the position's immediate supervisor.

THE ORGANIZATION CHART

The completed chart should show:

- Organizational levels above the incumbent's position up to the senior management level.
- Other positions reporting to the incumbent's supervisor.
- All positions directly supervised by the incumbent should be shown.
- Wherever possible, each box completed on the organization chart should represent only one position. Where appropriate, several positions performing the same job function at the same classification may be grouped in a single box.
- Each position should include a position number, descriptive work title, and classification assigned.

- Direct reporting relationships are represented by a solid line, and functional reporting relationships (where technical direction, but not administrative direction is given) are represented by a broken line.

Each Organization Chart should contain:

- identifying information at the top;
- under the chart, the certification:
“The description is an accurate statement of the position’s assigned duties, responsibilities, and reporting relationship as of _____
_____, 200 _____.”

DESCRIBING DUTIES AND TASKS:

This is the most important section of the description in that it states:

- A) WHAT is done
- B) HOW it is done
- C) WHY it is done
and sometimes...
- D) WHERE and WHEN it is done.

The job information you have gathered requires planning and organizing. From the mass of material before you, you face the task of sorting the material into Duties and Tasks. A duty usually describes WHAT is done, while a task describes HOW it is being done. It is best to write this section of the description in three stages:

- Develop task statement
- Group task into common purpose groups
- Write “Key Duty” statements (or headings) that specify the purpose for which related tasks are performed. The key duty statements, which introduce related tasks, describe what is done. The task statements describe how it is done.

1. Developing Task Statements

- List all task performed by the incumbent
- Be as specific as possible, giving examples or other elaboration as necessary to show clearly the nature and extent of the function being performed.
- ie. washing floors, windows, walls, change fuses, clean sink traps, change light bulbs, sweeping floors, change washers/stems, litter pick-up, test emergency lighting, shampooing carpets, change shower heads, snake drains, change stove elements, vacuuming carpets, change switchplates, change shower heads, change spouts/aerators

2. Grouping Tasks Into Common Purposes Groups

- Collect together those tasks associated with one another
- Combine and rewrite task statements as necessary to eliminate repetition and enhance clarity.
- This grouping will make it much easier to write key duty statements, which encompass related tasks.

ie:

Group I

- washing floors, windows, walls
- vacuuming carpets
- sweeping floors
- litter pick-up
- shampooing carpets

Group II

- change fuses
- change light bulbs
- change switchplates
- change stove elements
- test emergency lighting

GROUP III

- change washers/stems
- change spouts/aerators
- change shower heads
- clean sink traps
- snake drains

3. Writing Key Duty Statements; 7 Points to Remember:

- For each group related tasks, write a single “Key Duty” statement to identify the common purpose of those tasks.
- Usually, you will require from 4 to 7 key duty statements, each embracing 3 or more tasks.
- A duty is written in the form of a sentence composed of three parts, which describe WHAT work is done, HOW it is done and WHY.
- WHAT is done is the lead statement and begins with a definitive active verb in the third person singular, present tense. (e.g. sweeps floors)
- WHY the work is done is objective of the duty and is usually introduced by “to” or “in order to”. (e.g. to maintain cleanliness within the common areas)
- HOW the work is performed (also known as the “task” statement) is accomplished by a series of participial phrases (“by...”), describing tasks which logically relate to the lead statement and combine to accomplish it. (e.g. by arranging mail according to postal category, by inserting mail in appropriate envelopes)
- In some cases the WHY and / or the HOW are self-evident and it is not always necessary to explain them as separate parts within the duty. Remember, though, that the evaluator is learning about the job through the job description, and things that may be obvious to someone who isn’t familiar with your work environment.

Think about these points and then note the following examples:

EXAMPLES:

Tasks

Sweeps Floors
Washes floors / walls
Litter pick-up
Shampoo carpets
Vacuuming

Change fuses
light bulbs
change switchplates
change stove elements
test emergency lighting

change washers/stems
spouts/aerators
change shower heads
clean sink traps
snake drains

Key Duties

[WHAT] Performs cleaning duties manually or by machine, [WHY] to maintain an acceptable level of cleanliness in common areas.
(HOW is self-evident)

[WHAT] Carries out minor electrical maintenance duties
[WHY] to maintain acceptable safety and service levels.
(HOW is self-evident)

[WHAT] Carries out minor change plumbing maintenance duties
[WHY] to maintain acceptable service levels.
(HOW is self-evident)

Arrange key duty statements logically, in descending order of importance or in order of time spent, with appropriate task statements following each key duty statement.

