

How to Write a Job Spec

That Actually Works!



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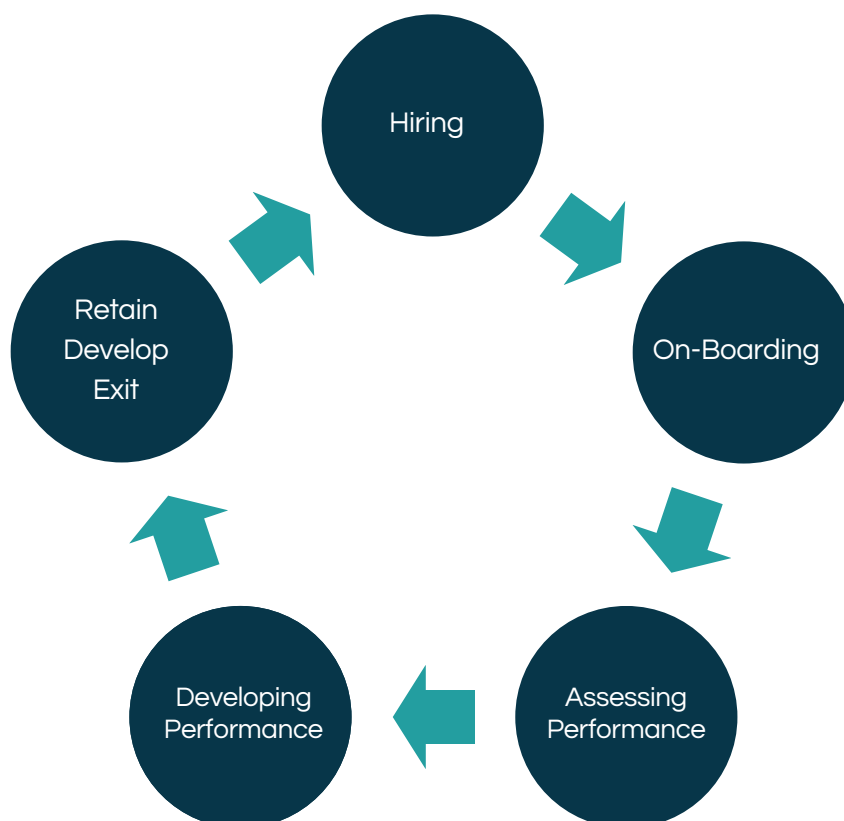
Introduction

To attract and assess the best candidates, you need a clearly defined job description — one that actually works.

It should cover the job title, objectives, responsibilities, schedules, activities, authority, measurements, wages, and benefits. It should also state any required certificates or licenses — or whether these can be gained post-hire. You may wish to include the number of years' experience needed, familiarity with specific systems or equipment, and any industry, occupational, or challenge-specific experience required. Define how success will be evaluated, measured, and rewarded.

The benefits of a good job description are numerous. It clarifies expectations for both employer and employee, clearly spells out duties, and helps eliminate — or at least minimise — potential misunderstandings.

The job spec should cover three areas: the opportunity, the job description, and the person specification. It should serve as a point of reference not just for hiring, but throughout onboarding, development, and performance management.



Your Seven Point Checklist

A job spec isn't just paperwork — it's a strategic tool. Done well, it helps you attract the right candidates, align internal stakeholders, and set someone up for success long after they're hired. Done poorly, it can lead to confusion, mis-hires, and wasted time. Here's what to focus on:

1

Being clear about what you want someone to achieve?

Define success upfront — what outcomes should the person deliver, and how will they create value for the business?

2

Responsibilities...

Outline the core tasks and accountabilities that form the day-to-day focus of the role. Prioritise what really matters.

3

Person spec

Specify the skills, experience, and personal qualities required to succeed in the role — and distinguish between “must-haves” and “nice-to-haves.”

4

What you don't want!

Think about characteristics or behaviours that would be a poor fit — this helps filter out the wrong candidates early.

5

Transparency

Be open about both the positives and the challenges of the role or environment — it builds trust and attracts the right fit.

6

Critical Point of Reference

A job spec should remain useful beyond hiring — guiding onboarding, performance reviews, and development conversations.

7

Positioning the opportunity

Most people fall short in this context. Present the role in a compelling, credible way that appeals to the right people — don't just list duties, sell the story.



Templates You Can Copy or Customize

A Job Spec Template, Person Specification, and a Benchmarking/Rating Framework you can use or adapt for your own needs (see pages 7–9).

1

Being clear about what you want someone to achieve?

Key Objectives



When defining the job spec you should consider:

What needs to be done?	Why does it need to be done?	What will be the outcomes?
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Look at the next three years and consider how any changes or events might affect your hiring and staffing requirements. For example, there may be movements in the economy or marketplace you will need to consider when determining the job description and person criteria.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Threats

Is taking someone on full time the best option? What other alternatives are available? It might be better to outsource the work, take on a contractor or find an interim solution.

What is the make-up of your current team? How strong is it? How diverse is it? Are there any gaps or too many common types? And what implications, if any, should be taken into account?

