Overview:

A job description (commonly called a JD) is a written document that describes the purpose, duties, responsibilities, tasks, and relationships of a particular job. Without a JD, it is impossible to hold a person accountable for performing the duties of their position. The primary purpose of a job description is to identify the essential functions of the position. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), essential functions are those tasks or functions of a particular position that are fundamental to the position (as opposed to marginal). Knowing the essential functions of the job will aid you in:

- Assuring compliance with legal requirements related to equal opportunity, equal pay, overtime eligibility, etc.
- Establishing a basis for recruitment, selection, and hiring
- Writing appropriate interview questions
- Determining whether a person is qualified to perform the essential functions
- Identifying reasonable accommodations to enable a disabled person to perform the essential functions
- Evaluating work distribution and departmental organization
- Analyzing jobs to determine appropriate pay ranges and classifications
- Training employees
- Assisting incumbents in understanding their job better
- Allowing clear and accurate performance reviews
- Counseling employees on career opportunities and their vocational interests

While every position changes somewhat over time based on the abilities of the incumbent, the description should be written in terms of the position itself, not the capabilities of any individual. It is a document that establishes the baseline which will be utilized for the many reasons listed above, for training new employees, and for various legal purposes.

All job descriptions are summaries. The baseline objective is to provide enough information in the right format and language to be accurate, clear and useful to the employer. Job descriptions:

- Should contain enough accurate information to be useful, and
- should not be so broad that they confuse or mislead managers, employees and/or job applicants.
Position Summary Section

The Position Summary section describes in very brief terms, the duties and responsibilities of a position. It explains the general reporting structure, what is done, how it is done and why it is done. It should be no more than two or three sentences long.

Job Content Section

There are two sections that make up the overall Job Content Section: **Principal Duties and Responsibilities** and **Other Duties and Responsibilities**. The Principal Duties and Responsibilities section covers the **Essential Functions** of the position. This section will list some items which will be standard to all University positions as well as the 6 to 12 most vital essential functions of the position. The Other Duties and Responsibilities section covers other important pieces of the overall position; however, it does not include essential functions. It will include one item common to all University positions, as well as any additional duties (up to 6 or 8) that are important to the position but which do not reach the level of an essential function.

What are Essential Functions?

In identifying **essential functions**, be sure to consider (1) whether employees in the position actually are **required to perform the function**, and (2) whether removing that function would **fundamentally change the job**.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, from which the issue of **essential functions** has come into focus, lists several reasons why a function could be considered essential:

- **the position exists to perform the function** (e.g., if you hire someone to proofread documents, the ability to proofread accurately is an essential function, since this is the reason that the position exists);

- **there are a limited number of other employees available to perform the function, or among whom the function can be distributed** (e.g., it may be an essential function for a file clerk to answer the telephone if there are only three employees in a very busy office, and each employee has to perform many different tasks);

- **a function is highly specialized, and the person in the position is hired for special expertise or ability to perform it** (e.g., a company expanding its business with Japan is hiring a new salesperson, so requires someone not only with sales experience, but also with the ability to communicate fluently in the Japanese language).

To identify the **essential functions** of the job, first identify the **purpose** of the job, and the **importance of actual job functions** in achieving this purpose. In evaluating the "importance" of job functions, consider, among other things, the frequency with which a function is performed, the amount of time spent on the function, and the consequences if the function is not performed.
The EEOC considers various forms of evidence to determine whether or not a particular function is essential; these include, but are not limited to

- the employer's judgment;
- the amount of time spent on the job performing that function; and
- the availability of others in the department to fill in for the person who performs that function.

In defining the essential functions of a job, it is important to distinguish between methods and results. For example, is the essential function moving a fifty pound box from one part of the lab to another, or is it carrying the box? While essential functions need to be performed, they often do not need to be performed in one particular manner (unless doing otherwise would create an undue hardship).

**Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Section:**

This section may break out into two or three subsections; it will depend on the needs of the job and your preferences. Every entry in this section must be supported by the Principal Duties and Responsibilities section. This section is critical in determining the areas of the position which may and may not be accommodated under the ADA. This section outlines:

- **Knowledge:** The level of education, experience and training an individual must have at minimum to be considered qualified for the position.