- Assign percentage values to each key duty, according to the amount of time spent on the tasks associated with that duty.
- The last key duty statement should always be “Performs other related duties such as... (include appropriate examples). Normally this duty statement groups minor tasks which take about 5% of the time.

“The dos and don’ts”

The language of position descriptions should consist of precise, concise, and factual statements, which give a clear word picture of action or activities being accomplished, and their objectives.

- *Each duty should begin with a very precise, descriptive, active verb in the third person singular, present tense.*

A specific action verb (with the subject “the incumbent” implied) plus an object, provides “WHAT” is done. It is important, therefore, that the verb be descriptive and specific. Vague or ambiguous verbs such as “prepares”, “handles”, “assists”, “looks after”, should be avoided, as they are open to a variety of interpretations.

For example, “Prepares estimates” could mean “Types estimates of costs”; or “Assembles cost figures”; or “Estimate future costs on the basis of previous years costs and other factors, such as...”

Because the past and future tenses have nothing to do with the description of the position as it is currently being performed, the present tense should be used throughout the description.

- *Keep sentences short, simple, and to the point.*

The less trouble the reader has in understanding the manner in which duties are described, the more attention he can give to what you are writing about. Writing that’s overly complicated and wordy is a sign that the writer isn’t confident about forthright communication, or worse, that there is an attempt to artificially enhance the importance of the job. *Keep it factual.*

- *Use only words and phrases that are necessary and that really contribute to the description.*

Unnecessary words and phrases are not only wasteful of the reader's time and energy, but they distract as well. The evaluator doesn't know what you consider to be necessary or unnecessary, and has to make up his / her own mind.

In addition, extra words and phrases add to the chance of his misunderstanding what you write, and can lead to delay while obtaining clarification. *Be specific in choice of words; Make them tell exactly what the work is.*

- *Description of duties should be specific with emphasis on skills and purposes involved. Detailed motions which the worker makes should be excluded because they will distract attention from the larger aspects of the picture.*

Thus:

"Takes Work Order from the drawer; writes information on work order; listens to caller on the phone; may talk with other department heads; hands work order to worker doing job;..."

Becomes:

"Writes work orders for jobs that do not have written orders accompanying them, i.e. from telephone calls or conversations with other supervisors."

Elimination of such details throws emphasis on the questions "WHAT", "WHY", "HOW".

- Avoid abbreviations or they must be defined first.
- *All important tools and sophisticated equipment used by the worker should be mentioned specifically and should be identified by number or trade name wherever necessary for purposes of clarity.*

An attached list of unique or complex equipment and their usage is a definite asset to the evaluator as it gives key information that has a bearing on the technical complexity of the duties performed.

- *All references to other jobs, individual departments, sections, machines, and the like should be very specific and definite.*
- *Be brief.*

Even the most complex jobs have been described thoroughly and precisely in one or two pages. Remember that a job description is not meant to show the minute by minute action of a job, nor (by itself) to teach someone precisely how to do a job.

- Avoid jargon, if used define if it is important to the job.

5. Assigning Percentages

Having developed the key duty statements for the position you are now ready to determine how much time is likely to be taken up by each key duty (including “Related Duties”). These amounts, in terms of hours per day, per week or per month, are expressed as a percentage of daily, weekly or monthly working time. The sum of these percentages must total 100%.

- 1 hour per day is 15%.
- 3 hours per day is 45%.
- 5 hours per day is 75%.
- 7 hours per day is 100%.
- 1 hour per week is 3%.
- 5 days per week is 100%.
- 1 day per month is 5%.
- 5 days pre month is 25%.

POSITION SUMMARY

The position summary is a brief, undetailed, but specific statement of the duties and responsibilities of the job. Its purpose is to provide insight into the reason for the position's existence or for its establishment. A convenient way of developing the position summary is to extract the leading statements from each of the key duties and incorporate them into the summary. To establish the supervisory relationship, it is conventional to precede the summary by one of the following clauses:

“Under the supervision of...”

- Usually means that the work is performed in the frequent presence of the supervisor, who provides specific and detailed guidance but does not constantly check the full range of routines. Work is performed according to established practices and controlled by frequent reference to the supervisor for advice and decision.

“Under the general provision of...”

- Means a general form of control not intimately bearing on the details of the employee's work, which is ordinarily reviewed upon completion for adequacy and compliance with instructions. The worker is expected to know the mechanics of his job, and to operate within established practice without advice.

“Under the direction of...”

- The degree of supervision provided to a fully trained worker by senior manager, section head not necessarily practicing in the same field of expertise as the subordinate.