How to Write a Job Description

A step by step guide to crafting the perfect job description.

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Tech Jobs for Good is a hiring platform that helps organizations with a social or environmental mission recruit from a diverse community of passive and active candidates who want to make the world a better place.

We welcome posts from all organizations with an impact mission, including nonprofits, social enterprises, B Corporations, foundations, corporate social responsibility departments, government, and for profit organizations that meet our impact criteria. Our platform is focused on a variety of technical roles, including engineering, design, data analytics, and product roles.

Learn more and get started at techjobsforgood.com.

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What's a job description for?

Most job descriptions serve a dual function:

1 Market the organization and position in a way that attracts and convinces qualified candidates to apply and participate in the interview process.

2 Communicate the responsibilities and expectations of success in a role to executives, managers, hiring team members, co-workers, and the person in the role to ensure organizational alignment and support good management practices.

In some cases, a job description is written solely for communication purposes, such as when someone's key responsibilities have changed over time due to organizational changes and their job description must be updated.

At Tech Jobs for Good, we help organizations find and hire mission-aligned tech talent, so this guide assumes you are trying to accomplish both functions.

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Why are you hiring?

Whether your are intimately familiar with the qualifications, responsibilities, and needs of the job, or if you are writing a description for a job you do not understand at all, start by writing a purpose statement.

> *Tip:* A **purpose statement** is a one sentence summary explaining why a position exists (or is being created).

Before you write the job description, it is crucial to check the purpose statement with key people in your organization to ensure everyone is on the same page. Even if you're *certain* everyone is in alignment, double check. You can save yourself a lot of time and frustration by catching and discussing different expectations now.

If you are hiring for a role that is critical or new or unfamiliar to you, we also recommend checking your purpose statement with advisors or people in your network whose opinion and expertise you trust.

As you proceed in your hiring process, your purpose statement can be used to quickly explain the role to potential candidates at hiring events, facilitate better feedback about your job description from your network, and more.

Purpose Statement Examples

We are hiring someone to create and manage a website where the community we serve can learn about our services.

We are hiring someone to manage the product development team and make decisions about what features should be prioritized to best serve our customers.

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What are they going to do?

After you have a strong purpose statement, it's best to outline the key responsibilities before considering qualifications.

Start by making a list of key tasks the role will have ownership over.

If you aren't very familiar with the role because it's new to your organization, it might be tempting to copy from another job description, but resist the urge! If you take inspiration from elsewhere, be sure to write the responsibilities down in your own words so the language is consistent and the tasks make sense for your organization. Remember, you can add tasks to "figure it out". This could be creating new processes, or developing brand new departments.

Next, group your list by related tasks.

Some responsibilities might not have related tasks depending on how you've written them or the nature of the role. That's okay! You may also find that grouping the tasks into themes helps you generate more responsibilities, so make sure to note those too.

Task List Examples

- Lead daily standups, bi-weekly sprint planning, and quarterly goal setting meetings
- Design wireframes for client web and mobile apps
- Make hiring, promotion, and performance management decisions for the engineering team
- Establish a process for collecting and using data to improve our product
- Meet with cornerstone clients on-site quarterly to get product feedback

Task Grouping Example

Communication Tasks:
- Lead daily standups, bi-weekly sprint planning, and quarterly goal setting meetings
- Write monthly project status reports for clients
- Report on metrics quarterly to senior leadership team

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Why are they doing that?

Now that you've grouped the tasks, it's time to articulate *why* these tasks are important.

In some cases, especially for senior and leadership roles, entire groupings of tasks will have the same why, which is fine. For the grouping, try to summarize the responsibility in an overarching task. For individual contributors, the discreet tasks are more likely to have separate reasons.

"Why?" Examples

Facilitate communication between team members, clients, and senior leadership:
- Lead daily standups, bi-weekly sprint planning, and quarterly goal setting meetings
- Write monthly project status reports for clients
- Report on metrics quarterly to senior leadership team

Why? To ensure projects fully meet our clients' needs and are delivered on time.

Design wireframes for client web and mobile apps.
Why? To solicit early feedback from clients, reducing design changes after development begins.

Now draft the responsibilities section of your job description, incorporating the *Why?* statements and combining grouped tasks. Before you go further, take this draft responsibilities list back to those same key people or external advisors who gave you feedback on your purpose statement and make sure the responsibilities match your purpose statement and needs.

Responsibilities Example

Ensure projects fully meet our clients needs and are delivered on time by facilitating communication between team members, clients, and senior leadership.

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What makes a great candidate?

Qualifications are often where job descriptions run into serious problems. On one hand, vague or general requirements will attract unqualified applicants and can significantly increase the hiring team's workload. On the other hand, pedantic or excessive qualification lists can cause many qualified candidates to self-select out of applying to begin with. Accurately matching qualifications to responsibilities is a helpful way to avoid these challenges.

Take your list of responsibilities and brainstorm the qualities that would enable someone to successfully handle each responsibility.

