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# HOW TO DEVELOP AND WRITE JOB DESCRIPTIONS

By Ken Drummond



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Thank you for downloading the sample chapters of *How To Develop and Write Job Descriptions* published by Gull Publishing. This excerpt includes the Table of Contents and the first chapter, which overviews the book.

We hope you find this information useful in evaluating this book.

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## CHAPTER ONE



**M**any workplace positions have job descriptions and job specifications, however, from experience and the research undertaken as a basis for this manual, two factors have become evident:

- 1) Firstly, a large number of managers and supervisors who are required at various times to write job descriptions for staff positions, frequently lack knowledge of the correct method of developing and writing these documents.

This often results in the scanning of other job descriptions and job specifications to ascertain the content and format, even though these may have been developed in an unsatisfactory format or in an incorrect manner. Therefore, if these existing documents contain any errors or misunderstandings, those errors are perpetuated.

- 2) Secondly, there appears to be confusion surrounding the terms 'job description' and 'job specification'.

**A Job Description** addresses the duties and responsibilities pertaining to the job.

**A Job Specification** is concerned with human resources - the human qualities and skills required for the job.

To eliminate the confusion between job descriptions and job specifications, the latter is referred to in this manual as job (person) specifications.

The aim of this manual is to provide a practical three-stage approach:

- 1) Conducting a job analysis
- 2) Developing a job description
- 3) Developing a job (person) specification

In developing the job description, emphasis has been placed on identifying the results to be achieved by the job-holder from the key tasks involved in the job. Job descriptions developed in this way are not merely a list of activities in which the job-holder may be expected to become involved, they are objective and performance-based.

It should be noted that the key task method requires more effort and consideration than the traditional way of listing all the duties and responsibilities. However, the advantages of this method fully justify the additional time required.

While there are undoubtedly more academic ways to develop and write job descriptions, the approach detailed in this manual will result in practical, realistic and accountable documents that can be clearly understood by everyone from senior management to the shop floor.





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## CHAPTER TWO

From the outset it is essential that the link between a job analysis, job description and job (person) specification is fully understood. The following definitions and explanations clarify the differences:

### JOB ANALYSIS

The foundation for both a job description and a job (person) specification is a job analysis, which is the process of critically examining every aspect of the job, to identify:

- All the individual tasks involved in fulfilling the duties and responsibilities of the job.
- How the tasks are interlinked and carried out.
- The human resources required for the job.

When considering a job analysis, complex jobs may take a great deal of time to analyse, while those that are simple and straightforward are usually resolved relatively easily.

A job analysis is needed when:

- New positions have been created in an organisation.
- Identification of both the job content and the human qualities of the job-holder are required for established positions in which a job analysis has not previously been undertaken.
- The job content for established positions has significantly changed since a job analysis was last undertaken.

Before proceeding further it is important to clarify the difference between the terms job analysis and task analysis, and to understand the need to identify key tasks.

**A job analysis is a macro approach** requiring examination of all aspects of the total job, encompassing the duties, responsibilities, human qualities and skills, limits of authority, functional relationships, reporting requirements, and any other interrelated factor/s.

It follows that each job comprises a number of tasks, which, when collectively completed, make up the total job.

**A task analysis is the micro approach** addressing the duties and responsibilities, and involves identifying and analysing each and every task associated with the job.

Having identified each task it is then necessary to identify the **key tasks**. These are the essential tasks that must be completed in order to fulfil the job objectives. At this stage the **key task objectives** must also be identified.



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It may be argued that **all** tasks identified are necessary to achieve the job objectives. However, ***experience indicates that most jobs can be accomplished by the completion of a maximum of ten key tasks. It is only when the key tasks have been identified that an effective job description can be compiled.***

A job description prepared on the basis of key tasks avoids the common misunderstanding that this document should comprise a long (and sometimes meaningless) list of 'things' which loosely indicate what the job-holder is required to do.

## JOB DESCRIPTION

A job description incorporates the objectives, duties and responsibilities of the job (in the form of key tasks) into a readily understood format. A job description is not, in itself, a contract of employment, despite the often quoted phrase, 'it's not in my job description, so it's not my responsibility'. The content of a job description should include:

- Title of the job.
- Function of the job.
- The functional relationships that are required in order to achieve a smooth work flow and harmony in the workplace.
- The position of the job in the organisational structure.
- Purpose of the job.
- Objectives of the job.
- The key tasks which, when carried out, fulfil the duties and responsibilities of the job.
- The achievements expected from the key tasks.
- Limits of authority that the job-holder must observe.
- Lines of communication and reporting.
- Management information required to be passed out from the job.
- Date the job description was prepared.

## USES OF A JOB DESCRIPTION

A job description has a number of uses. For example:

- During induction training.
- As a basis for job evaluation.
- During the recruitment and selection process.
- To assist in determining training needs.
- Industrial relations.



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- As part of an organisational audit. (Because a job description is used to indicate the tasks, duties and responsibilities that must be carried out by the job-holder, this information, when used in conjunction with other job descriptions, helps to ensure that the duties and responsibilities of the total organisation are being met).
- Job restructuring.

It should be noted that the development of a job description cannot be rushed. An effective job description takes time to compile correctly and may require some 'fine tuning' after it has been used for some time.

## JOB (PERSON) SPECIFICATION

The job (person) specification specifies the 'type' of person and the human qualities that person must possess. For example:

- The educational or trade qualifications required.
- Work experience.
- The knowledge and skills required to carry out the key tasks.
- Other qualities of the person best suited to carry out the job.

A job specification is used:

- When analysing training needs.
- During the recruitment and selection process.
- During appraisals.



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