

## The Importance of Job Descriptions

Job descriptions are a diverse tool for Human Resources, and serve as the foundation for every action we take in HR. Whether used for hiring, conducting a performance review, or any number of HR related activities, at some time one or many job descriptions have crossed your desk as an HR professional. In this issue of *Astronomy*®, we will explore how essential job descriptions truly are to your organization's success, and how to keep your job descriptions accurate.

In short, a job description is a “written statement that describes the duties, responsibilities, required qualifications, and reporting relationships of a particular job,” according to [the human resources section of about.com](#). Although many may find the responsibility of writing and reviewing job descriptions as mundane, or possibly even pointless, without them you open your organization to a lot of risk.

Job descriptions are helpful in that they:

- Give a clear understanding to candidates of what their duties and responsibilities for a particular position would be.
- Protect an organization legally, as the job description can defend why a candidate was selected – or not – for a position, and why a position is classified as exempt or non-exempt under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).
- Provide a consistent understanding across departments of job position roles and how they help the organization to grow.
- Facilitate on-going performance management efforts.
- Help employees to create goals for job advancement.
- Create boundaries regarding employees' responsibilities.
- Justify an employee's pay.
- Support training and development activities.

Job descriptions are critical. This means that great care needs to be taken in creating them and keeping them up to date. Paul Slezak lists in a post at [Recruitloop.com](#) five areas that should be included when writing job descriptions:

- **Job Title:** It should accurately reflect the nature of the job, including its ranking order with other jobs. It should also be generic enough for recruitment, and in harmony with similar jobs in the same industry.
- **Duties:** Ideally the list of responsibilities and duties associated with a position should include a percentage, to give a more rounded understanding of how much one would be expected to handle over the course of a year. It's also important to keep this section brief.
- **Skills and Competencies:** Listed separately, 'Skills' would be the activities one has learned through experience as well as qualifications earned. 'Competencies' are the traits we expect one in this job position to display.
- **Relationships:** Including reporting lines helps employees and candidates to see the hierarchy of the organization and where they fit.
- **Salary:** A salary range that is in competition with the market is ideal.

Because of the many roles that job descriptions play in an organization, it is essential to keep them up to date. An ideal approach is to review job content during the performance appraisal period, when hiring, and on a rotating two-to-three-year cycle. Other opportunities for job description reviews are when an incumbent is promoted and during an exit interview. With many touchpoints along the way, keeping descriptions up to date will not be a major time investment.

### **Writing Inclusive Job Descriptions**

Special consideration for inclusiveness needs to be made in writing job descriptions, especially for recruitment purposes. [In an August 2020 SHRM blogpost](#), Osasumwen Argibe, PHR wrote “I’ve [also] learned that word choices can determine the diversity of a company’s talent pool. So, if a company’s goal is to create a diverse and inclusive workforce, it’s important to attract diverse candidates using inclusive language in job postings.” Unconscious biases influence our interactions and decisions. Left unchecked, HR professionals and organizational leaders can create unintended environmental challenges in the workplace. Organizations can begin to counteract these biases by addressing how job descriptions are written. [Monster.com](#) has the following suggestions for writing inclusive job descriptions:

- **Remove Gender-Coded Words:** Avoid the common mistake of using coded words for a male or female audience. For instance:
  - **Female coded words include variations of** agree, empath, sensitive, affectionate, feel, support, collaborate, honest, trust, commit, interpersonal, understand, compassion, nurture, and share.
  - **Male coded words include variations of** aggressive, confident, fearless, ambitious, decisive, head-strong, assertive, defend, independent, battle, dominant, outspoken, challenge, driven, and superior.
- **Avoid Gender Bias:** A [Hewlett Packard Internal Report mentioned that women often will apply only for jobs where they meet 100% of the qualifications](#). To help reduce this issue, consider eliminating requirements that are not essential. For example, do not ask for experience with specific software packages if training can be easily provided for the position. Generalize transferable skills and clearly outline which qualifications are *required* and which are *preferred*.
- **Eliminate Racial Bias:** Racial bias can be implicit. To eliminate this in your job description writing keep in mind:
  - Never mention race or national origin
  - Phrases such as “strong English – language” or “clean- shaven” could deter qualified non-native English speakers or candidates whose faith requires facial hair.
  - Avoid phrases such as, “Cultural Fit” instead, use “Value Alignment”
- **Consider Experience:** [35% of the workforce will be made of workers ages 50 or older](#) by 2022. The mixed generation workforce is already here, so it is imperative that job descriptions remain age-bias free. Avoid phrasing such as:
  - “Young and Energetic”
  - “Digital Native”
  - “Athletic” or “Athletically inclined”
  - “No more than X years of experience”
  - “Supplement your retirement income!”

- **Keep in Mind Disabled Workers:** Communicate that your organization welcomes and values all people by using phrasing such as “Ability to complete tasks with or without reasonable accommodations.”

If your organization is quite large, it’s been a while since you updated your job descriptions, or you are still having trouble completing a job analysis in order to write accurate job descriptions, contact Astron Solutions! Our Flare® job description module can support your efforts in this area. To learn more information, [contact us](#).