

# **Job Descriptions:** *Their Creation, Use and Value*

Maryann T. Dillon, CAE  
Dental Practice Consultant

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**Although it is time-consuming to create them, the overall benefit of having job descriptions for each job outweighs the effort it takes to develop them.**

For years, practice management consultants have recommended that businesses have an Employee Manual and Job Descriptions for each position in the office. Experience has shown that many practices do not have clear, well-defined job descriptions. This article will explain the benefits of job descriptions and the basic elements of a job description. It will also provide useful help on how to write job descriptions including a process for their review and acceptance.

Each position in an office should have a job description. Although it is time-consuming to create them, the overall benefit of having job descriptions for each job outweighs the effort it takes to develop them.

## Why Have Job Descriptions?

Job descriptions can be used to accomplish several objectives. On the part of the employer, they can clarify the expectations for that job, and on the part of the employee, they will identify the employee's responsibilities. They serve as the major basis for outlining job training. They support objective performance evaluations since they identify the responsibilities and tasks of the job against which the employee is judged. They are especially valuable to use in performance evaluations when employees are not meeting the job requirements as outlined in the job description. Job descriptions are especially useful in advertising to fill an open position.

### Creating a Job Description

According to consultant Mary J. Witt, a senior manager with the Camden Group, there are six key elements that each job description should contain. These elements address both important practical aspects and employment law issues.

These elements are:

- Position summary
- Job responsibilities
- Qualifications
- Physical requirements
- Performance expectations
- Employee signature

According to other authors, there are additional elements that a job description should include:

- the title of the job,
- the date it was written,
- the person to whom the person holding the job reports,
- if the job is of exempt or non-exempt status,
- job location, and
- may include the salary range.



## Description Formats

There are many formats used in formulating job descriptions and included here is one job description format that can be used by small businesses. A few sample-wording suggestions are included to assist in identifying what should be contained in each section of a job description.

### Position Summary

The summary is just a one- or two-sentence overview of the job's key tasks and responsibilities. For example, for a front desk person, the summary may say, "The front desk person will greet patients, schedule appointments, and provide a variety of clerical and secretarial functions."

### Job Responsibilities

Create a thorough list of specific duties required to fulfill the responsibilities of the position. For example, for an assistant or nurse, it may include: assist the provider while treating patients; prepare operatory for the patient; greet patients and review medical history, medications, etc.; complete paperwork at conclusion of treatment; clean room following treatment, etc.

It is important to develop your own list of responsibilities based on the practice needs and job tasks required. The most valuable cornerstone of a job description begins with the job analysis by the person currently holding the job. Conducting interviews with employees who work with the person and whose jobs intertwine with the job being analyzed is valuable. Observing performance of certain tasks and asking employees to fill out questionnaires and worksheets assists in getting a total picture of the job. These are ways of collecting information about a job from secondary sources. More will be said about the job analysis process later in this article.

Every job description should contain, as part of the position's duties, an open-ended statement such as "performs other services deemed reasonable by the supervisor."

### Qualifications

This section outlines the education, experience, knowledge and abilities needed for the position. Describe any specific diplomas, certifications, degrees required. Also, include any experience requirements such as OSHA training, CPR training, HIPAA compliance knowledge, etc. If you are using the job description as a hiring tool, these listed qualifications help identify candidates and objectively screen out the unqualified ones. An example for a dental hygienist may include: must hold current hygiene license from the State of Wisconsin, have five (5) years' experience, have administrative ability, can do public speaking, etc. An example for a secretary may include: must have skill in using a personal computer, have knowledge of various (could enumerate) software packages, possesses skill to type 50 words a minute, etc.

Some jobs may have special requirements like periodically working weekends, or

putting in overtime at peak work periods, etc. These facts should be included in the job description qualifications.

### **Physical Requirements**

Some jobs require specific physical ability and strength to perform. For example, if an assistant is required to assist in lifting patients out of a wheelchair and onto an examination table, the job description should indicate that strength and/or other physical ability is needed to fulfil the job. By mentioning it, you are on the right side of anti-discrimination laws.

### **Performance Expectations**

Defining the benchmarks by which the job performance will be judged helps the employee understand what it takes to do the job and how management will measure it. For example, one performance standard for a nurse assistant could be to have a five-minute turnaround time in preparing an examination room for the next patient. That can be measured against a time log. Another standard for a billing secretary could be submitting all claims electronically by the end of each day.

Inclusion of these standards is one step beyond the traditional job requirements and shows employees how they will be evaluated.

