

Guidelines for Critically Reviewing Job Descriptions

Once a job description has been drafted, it's important to review it carefully to make sure it's a true representation of the job. Following are guidelines and helpful hints to assist you in the review.

Job Specifics

Review the job specifics for accuracy, such as who the job reports to, etc.

Job Summary

The Job Summary should be one or two sentences that capture the essence of the job and its general purpose.

Essential Functions

Essential job functions are the fundamental job-related duties that are necessary to the position. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a person is qualified for a job if he or she can perform the essential functions of that job with or without reasonable accommodation. Therefore, under the ADA, it is necessary to clearly identify those functions that are essential for each position.

You need to carefully evaluate each function to determine whether or not it truly is "essential" to the job. Review each function as it relates to the overall purpose of the job, and use the following chart to help you make the final determination. If there is a function that you deem non-essential, but you strongly feel should be included as part of the job description, you can list it under a heading of "Other Functions".

Function Characteristic	
Indicates Essential Function	Indicates Non-Essential Function
The position exists to perform the function (e.g., if you hire someone to proofread documents, the ability to proofread accurately is an essential function, since this is the reason that the position exists), and removing the function would fundamentally change the job	The job would fundamentally still exist if the function was eliminated
All current employees in the position are required to perform the function	Some employees in the position are not required to perform the function
A large percentage of time is spent doing the function (this is not always a good indication of whether or not a function is essential, and no guidelines exist as to what percentage of time is required for a function to be considered essential)	Only a small amount of time is spent performing the function
Significant consequences would result from the function not being done	Consequences of not doing the function would be minimal
The function is not easily delegated to someone in another job	There are others who can fairly easily take over this function if necessary

Guidelines for Critically Reviewing Job Descriptions

Methods vs. Results: it is important to distinguish between **methods** of performing a function and **results**. For example, is the essential function *moving* a fifty pound box from one part of the lab to another, or is it *carrying* the box? While essential functions need to be performed, **they often do not need to be performed in one particular manner** (unless doing otherwise would create an undue hardship).

Multiple employees with varying job functions: usually, there are multiple employees in each job, and the job may vary somewhat from employee to employee. For example, a custodial function might be to shovel snow from the walkway as needed. One of your custodians, who is 20 years old and in good physical condition, might generally do this. In determining whether or not this is an essential function, ask yourself, “would I require my other custodian to shovel snow if this custodian was not available”? Your answer would probably be “yes”, since a consequence of not shoveling the snow would be potential injury to a pedestrian, so that function would be essential.

Qualifications

These are minimum qualifications for performing the essential functions of the job, generally education, work experience, and certifications. In determining qualifications, ask yourself if you would consider hiring someone who fell short on these qualifications; if so, then you need to revise the stated qualifications. You should also make sure that these minimum qualifications are enforced. If you are asking for a masters degree, but one of your employees already doing the job does not have one, then you should not require one on the job description. An alternative in this situation would be “masters degree or comparable experience”.

Required Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

Again, these are minimum requirements. Follow the same guidelines as for Qualifications. For example, do you really require a custodian to have heating system knowledge, or will someone be able to train him/her in a reasonable period of time to troubleshoot the heating system? If a new employee can be easily trained, then it is not a requirement.

Tools/Technology Used

This should list the predominant tools and technology that the employee will be required to use in performing the essential functions of the job.

Physical/Mental Demands

These are the physical and mental demands of the job. As a general rule, to avoid workers comp issues, employees should not be required to lift more than 50 lbs. Take another look at the essential functions, and make sure the physical and mental demands tie into the functions being performed.

Work Environment

Make sure that the physical environment of the position (indoors, outdoors in all weather conditions, etc.), as well as a description of the surroundings, such as noisy, distracting, quiet,

Guidelines for Critically Reviewing Job Descriptions

fast-paced, is accurately described. Anything unusual, such as extreme heat in a kitchen, etc., should be mentioned.

Final Approvals

Once the description has been reviewed by the hiring manager, often in conjunction with the employee actually performing the job, the final description should be signed by the manager, employee, and Human Resources, and the employee should be given a copy. Remember that the job description is a working document; as a job changes and evolves, so should the description.