

A good job description must be a brief concise document - not lots of detail of how each individual task is done, which should be in an operational manual, which can of course then be referenced by very many different job descriptions, saving lots of time, especially when operational details change, as they inevitably do.

A job description is in **essence a list of 8-15 short sentences** or points covering the main responsibilities of the role, not the detailed processes.

**Don't get sidetracked or persuaded into writing an operational manual.** Detailed tasks belong in an operational manual, not a job description. If your boss or organization thinks your job description should contain the detail of how you do your job, then encourage him/her/your organization to produce an operational manual instead.

If you need to re-write job descriptions (or your own job description) then structure it in terms of **main responsibilities - not the detail**. If you wish, or if helpful to arrive at your main responsibilities, you can list the detail of your job tasks elsewhere, as this effectively represents a section in an operations manual - which shows the detail of how the job is done. You can use the detail to indicate (to yourself) the main responsibilities, but for the job description you must summarize the detail into broad descriptions, for example:

All the detail concerned with, for instance 'invoicing', could be covered by: 'manage and report on all invoicing activities using agreed systems and processes (as defined in the operational manual).'

All the detailed process concerned with, say 'cash management', could be included in 'manage movement, security and accounting of cash in accordance with agreed processes and standards (as defined in the operating manual).'

Identify the main activities by type, not the detail.

Where appropriate refer to where the detail is held (for example the operational manual, safety manual, or say 'agreed procedures/standards') - do not attempt to include the detail in the job description.

It might help to see things in terms of the main types of activities (rather than your specific task detail), as listed:

Bold type indicates that these responsibility areas would normally feature in most job descriptions:

- **Communicating** (in relation to whom, what, how - and this is applicable to all below)
- **Planning and organizing** (of what..)
- **Managing information or general administration support** (of what..)
- **Monitoring and reporting** (of what..)
- Evaluating and decision-making (of what..)
- Financial budgeting and control (of what..)
- Producing things (what..)

## Writing Job Descriptions

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- Maintaining/repairing things (what..)
- Quality control (for production roles normally a separate responsibility; otherwise this is generally incorporated within other relevant responsibilities) (of what..)
- **Health and safety** (normally the same point for all job descriptions of a given staff grade)
- Using equipment and systems (what..)
- Creating and developing things (what..)
- **Self-development** (normally the same point for all job descriptions of a given staff grade)

Plus any responsibilities for other staff if applicable, typically:

- Recruiting (of direct-reporting staff)
- Assessing (direct-reporting staff)
- Training (direct-reporting staff)
- Managing (direct-reporting staff)

Senior roles will include more executive aspects:

- Developing policy
- Duty of care and corporate responsibility
- Formulation of direction and strategy

You will find that you can cluster most of the tasks on your (initially very long) list into a list of far fewer broad (but still specific) responsibilities according to the above examples of typical job description activity areas.

The tendency when having to create or re-write a job description is to under-estimate the strategic nature of the role and responsibilities, and to be too detailed.

When writing your own job description, especially if you perform a wide range of responsibilities in a small company, be bold in the way you describe what you do. Use the sort of terminology that is found in senior-level job descriptions - it is likely that you could have a similar type of strategic responsibility without realizing it or being recognized for it.

Doing this will help you and others to recognize, **formalize and acknowledge the importance of what you do**, and therefore your value to the organization. It will also suggest several ways in which you could grow and to develop (into) the functions involved, and also indicate ways that the responsibilities activities can be developed, whether you do them or not, although you may be surprised at the high level of your own influence to drive and decide these decisions.

**Empowerment is often what you make it.**