Quality Brainstorm Examples

Ensure projects fully meet our clients needs and are delivered on time by facilitating communication between team members, clients, and senior leadership.
- Strong written and verbal communicator with different types of stakeholders (varying levels of technical knowledge + internal and external stakeholders)
- Good listener, makes people feel heard
- Strong presentation skills (includes making a deck and presenting it)

Increase customer retention by implementing and managing an ongoing product data collection process in collaboration with the development team.
- Understands GDPR compliance issues
- Good at balancing cost, long-term needs, and ease of implementation when implementing new tech or processes
- Very strong at distilling data to actionable steps for others

Tip: The more frequently a quality appears, the more important it is likely to be. Make sure to take note of how often certain qualities (or related qualities) repeat.

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What qualities belong in the description?

When you have finished reviewing each responsibility, group redundant or heavily related qualities, and rearrange the list in priority order. If you're struggling to decide if one quality is more important than another, sort them into one of three groups: "high importance", "medium importance", and "low importance".

Your highest priority qualifications should be non-negotiable; if you'd be willing to take a candidate who doesn't exhibit that quality, it's not high priority. Medium priority qualities are qualities that would give the hiring manager or team significant pause, but it's possible you would hire someone who is missing one or two of them if they were a stellar candidate. Low priority qualities are nice-to-haves that might help you tie-break candidates, but would not prevent you from extending an offer to someone who otherwise demonstrated all of your high and medium priority qualities.

> **!**
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> *Tip:* The qualifications priority list is a helpful tool for preparing an interview team to properly evaluate candidates against the needs of the role. Keep it on hand!

Now combine and clarify these qualifications into strong descriptions of the candidate you are looking for to draft your qualifications section (leaving out low priority qualities for length if necessary):

Qualifications Example

- Perceptive listener experienced at identifying underlying user needs and leading collaborative discussions to help stakeholders with competing priorities reach agreements and drive complex technical projects forward.
- Kind, respectful, and responsive people leader who excels at developing and retaining junior colleagues through hands-on mentorship.

If something is nice to have but not a priority, make sure it is clearly communicated as such.

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What should you watch out for?

As you create your qualifications, pay special attention to two kinds of requirements: years of experience and specific technologies. While these types of qualifications are not necessarily bad, they are often misused.

What's the problem with years of experience anyway? Time is often used as a proxy for amount or quality of experience. In practice, time is usually a poor signal for real qualifications, and it can be difficult to accurately assess on resumes. For example, if a resume only lists years, does a job from 2019-2021 count as three years of experience or fourteen months?

> **!**
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> *Tip:* Consider if using "experience" or "significant experience" without a specific number of years will effectively communicate your intention.

If you do want to use years as a qualifier, think critically about the lower bounds of that experience and the specificity. For example, do you need someone with five to eight years of experience managing a team, or could someone with three years of managing a large team potentially be qualified? Does the experience need to be engineering team management, or could an engineer with management experience in a previous career also be qualified? When in doubt, err on the side of being more generous and adjust your requirements upward if you receive a significant number of unqualified applicants.

If your requirements list specific technology or software, review this carefully as well. What if a candidate had the right qualifications but was experience with Jira instead of Asana?

> **!**
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> *Tip:* In many cases, you should add "or equivalent tools" to specific technical qualifications to attract a larger pool of qualified candidates.

If someone is responsible for making time-sensitive or complex technical decisions from a senior leadership position, specific experience with your tools or programming languages is likely a good idea. But keep in mind that experience with a variety of related technologies is a strength, and don't over-limit your candidate pool by combining specific technical requirements with lengthy time requirements.

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What's in it for them?

In short, if you want candidates to apply to your job posting, you should tell them what's in it for them! Pay, benefits, location, values, and company culture are usually important factors to job seekers, and should be included in one or more paragraphs or bullet point lists. If not in your job description, you should make sure to communicate this information on your career site or through the interview process to keep candidates excited and engaged.

1   **Pay:** Aside from any legal requirements you may have, we strongly recommend including salary information in your job posting. Job seekers report more positive opinions of organizations that share pay ranges or compensation practices openly, and at Tech Jobs for Good, we see a higher application rate on job posts with salary ranges.

2   **Benefits:** Benefits make a big difference in the overall compensation package and come in many forms beyond health and dental insurance. List your paid time off for jury duty and voting, mention your options for flexible workdays, your commuter benefits, and your long term disability insurance. Even if you are a small organization without a lot of resources for high dollar value benefits, quality of life benefits are an easy way to compete around flexibility and highlight your positive work culture.

3   **Location:** More workers than ever are remote or hybrid, but regardless of whether your space is virtual or in-person, employees will spend 40 hours a week there. Describe what candidates can expect in terms of workspace and interactions with their colleagues.

4   **Values and Culture:** Sharing the way your values show up in your culture is a good way to attract candidates who share your values. For example, if you value volunteering, you might have company-wide volunteer days once a month on a Friday and colleagues might regularly share volunteer opportunities with each other in a dedicated slack channel. List that in your benefits or describe it in a separate section!

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What should they know about you?

