



## **How to Write an Effective Job Description**

*Provided by the workplace experts at Robert Half*

As a management tool, the job description is extremely important. A well-written job summary can mean the difference between a successful hire and a hiring mistake. Fortunately, you can avoid the most common pitfalls and carefully outline the requirement of a position using the following approach.

### **Analyze Before You Write**

Sometimes the very act of writing the job description can tell you whether or not a given set of tasks requires a full-time person. You may find that you can assign the duties to one or more people on staff.

If you decide you need to hire a new employee, the next step is to identify essential tasks and responsibilities. One common mistake managers make when writing or updating a job description is to simply generate a “laundry list” of duties without carefully reviewing the position. What specific duties will the employee perform on a daily basis? Which are primary versus secondary? If the employee will supervise others, what will be the extent of his or her authority? What are the other reporting relationships, and with whom? For what critical outcomes or results will the employee be accountable?

The answers to these questions will help you develop your hiring criteria – the mix of qualifications, skills and traits that are necessary for a candidate to be successful in the position. Avoid blurring these distinctions. “Qualifications” are those attributes the candidate must have in order to perform the job, such as previous experience, certification or other credentials. “Skills” are the competencies, like computer literacy, that the prospect must possess. Qualities that are less tangible and quantifiable – like personality, work style and attitude – are “traits.”

The criteria you establish will be indispensable when you’re screening resumes and arranging interviews. This is particularly important when there are a high number of candidates.

Your hiring criteria can help you eliminate those who are “almost” a fit and allow you to quickly identify the single most qualified person.

### **Elements of the Job Description**

After reviewing the position and detailing your criteria, you’ll draft the job description. Keep in mind that a good description will not only attract the best person but also serve as guide for evaluating candidates and a benchmark for the new hire’s progress.

In general, the description should be practical, functional and clearly written. It should start with the title of the position, followed by the department and to whom the position reports. Next is the statement of overall responsibility – no more than three sentences summarizing the general nature, function and purpose of the job. Then list the primary tasks and responsibilities connected with each essential activity the candidate will be expected to perform. Follow this with a list of the secondary tasks.

After this “nuts and bolts” section, you can describe the skills and attributes necessary for success in the position. This is where you should include items such as “strong organizational skills,” “ability to lead a work team” or “must work independently.” Then list other requirements, including education.

Salary is another important component of the description. By factoring in the necessary education, training and experience, as well as the cost of living in your area, you should be able to come up with a realistic salary range. There are a variety of resources that can assist you, including recruiters, salary surveys such as Robert Half International's 2008 Salary Guide (order your free copy at [www.roberthalf.com](http://www.roberthalf.com)), career centers and websites.

Although you may be under pressure to fill a vacancy quickly, keep in mind that a thorough job description will increase your chances of hiring exactly the right person.

Robert Half International was founded in 1948 and is traded on the New York Stock Exchange. Its financial staffing divisions include Accountemps, Robert Half Finance & Accounting and Robert Half Management Resources, for temporary, full-time and senior-level project

professionals, respectively. The company has more than 360 staffing locations in North America, South America, Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, and offers online job search services on its divisional websites, all of which can be accessed at [www.rhi.com](http://www.rhi.com).

###