What are the key performance indicators?

Consider high-level primary outcomes such as revenue increase, profit, margin increase, percentage market share, customer satisfaction improvement ratios, cost reduction, and operational improvement. These should be quantifiable, should directly contribute to the financial performance or value of the business and be smart....

SMART

Specific | Measurable | **Attainable** | Relevant | Time bound

Also consider what secondary skills, actions and behaviours contribute to the primary outcomes being realised.

You need to measure what counts most.

A common management error is to measure too many, or the wrong outcomes, which may result in employees failing to understand or act on what is most important. There is, however, a small number of circumstances or regulatory situations where all areas are equally important.

Often HR professionals will be very general in their description of the role, so that changes can be easily accommodated. This is a positive in respect of allowing scope for change.

The downside is that you can fail to state clearly exactly what is required. A smart manager may wish to have their own addendum which they keep to themselves and use as a point of reference or use with others as a Memo.

For senior and specialist roles, it's increasingly the norm to state specific targets or measurable outcomes.

Senior roles (C-level, VPs, Directors) : Senior hires are accountable for business impact. Clear targets help attract the right candidates and align expectations.

Specialist roles (e.g. Sales, Accounts Receivable Rep, Consultant, Programmer) : Specific targets (like sales target, deadlines, output quality, or KPIs) create clarity and help screen for capability.

Early-stage, startup, highly fluid roles: May require a more cautious approach. Targets might be evolving — so sometimes it's better to state "example outcomes" rather than hard numbers. Here are some examples:

List 3–5 high-impact outcomes expected over the course of the year. These should reflect what's required of the individual's core contribution to team and business success, as well as any specific responsibilities outlined in their job specification. Include both performance and growth-oriented goals. These may be quantitative (e.g. revenue targets, project completions) or qualitative (e.g. collaboration, innovation, leadership development).

You need to have and state with good clarity what the key objectives are - a good way to crystallise your thinking, is to fast forward... if at the end of 12 months, the person has performed well, exactly what have they done - list in order of importance/magnitude.



2 Responsibilities



Primary Responsibilities:

These should capture the activities and behaviours most likely to drive success in the role, meaning key objectives are met or exceeded.

- Positioning – Define where the role sits: team, function, reporting lines, and location.
- Role Purpose – Summarise the scope, objectives, and overall purpose of the role.
- Expectations – Clarify what is expected of the person, what needs to be accomplished—and by when.

Focus on what matters most probably five to seven primary responsibilities that directly impact success.

These should reflect the key tasks the individual will be held accountable for and that form the basis of both day-to-day feedback and formal reviews.

Also include the specific skills and behaviours needed to deliver on expectations.

Other responsibilities:

This broader list may include 15–20 items and should reflect both ongoing duties and high-impact deliverables.

The clearer and more outcome-focused your responsibilities list, the more meaningful and measurable your performance assessment will be.

3

Person Spec/Criteria

The person specification outlines the skills, experience, and personal attributes required to succeed in the role.

- Sometimes, it may be appropriate to augment this with a likely candidate profile to help clarify what a strong fit looks like.
- When building the person spec, you'll likely gather input from HR, your own judgment, and colleagues in departments that will interact with the role. The result is often a long — and potentially unrealistic — list of qualities. That's why it's important to distinguish between "Essential" and "Desirable" criteria.
- Start by identifying the four or five most important qualities you're looking for. Then rank or rate candidates against these on a simple 1–5 scale. This gives you a practical way to compare candidates and remain focused on what truly matters.

Use others to help define the criteria. Consider:

- Experience (track record)
- Knowledge
- Qualifications
- Technical skills

Achievement Oriented	Analytical Ability	Communication Skills (Oral, written, presentation)	Creativity / innovation
Decision- Making Skills	Integrity / Honesty	Flexibility / Adaptability	Initiative
Interpersonal Skills	Leadership	Management Skills	Persuasiveness / Influencing
Planning and Organisational Skills	Problem- Solving Skills	Team Building / Team Work	Time Management

Also consider what level each competency is needed at — and keep the list manageable. Think about the ideal candidate's likely background, and where or how such a person may be found. Equally, define any red flags — behaviours, attitudes, or gaps that would rule someone out.

3

Person Spec/Criteria (Continued)

You can't ignore cultural fit and emotional intelligence. At senior level, it's not just about skills.

Can they influence? Navigate change? Build trust? These qualities are rarely captured well in job specs — but they're often the reason hires succeed or fail.

Emotional intelligence (EQ) plays a critical role in job performance — it accounts for 58% of success across roles, and leaders with high EQ are 40% more effective than their peers. When building a job spec, it's worth factoring EQ into your person specification — especially for leadership, commercial, and team-based roles.

