

How to Write an Effective Job Brief / Specification

To really understand the scope of a job, it helps to have it defined in writing. During the recruitment process, you have a better chance of attracting top talent if there is a well-documented account of the role.

While particularly useful in recruiting new staff, a job description has an ongoing purpose throughout the employment lifecycle so it pays to spend some time getting it right from the outset.

Why are Job Briefs so important?

- **Candidate attraction** – It is the first opportunity to interest potential (internal or external) applicants and describe the role. If it is poorly written you could create an unfavourable impression and put jobseekers off.
- **Role definition** – It is a reference point for responsibilities and required level of performance (especially at appraisal time or when a promotion is being considered).
- **Management reference** – It is a framework and benchmark to understand the scope and level of responsibility expected of the role (particularly for a new manager).

How to Write a Clear, Concise Job Brief

Taking the time to craft an accurate job description can be invaluable to the ongoing attraction, hiring and retention of employees. A comprehensive job brief / job description comprises the following areas:

- Title of the job
- Where the role sits within the team, department and wider business
- Who the role reports to, and other key interactions
- Key areas of responsibility and the deliverables expected
- Short, medium and long-term objectives
- Scope for progression and promotion
- Required education and training
- Soft skills and personality traits necessary to excel
- Location and travel requirements
- Remuneration range and benefits available
- Convey the organisation's culture and identity

To help you, here is a brief explanation of some of the key areas:

Job Title

Begin with a job title that accurately describes the job role. Don't overstate or understate the job as you will attract overqualified or under-qualified applicants.

Job Purpose

Provide a brief description of the general nature of the position; an overview of why the job exists; and what the job is to accomplish. The job purpose is usually no more than four sentences long

Key Areas of Responsibilities

The main duties of the post should be listed in the job description in a bullet-pointed or numbered list.

- Each duty should begin with a verb and end with an outcome.
- A useful formula: "DO what + TO what = ACHIEVE what".

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Keep the list of duties as short as possible, ideally no longer than 10 bullet points.

- If you have more than 10 bullet points, are the duties being broken down into too many tasks? Can some of your bullet points be combined?
- Prioritise the list to ensure that the most important duties appear at the top.
- Use generic language such a photocopy instead of Xerox.
- Avoid words that are open to interpretation.

Qualifications and Skills

If there are specific qualifications that are required for the job role, be sure to include these when you are writing the job description.

- State the minimum qualifications required to successfully perform the job (necessary to be considered for the position).
- This will deter unqualified applicants.
- Qualifications include:
 - Education
 - Specialised knowledge
 - Skills (language fluency, typing skills, specific programme competencies e.g. Word, Excel, PowerPoint)
 - Abilities
 - Other characteristics such as personal characteristics
 - Professional Certification
 - Experience

Person Specification

These should be broken down into two parts: Essential and Desirable.

Essential

These are skills and experience considered **vital for the role**.

- Try to be specific about the types of experience required.
 - For example, if the post-holder has to give regular talks, the ability to produce PowerPoint presentations and experience of public speaking may be essential
- It is good practice to avoid expressing experience requirements in years as this can be seen as indirect age discrimination.

Desirable

These are skills and experience that would be **an added benefit** to help to deliver the role however someone could do the job without this.

- These can be linked to the cultural needs and work style behaviours required for the role
- Try list the desirable criteria in order of priority.

Reporting Line / Direct reports

Providing a reporting structure should be shared so that applicants can see where they / the role sits in the hierarchy.

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- A direct reporting line to senior management may be an important factor for applicants who are searching for a promoted post.
- List by job title any positions to be supervised by the incumbent.

Working Conditions / Physical Requirements

If the job requires a person to work in special working conditions this should be stated in the job description e.g. regular evening and weekend work, shift work, working outdoors, working with challenging clients, and so forth.

If the job is physically demanding, an outline of what this may involve should be shared e.g. lifting, bending etc.

Five mistakes to avoid when creating an effective job description

1. **Using internal terminology:** Stick to well-recognised requirements and generic words to appeal to the widest possible audience.
2. **Not involving all stakeholders:** When defining or refining what a role entails and to ensure that accurate specifications are produced, it is wise to get the input (if you can) of HR, line management and employees in a similar function.
3. **Being unrealistic:** A job description should be an accurate representation of the role requirements, not an impossible wish list of every skill that may come in useful.
4. **Using discriminatory language:** The use of certain words and phrases in a job description can be construed as discriminatory. Visit the ACAS website for some useful guidance <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1371>
5. **Irregular reviewing:** Organisations are constantly evolving. Job descriptions need to reflect these changing requirements and therefore should reviewed, ideally annually, and amended as appropriate.

For further insight and information please visit www.famerecruitment.com Employers section for our guides on Defining Your Job Needs and our Job Briefing Form

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