- **Skills:** Specific skills such as ability to create, manipulate and utilize spreadsheets, word processing programs, and so on (avoid using program names unless knowledge of that specific program is essential).

- **Abilities:** Be careful with this requirement. Some examples: Does the position require LIFTING 50 pounds, or does it require the ability to move a box of paper from one location to another which could be done with a dolly, or one ream at a time? Does it require the ability to WALK across campus or MOVE across campus? For some positions, such as Security, the ability to walk and run will be essential. For most other positions, moving about could be accomplished by other means. Include such abilities as visual acuity, ability to talk on the phone, and so on if appropriate. Remember, every entry in this section must be directly supported in the Principal Duties and Responsibilities section.

**Writing the Job Description**

Now that you’ve thought through the above, and have gathered data, it is time to write the job description. Have you carefully thought about what is REALLY needed? Is there tolerance for a new person's learning curve or do you need to hire someone with specific experience? As you consider your responses to these questions, remember that Human Resources is available to offer you guidance in writing your job description. There are certain elements common to all job descriptions at Aurora University; they are on the template. The sample template attached includes those common elements as well as some tips and guidelines in each appropriate section.

The template itself is available in the shared “HR Docs” folder, and via a link from the HR website. You may open the document and do a “Save as” to save it to your K: drive as a new WORD document, then add your information at that time.
Some tips in writing Job Descriptions:

A well written job description is written in a factual and impersonal style. It should be accurate, concise, and complete. Before writing a job description, you may want to consider these suggestions:

- List all the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to perform the job; divide them into requirements and preferences.
- Be precise. This is critical.
- The requirements listed on the job description must support the essential functions, and serve as the primary criteria for selecting/rejecting candidates.
- Keep sentence structure as simple as possible; omit unnecessary words that do not contribute pertinent information.
- Begin each duty/task with an action verb.
- Avoid the narrative form.
- Be consistent when using terms like "may" and "occasionally." These should be used to describe tasks that are performed once in a while, or tasks that only some employees perform.
- Refer to job titles rather than incumbents, i.e., "Reports to ______ Manager" instead of "Reports to Mary Smith."
- Focus on critical activities. Disregard minor occasional tasks, which are not unique to a specific job.
- Use logical sequence in describing duties and responsibilities, and be consistent.
- Don't lock yourself into strict requirements that may prevent you from considering qualified candidates. Consider substitutions (example: “Bachelor’s degree or a minimum of 6-8 years of relevant professional experience”).
- When hiring, use the job description as one of your guides in your search to find the most qualified candidate. Keep in mind that, under the ADA, you cannot refuse to hire a qualified candidate who meets the requirements and whose disability can be reasonably accommodated.
Once you write your job description:

1. Forward it in electronic format to Human Resources for review. We will review the draft, make suggestions for changes, and return it to you.

2. Once Human Resources has reviewed and given format approval, print a hard copy for your signature and your Vice President’s signature.

3. Forward a signed copy to Human Resources, AND forward a finalized electronic copy to hr@aurora.edu.

4. Give the employee 2 copies of the job description; one they will review with you and keep, the other will be signed and forwarded to Human Resources for their employee file.

Questions?

Contact Human Resources. We'll work with you to make this a fruitful process!

References:


Websites from the following Universities and Organizations:

- Society for Human Resource Management: www.SHRM.org
- Rice University: www.ruf.rice.edu/~humres/training/HowToHire.htm
- St. Louis University: www.slu.edu/services/HR/compensation_position_analysis.htm
- University of Pittsburgh: www.hr.pitt.edu/comp/JobD.htm
Sample Job Description Form

Please Note: This template can be found on the Shared Drives in the HR Docs folder and can be accessed from the HR Homepage. Do a “Save As” and save the document under a new name on your personal drive before inserting any text.

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JOB DESCRIPTION

TITLE:  
(Consult HR if you have questions regarding title)

COLLEGE/SCHOOL/DEPT:  
(your department name)

DATE PREPARED:  
(Date approved)

REPORTS TO:  
(Title of person position reports to)

FLSA:  
(Exempt/non-exempt status)

POSITION SUMMARY:

This is a brief, 2-to-3 sentence section that summarizes position. This information is used in job postings, classified advertising, and so on. Include:

- The kind of supervision/guidance the position generally receives (e.g., general direction, close supervision, and so on)
- The main responsibilities of the position

PRINCIPAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

(This is the section for the Essential Functions of the position. The first three are core competencies, the same for all AU positions)

1. Represents Aurora University in the most positive manner with prospective, former and current students, clients, suppliers and the community we serve. Interacts effectively with a diverse group of faculty, staff, students and other customers of our services, learns and uses operating practices of the department and Aurora University.