### **Employee Signature**

Any new hire, after a thorough review of the job description, will be asked to sign and date each sheet of the job description. Provide a copy to the employee and add the document to the employee's personal file. The employee will then understand what is expected of them and hopefully, a long employment relationship will begin.

### **Additional Elements**

Of course, the title of the job should be clearly stated at the top of the description, as well as the effective date. It would be wise to include somewhere on the description the date when that particular description was written. As time passes and different persons hold that particular job and responsibilities expand, it is important to update the job description. The date of the last review of the document may stimulate a fresh review and revision.

Clearly identify the person to whom the employee reports. This takes away any ambiguity as to the line of responsibility.

Indicate the job status, either exempt or non-exempt, the working location within the office, and finally, if you wish, the salary range.

## **A Job Analysis**

Job descriptions take time to develop and are not usually part of the everyday activities of a practicing professional. So, a technique that can be used to assist

in writing job descriptions is to conduct a job analysis of the job under consideration.

A job analysis is an in-depth study of a job that provides the information upon which the job description is based. Job descriptions are the most visible output from a job analysis. Depending upon the size of the office, the office manager may serve as the job analyst. In larger offices, a separate person can serve as job analyst. Comprehensive job descriptions developed from job analysis are used in selection, training, performance appraisals, and compensation of the person holding that position.

## The Role of the Job Incumbent

When a job analysis is performed with the end result being a newly written job description, the person currently holding that position is very important. Upon introducing the idea of a job analysis to the incumbent, ask them to consider the following items which will help them analyze the job they hold.

1. Ask them to spend time thinking about the job. Encourage them to make notes and/or keep a diary of the work-related activities needed to fulfill the job.
2. Verbally or in writing ask the incumbent to explain their concept of the job.
3. Direct them to provide a written list of the duties, knowledge, skills, abilities, training and other characteristics that are needed to do the job.
4. Advise them to focus on the facts and not overstate or understate duties, knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics.
5. Encourage them to refrain from bringing up side issues. They should be concerned with the job only. Job performance, wages, complaints, relationships with co-workers, etc. are not relevant.
6. Allow them to make suggestions as to changes to the job, to point out where some tasks overlap with those performed by others in the office, thereby duplicating efforts, and indicate where other efficiencies could occur, etc.

Sometimes, if a practice conducts a job analysis on a specific job, or if the office does a mass job analysis (looking to upgrade all job descriptions), employees can become concerned for their jobs and salaries. The office manager or job analyst will want the full cooperation of the employees, so it is important to lay aside any fear they have about their job or income. Point out that there will be no adverse consequences from the job analysis. It should be stressed that no person's job will be eliminated and no person's salary will be reduced. It is reasonable to believe that there may be a change of title or job realignments but those are decisions made after a complete review of the analysis, by top management.

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## Approval Process

It is important to identify for all those participating in the process the method by which the new job description(s) will be accepted. Here are a few suggestions that can be used as a guide for the office manager, provider, or business owner to outline the approval process.

1. The incumbent completes the analysis.
2. Their written findings and data are presented to the job analyst.
3. Together they will discuss the material.
4. The documentation is then presented to the incumbent's supervisor for review (often the incumbent's supervisor is the job analyst).
5. The supervisor (office manager) may add, delete or modify duties, knowledge, skills, abilities, training requirements and other characteristics.
6. It will then be put in the proper format previously developed for the office and standard for all job descriptions.
7. The supervisor approves the document.
8. It is forwarded to the designated person (generally the provider/business owner) for final approval.
9. The new or revised job description is presented to the person holding the job to sign and date.
10. This job description becomes the official record for this particular job, held by that particular person.
11. Include the date of the final review and acceptance.

## Crisp and Clear Language

Each statement in a job description should be crisp and clear. Here are a few hints that will assist in that goal.

- Structure the sentences in classic verb/object and explanatory phrases. The occupant of the job is the subject of your sentences so the subject of the sentence can be eliminated. For example, a sentence pertaining to the description of a receptionist position might read: "He/she greets all office visitors and any other personnel in a friendly and a sincere manner."
- Always use the present tense of verbs, for example: *greet*s, *clean*s, *distribut*es, *submits*.
- If necessary, use explanatory phrases telling why, how, where and how often to add meaning and clarity. For example: "Collects all patient records on a daily

basis, for after-closing filing purposes.”

- Omit any unnecessary articles such as “a,” “an,” or “the” to facilitate an easy-to-understand, to-the-point description. Using the above example, the statement including the unnecessary articles would read, “Greet all building visitors and office personnel in a friendly and sincere manner.”
- Use un-biased terminology. Construct the sentences in such a way that gender pronouns are not required. If needed use the “he/she” approach.
- Avoid using words which are subject to differing interpretations. Try not to use words such as *frequently*, *some*, *complex*, *occasional*, and *several*.

