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# Writing Effective Job Descriptions

# What is a Job Description?

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A clear explanation of a job's function, duties, and requirements

(used for hiring qualified applicants, evaluating employee performance and promoting employees)

# Writing Effective Job Descriptions

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- Identify what needs to be done, how work is to be performed, what equipment will be used, what working conditions are
- Describe the Job
- Define Skills, Knowledge, and Abilities

*A job description should be detailed enough to provide a clear picture to someone who is unfamiliar with the job. Must indicate the scope of the job, its duties and responsibilities and essential job functions.*

# Describing the Job

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- Summary Statement
- Identify major or critical functions/duties regularly performed – Be specific as possible and use qualifiers when necessary to improve clarity
- Frequency or percent of time - most important and most time intensive responsibilities listed first
- Degree of Supervision
- Skills, Knowledge, and Abilities required to perform the job

# Summary Statement

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Provides a synopsis of the major purpose of a position and its role in the department.

Example: Budget Analyst

Under the supervision of the Financial Manager, the Budget Analyst will provide assistance in coordinating and overseeing budgeting activities for the accounts of the Advanced Academic Programs. The Budget Assistant will develop budgets, business proposals and/or grant applications, analyze allocations, and review budget justification to ensure it relates to budgeted dollars, while complying with all relevant University and/or agency regulations and restrictions.

# Functions/Duties

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Major subdivision of work performed\*  
(Includes similar tasks that make up one area of responsibility)

Example: Budget Analyst

- Budget development and analysis
- Contract and grant administration
- Policy & procedure interpretation
- Report generation

\* *Should be listed in order of Priority*

# Functions/Duties, continued

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## Example: \*\* Assistant

- Answer Phones
- Public contact/Reception
- Prepare correspondence
- Conference coordination
- Filing

# Tasks

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- One of the work operations that is a logical, essential step in the performance of a duty
- Define the methods, procedures and techniques by which duties are carried out
- Show what is done (action), how it is done (procedures, materials, tools, or equipment) and why it is done (purpose).
- Begin each task statement with an action verb in the first person, present tense, e.g., write, analyze



# Tasks, continued

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## Example: Budget Analyst

- Review and analyze proposed budget plans to confirm amounts and allocations to ensure that funds are expended according to sponsoring organization's stipulations and appropriate University policies and guidelines.

# Tasks, continued

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- Clarify verbs which have a variety of meanings and connotations, e.g., edit, analyze, prepare, act as liaison, supervise, handle, manage.
- Provide additional explanation or examples for generic phrases such as “assist in,” “responsible for,” and “involved in.”
- Define uncommon abbreviations, acronyms, jargon
- Do not include references to personal qualities or skills.
- Provide supporting documentation to substantiate qualitative terms, e.g., complex, elaborate).

# Tasks: Clarify Verbs (example)

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*Be clear, not vague or “overwritten”*

(Good)

Edit manuscripts for post graduate researchers by correcting spelling, faculty phrasing and imperfect punctuation.

(Better)

Edit manuscripts for post graduate researchers with authority to review critically from a subject matter standpoint, checking and verifying content, condensing over-elaborated topics, making additions to topics inadequately covered, and rearranging material when not effectively presented.

# Tasks: Avoid Vague Phrases (example)

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Assist Administrative Assistant in budget management by monitoring 30 supply and expense accounts

(Better)

Monitor 30 intramural supply and expense accounts by posting expenditures and reconciling balances against the General Ledger

# Degree of Supervision

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- Describes the way in which work is assigned, when it is reviewed, how it is reviewed, and what guidelines, prototypes and protocols are available

# Degree of Supervision, (example)

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## Example: Associate Director

- Assignments are given in terms of broad, organizational goals and objectives. Goal attainment is reviewed with department chairperson on a quarterly basis through presentation of status reports and formal discussions. Department, campus and governmental guidelines relative to budgetary control, contract and grant administration, and staff management are available for reference; however, interpretations and original problem-solving are required.

# Guidelines for Writing Skills, Knowledge and Abilities (SKAs)

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SKAs – something an employee knows or can do that enables him/her to successfully perform the duties of the job.

Examples: mathematical skills, computer skills, language skills, interpersonal skills, multi-tasking

Education/Experience – specific and relevant  
**REQUIRED** to do the job!

# SKAs, continued

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## Bona Fide Occupational Qualification

- Valid qualification requirements for a job that does not prohibits one's employment or promotion on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin.



# SKAs, continued

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## Reasonable Accommodations

Can this job be performed with reasonable accommodation?

American with Disabilities Act (1990) creates nondiscrimination protections for people with disabilities. Employers may not refuse to hire or promote a person because of a disability, and employers are required to make "reasonable accommodations" to allow people with disabilities to perform essential functions.

# SKAs, continued

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Each SKA statement should indicate:

- What skill, knowledge, or ability?
- At what level, in what amount?
- In what context, for what purpose?

Example: skill in reading English words, simple sentences and numbers on documents on order to properly file them

## SKAs, continued

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- Use examples from the job to help define the SKA concisely.
- Avoid using subjective modifiers, e.g., high level, which can have a different meaning for each individual.
- Cheerful, friendly demeanor vs. demonstrated customer service skills