

4.2 How to Write Inclusive Job Descriptions



Benefits of Inclusive Job Descriptions

Writing an inclusive job description is not mandatory when it comes to hiring people with disabilities. However, inclusive job descriptions are beneficial for any hiring, and when used as a regular HR practice, they can increase business efficiency by allowing managers to accurately assess an employee's work performance.

Determining essential/non-essential and critical/non-critical functions also creates opportunities to increase employees' performance and job satisfaction. Inclusive job descriptions help to select the right person for each job. They can also increase your recruitment reach.

Employer's legal responsibility: It is important to define all essential job functions and to prepare job descriptions before advertising any vacancies or interviewing any applicants. Employment should be defined by a person's ability to perform the essential and critical job functions. In other words, employers may not disqualify a person from employment if they are unable to perform non-essential job functions.

Steps for Writing an Inclusive Job Description

To write an inclusive job description, refer to the following questions and to the accompanying sample *Receptionist* job description.

1. What is the formal job title?
2. What is the supervisor's job title?
3. What is the purpose of the job?

This should usually take no more than 3 or 4 sentences. It is meant to indicate the main objectives, outcomes, intended results and/or outputs.

4. What are the duties and responsibilities?

List 3 to 8 job duties and/or responsibilities. For each one, list examples or related tasks and indicate if they are critical or non-critical. Critical tasks may be routine or occasional.

Providing these details ensures flexibility and encourages employees to think in terms of **job enhancement** instead of viewing certain tasks from the perspective of “That is not my job”. Tasks may also be listed as routine or occasional.

- Begin each statement with an action verb (present tense).
- Use gender-neutral and non-discriminatory language.
- Use clear, simple and precise language. Use qualifiers only when necessary.
- Be as specific as possible. Write details regarding where, when, why and how.

Examples:

Instead of: “Greet visitors.” Write: “Greet visitors at the office and on the telephone in a professional and friendly manner.”

Instead of: “Handle incoming mail.” Write: “Sort and distribute incoming mail.”

5. What are the job requirements and qualifications?

The requirements and qualifications should match the duties and responsibilities. This generally includes minimum education levels and certifications. This section does not focus on prior experience.

6. What are the working conditions?

Describe the physical work environment and the hours of work. This section usually includes special conditions such as: weekend work, shift work, working outdoors, working with challenging clients, or working in noisy environments.

7. What are the physical requirements?

Describe the critical range of motion needed by the person doing that job, along with the frequency and any strength requirements if lifting objects is necessary. Also describe any special equipment that must be operated in the workplace.

Employers may not indicate non-essential physical requirements.

Example:

In a receptionist job description, employers may not state the requirement to “lift and carry up to 20 lbs. or 10 kg”. Statements such as these are arguably discriminatory since they are not focused on a specific result or essential aspect of the job.

8. Disclaimers

Employers should consider adding disclaimers to remind employees and applicants that the job description is subject to change.

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BFOR’s → What are *bona fide* occupational requirements?

Bona fide occupational requirements are considered essential to the job. An employer must differentiate between the *essential and absolute job requirements and the optional or flexible job tasks*.

For example, in most situations refusing employment on the grounds of religious belief would be considered discriminatory, but a *religious school* may lawfully require that its teachers be members of that denomination and may lawfully bar from employment anyone who is not a member.

In other situations, posting job requirements that are not essential prevent otherwise qualified candidates from applying to a job that they would be capable of doing. For example, if having a “valid driver’s license” isn’t absolutely necessary for the job, it is not a bona fide occupational requirement and should not be posted.

Note: bona fide means authentic, genuine, real, valid, without intention to deceive.

Take the Challenge!

True or False

An employer must consider for employment all applicants who can perform the essential job functions, whether or not they have a disability.

True. An employer may not disqualify a person from employment if they cannot perform certain non-essential job functions.

Source:

¹Lloyd Gosselink, *Writing ADA Compliant Job Descriptions*. 2011. Independently obtained from the website www.tmhra.org.

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