2. Upholds the Mission Statement: Aurora University – an inclusive community dedicated to the transformative power of learning.

3. Handles confidential information with tact and discretion.

A sample of an entry from a job description for a Media Relations position might look like this:

* Organizes the distribution of media advisories and press releases; develops press releases and internal communications; assists with the development of distribution methods for press releases; distributes news releases using web-based distribution tool; constructs and maintains media database and distribution lists.
OTHER DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Performs other functions as necessary or as assigned.

This section contains responsibilities and important duties performed occasionally or in addition to the essential functions of the position. The above statement is on all job descriptions in this section.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES REQUIRED:

Every entry in this section must be supported by the Principal Duties and Responsibilities section. This section is critical in determining the areas of the position which may and may not be accommodated under the ADA. This section outlines:

A. **Knowledge:** The level of education, experience and training an individual must have at minimum to be considered qualified for the position.

B. **Skills:** Specific skills such as ability to create, manipulate and utilize spreadsheets, word processing programs, and so on (avoid using program names unless knowledge of that specific program is essential).

C. **Abilities:** Be careful with this requirement. Some examples: Does the position require LIFTING 50 pounds, or does it require the ability to move a box of paper from one location to another? Does it require the ability to WALK across campus or MOVE across campus? For some positions, such as Security, the ability to walk and run will be essential. For most other positions, moving about could be accomplished by other means. Include such abilities as visual acuity, ability to talk on the phone, and so on if appropriate.

APPROVALS:

Supervisor: ___________________________ Date: ____________
Vice President: ___________________________ Date: ____________
Human Resources: ___________________________ Date: ____________

Employee Review:

I have read the above, and understand that it is intended to describe the general content of and requirements for performing this job. It is not an exhaustive statement of duties, responsibilities or requirements. I understand that this description does not preclude my supervisor's authority to add or change duties or responsibilities, and understand that the performance of other duties will be required from time to time in order to meet the University’s needs. I have been given a copy of this description.

Incumbent’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: ____________
EXAMPLES OF ACTION VERBS
TO USE IN JOB DESCRIPTIONS

accommodate  conduct  extract  obtain  schedule
achieve  confer  facilitate  operate  screen
acquire  consolidate  file  originate  search
act (as)  construct  forecast  organize  secure
adapt  coordinate  govern  predict  select
address  control  handle  preside  sell
administer  convert  guide  prepare  solicit
adopt  correlate  highlight  participate  solve
advise  correspond  hire  prevent  specify
allocate  delegate  illustrate  process  stimulate
analyze  counsel  implement  program  strategize
apply  create  improve  promote  streamline
appoint  customize  identify  preside  strengthen
appraise  delegate  inform  present  study
approve  deliver  instruct  prepare  submit
approve  demonstrate  increase  provide  systematize
arrange  design  influence  publicize  teach
assemble  develop  inform  quantify  supervise
assess  determine  initiative  recognize  support
assign  increase  inspect  recommend  survey
assist  devise  instruct  refine  suggest
assume  direct  install  reconcile  summarize
assure  discuss  instruct  regulate  systematize
attain  draw  interpret  redesign  take
attract  disseminate  interview  reduce  transcribe
audit  distinguish  instruct  refine  transfer
augment  distribute  interface  regulate  translate
authorize  document  interpret  redesign  trade
budget  draft  introduce  refine  transcribe
calculate  drive  investigate  reduce  train
circulate  edit  investigate  refine  transcribe
clarify  eliminate  investor  refine  transcribe
clean  encourage  invest  refine  transcribe
clear  enforce  maintain  refine  transcribe
climb  ensure  manage  refine  transcribe
collaborate  establish  manage  refine  transcribe
collect  evaluate  market  represent  type
combine  execute  modify  report  update
communicate  exhibit  monitor  research  validate
compile  expand  motivate  resolve  verify
compose  expedite  negotiate  review  walk
complete  explore  notify  review  weld