If you intend to use your job description to hire someone external, it's important to include information about your organization that makes them excited to apply. In some cases, you may also want to include team-specific information. Start by writing a one paragraph description of the key information a candidate would want to know, such as:

- What does your organization or team do?
- Who do you do it for?
- What's your approach / how do you differentiate your work from others?
- How big is your organization or team?
- What are your organization or team's values?
- What are your organization or team's goals in the medium term (2-5 years)?

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Tip: You may already have a written description of your organization, such as on your website's About Us page. This can be a great place to start, but take care to rewrite it with a job candidate in mind. Your existing descriptions are likely to have potential customers or donors or investors as the target audience. In your job description, **the goal is to sell your organization as a great place to work**, not to sell your product or service. When in doubt, focus on the things an ideal candidate would value about your mission, your values, and your culture.

Organization Pitch Example

At Tech Jobs For Good, we know many tech workers want to make a difference, but have trouble discovering social impact tech jobs. Tech Jobs for Good is the only job board for high demand tech roles in civic and environmental impact organizations. We expect to expand our founding team from three to seven by the end of 2023, as we improve our candidate database and add more features. As we grow, we're focused on sustainability and retention, and offer a supportive team and work schedule that enables you to focus on your health and family first.

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How do you summarize it all?

At this point, we have created a set of disparate job description parts. In the next section, we'll cover different formats and how to assemble it. But first, we need a way to summarize the position. This is a slightly longer version of the purpose statement you created at the start of this process. It should highlight the principle purpose of the role, the most important qualities of a strong candidate, and explain where the role falls in your organizational structure.

In addition to serving as the introduction to your job description, the summary can serve as an elevator pitch for recruiting. Encourage your hiring team to use it at job fairs, in LinkedIn posts sharing the role, and when recruiting from their networks.

Tip: We recommend the following format for your summary section:

[ORGANIZATION] is hiring a [DESCRIPTIVE QUALITIES] [JOB TITLE] [DESCRIPTIVE QUALITIES]. You will report to the [MANAGER ROLE] and collaborate with [COLLEAGUES] / manage the [TEAM] to… [ROLE PURPOSE].

Role Summary Example

Tech Jobs for Good is hiring a detail oriented Junior Software Engineer who is a quick learner and enjoys working across a wide-range of technical and business projects. You will report to the CEO and Lead Developer, Noah Hart, and collaborate with our Head of Customer Success and Head of UX Design to identify and correct user-facing software issues and quality of life improvements so every customer and job seeker has a great experience.

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How do you put it all together?

Now that you've assembled the pieces of your job description, it's time to put it together. In general, we recommend using one of the following formats:

Formatting Option 1:

Organization Pitch
Role Summary
Responsibilities
Qualifications
Comp & Benefits
Hiring Process (Optional)

Formatting Option 2:

Role Summary
Responsibilities
Qualifications
Organization Pitch
Comp & Benefits
Hiring Process (Optional)

Is one of them better than the other? Not necessarily. However, for more senior roles, especially executive roles, we recommend opening the job description with the Organization Pitch. Senior leaders' job search decisions are heavily influenced by the organization they will be joining and leading, so place that information early on. For those roles, you should consider adding information about your annual revenue, customer demographics, investors, or other top level metrics that would be important to an executive in your Organization Pitch.

The Hiring Process section, which is optional, hasn't be covered in this guide. While we recommend communicating your hiring process to candidates, there are many good places to do this. That could be the job description, your careers site, the initial email confirmation when candidates submit an application, or in the very first interview step. If you do want to include it in the job description, simply outline the timeline and stages of the hiring process you plan to use.

Tip: We recommend using headers or bold font titles and bullet point lists to make each section stand out, so your description is more readable.

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What next?

At this point, you should have a completed job description! We recommend getting feedback from your colleagues or network one more time before publishing your job description, with an eye towards clarity and inclusion.

Job Description Checklist

- [ ] Purpose Statement
- [ ] Purpose Statement Feedback
- [ ] Brainstorm Task List
- [ ] Group Related Tasks
- [ ] Define the Tasks' "Why"?
- [ ] Draft Responsibilities
- [ ] Responsibilities Feedback
- [ ] Quality Brainstorm
- [ ] Group Related Qualities
- [ ] Qualities Prioritization
- [ ] Draft Qualifications
- [ ] Benefits, Comp, & Location
- [ ] Values & Culture
- [ ] Organization Pitch
- [ ] Role Summary
- [ ] Formatting
- [ ] Final Job Description Review

You now have a great starting point for future descriptions, as you'll be able to reuse your formatting, organization pitch, and other information about benefits, location, culture, and values. However, it's important to review the sections and content whenever you publish a new description to make sure it's up to date.

Also remember that even when you are rehiring for the same position, the responsibilities and qualifications may change. For example, your engineers may be using different hosting services or a new programming language, or your reporting structure may have changed.

Ready to start hiring?

Post Your Job

You can find more hiring resources, from how to manage candidate communication to designing better interviews on techjobsforgood.com.

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