## Conclusion

A well-written, practical job description will help prevent someone from refusing to carry out a relevant assignment because “it’s not in my job description.” Many jobs change due to personal growth, an increase or decrease in the number of persons working in the office, the incorporation of new technologies, a new facility, growth in patient load, incorporating a second dentist, etc. When any of these changes occur in the business, it is time for either revisions or newly developed job descriptions.

Flexible job descriptions will encourage employee growth within their positions and will encourage larger contributions to the practice than what they might have made with a strict, hard-and-fast description. For example, notice the difference in spirit in these two wordings for an office manager job: 1) Routinely orders office supplies and keeps the storage closet well stocked. 2) Develops and implements a system of ordering office supplies that promotes cost savings and efficiency within the office. Without a doubt, the second leaves room for development and expression of personal ability and organizational skills.

Well-developed job descriptions will assist in the advancement of the business. When hiring new personnel, conduct careful interviews and thus choose persons fit for the job. An efficient, goal-oriented staff will go a long way to help fulfill the overall goals of the business.

## Job Description Sample

(Modify according to the job using this format)

Title: *Dental Assistant*

Pay Range: \$XX,XXX - \$XX,XXX

Date of Employment:

Job Analyst:

Status: *Non-exempt*

Reports to: *Office Manager*

### **Position Summary:**

Assists Dentist during dental procedures, greets, seats and dismisses patients, sets up and breaks down operatory, takes and develops x-rays, and provides a variety of other functions.

### **Duties and Job Responsibilities:**

- Prepare operatory for various dental procedures. Involved procedures require more time.
- Greet and seat patients, review medical, dental history, medications, current dental problems, select music, administer N<sub>2</sub>O
- Put on matrix retainers, rubber dams, etc.
- Explain procedures to patients prior to starting the procedure, what to expect during and after the procedure (for example: taking impressions, root canals)
- Assist dentist during procedure/s
- Apply etching
- Take and develop x-rays as needed
- Conduct vitality tests on patients
- Complete chart and review next appointment time with patient
- Dismiss patients, provide instructions on care and maintenance of completed procedure
- Breakdown operatory after each patient. Disinfect all surfaces, remove and replace new barriers, re-set operatory with sterile instruments for next procedure.
- Make study models, including taking alginate impressions, pouring up in stone, and grinding down after disinfection
- Make temporaries

- Track lab cases
- Fabricate secondary trays and base plates
- Fabricate and cement provisualizations
- Prepare referral slips and send to specialist, copy patient
- General tasks shared by others on staff:
  - Empty garbage
  - Empty trap
  - Maintain dental equipment
- Sterilize all instruments when needed
- Check inventory, order dental supplies and equipment, prepare bills for payment
- Assist hygienist on hygiene days
- Seat emergency patients, listen, ascertain their problem, anticipate what is to be done and prepare for treatment
- Attend continuing education courses regularly
- Perform other services deemed reasonable by the supervisor

**Qualifications, Credentials and Experience, Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:**

- Attended a certified dental assisting school
- Knowledge of record keeping system, modern office equipment, including phone, computer, software, x-ray equipment
- Hold a current CPR certification
- Has had OSHA training, HIPAA compliance training
- Two years experience as a dental assistant
- Good working knowledge of dentistry to explain procedures
- Abilities and characteristics:
  - organized
  - follows directions
  - pleasing personality
  - detail-oriented
  - have initiative
  - can anticipate needs of the dentist
  - a team player
  - ability to see the big picture, wants the practice to succeed
  - friendly and outgoing
  - can handle emergencies
  - mature

**Special Requirements, Physical and Time:**

- Ability to assist wheel chair patients in and out of the dental chair
- Work on a Saturday several times a year (Seal a Smile, Give Kids a Smile Day, Children's Dental Health Week)

**Performance Expectations:**

- Provides friendly atmosphere
- Maintain a five minute turnaround time in preparing the operatory for the next patient
- Complete chart entries immediately
- Return charts to appropriate place for filing after each patient visit
- Provide monthly supplies review and ordering schedule
- Contact patient following dentist's x-ray reading within one day

Employee Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Description Creation: \_\_\_\_\_

## Author Contact Information

**Maryann Dillon, CAE**  
Schenck Health Service Solutions  
11414 W. Park Place, Suite 200  
Milwaukee, WI 53224  
414-465-5518  
888-556-5580  
[maryann.dillon@schencksolutions.com](mailto:maryann.dillon@schencksolutions.com)