Key Emotional Intelligence Traits to Look For:

- Self-awareness: Signals objectivity and openness to feedback — a foundation for learning, growth, and sound judgment.
- Self-management: Reflects discipline and consistency — staying composed under pressure, avoiding rash decisions, and maintaining high standards.
- Social awareness: The ability to read people and group dynamics — essential for influence, collaboration, and client engagement.
- Relationship management: Getting things done through others — vital for leadership, sales, and cross-functional work. Watch for extremes: dominating or disengaging behaviours are red flags.
- Motivations: Ensure the candidate's drivers align with the role and culture. Mismatched motivations often lead to underperformance or early exits.



Structuring the Criteria

When defining what's required, list essential skills first — focus on must-have capabilities, not a wish list. If you're unsure what matters most, categorise each skill or trait as either: Essential — must be present. Desirable — adds value, but not a dealbreaker

Use a rating scale (e.g. 1–5) and place the most important qualities at the top of your list.

Include both hard-side and soft-side characteristics:

- Hard-side: Acquired skills and experience — e.g. specific industries, role types, deal sizes, customer segments.
- Soft-side: Personal attributes — e.g. emotional intelligence, motivation, resilience, collaboration.

4

What you don't want!

- When writing a job spec, it's just as useful to think about what you don't want as what you do. Are there behaviours, mindsets, or working styles that would clash with the team or slow things down?
- For example, someone who needs constant direction may struggle in a self-starting environment. Including a line or two about what won't work can help filter out the wrong fit — before they even apply.

5

Transparency

- There are multiple merits to being transparent with candidates about both the strengths and potential drawbacks of an opportunity.
- Firstly, it builds trust.
- Perhaps more importantly, it acts as a filter — putting off those who aren't suited to the role, the requirements, or the environment. You don't want to hire people who won't work out.
- Equally, it can be a green light for the right people. For example, a chaotic, unstructured environment may be off-putting to some — but for others, it's where they thrive. The same goes for highly structured, process-driven settings: not for everyone, but ideal for some.
- When people join expecting one thing and find another, they often feel misled — not a good start, and frequently the root of a failed hire.

6

Critical Point of Reference

The job spec represents a critical point of reference when assessing someone's performance and developing them.

It's the responsibilities, behaviours and specific skills outlined in a good job spec, that offer scope to identify and assess any areas of weakness, skills gaps or to increase performance in the role.

Therefore it's important that these are identified, and prioritised from the outset.

7

Positioning the opportunity



Your job spec, is likely to need to be relevant to external hires (prospective hires not currently employed by your company), internal ones when making hires from within your company and to act as a point of reference post hire - when assessing performance and development.

When viewed by people outside of your company, they may not be familiar with your company and therefore for this audience, you'll probably want your job spec to commence with a few paragraphs outlining what your company does, showcasing its credentials and why it's a good place to be.



One of the most common traits of poor hiring is a failure to tune into the candidate's needs, interests, and what might attract them to the role.

Some managers can hire "B" or "C" players — a three-star hire — but if you want a five-star, "A" player, you need more than assessment; you need to influence.



Top performers are usually doing well and fully embedded in their current environments.

- If you want to land a five star candidate - then you need a five star approach.
- You need to keep the best candidates engaged and build their interest and confidence levels throughout your protracted hiring process.
- This is a quality that separates out the best leaders from the rest!



Effectively showcasing the opportunity isn't just about what's written in the job spec — it also depends on how well you prepare those representing your role to the market. Whether it's internal recruiters, external agencies, headhunters, or even contacts in your network, they need to be equipped with the right messaging, context, and insight to engage high-quality candidates and spark genuine interest.

The strongest prospective candidates require a strong approach.

7

Positioning the opportunity (continued)



Start by deciding what you want to communicate — both externally (to potential hires) and internally (to current employees).

- **Business Context:** Outline the company's line of business, the scope and scale of its operations, the market environment, and any major plans.
- Consider carefully what to share publicly and what to keep confidential.
- **Role Background:** Why is the role open? While you may choose not to disclose this, the reason often shapes both the role itself and the ideal candidate profile.



The nature of the job. What the job holder needs to accomplish and the nature of responsibilities.

- **Positioning:** Define where the role sits within the organization — team, function, reporting lines, and location.
- **Role Purpose:** Clarify the scope, objectives, and key responsibilities.
- **Expectations:** State what the new hire should achieve and the expected timeframe.



Attractions and Challenges:

- Highlight what makes the role compelling and be upfront about any hurdles. Present the company as a great place to work, without overselling — you want people to feel energized, not misled.
- **Working Style:** Explain whether the role is remote, office-based, hybrid, independent, or heavily team-oriented.
- **Future Outlook:** Describe potential career paths, progression opportunities, and the long-term intent of the position.

7

Positioning the opportunity (continued)

You'd be forgiven for thinking employer branding is only an issue for big brands —but it's not. Here's why:

✓ YES

✗ NO

People talk. They share information. Now imagine hearing these two different comments:

- "I got an approach from this company—I'd never heard of them, but the job spec looked strong, the company sounds good, and I'm keen to find out more."
- "I got an approach from this company—never heard of them, the job spec was vague, and honestly, it seemed pretty average. I think I'll pass."

Your brand shows up whether you control it or not. Make sure it's working for you, not against you.



Thinking this is hard work? Thinking it's time consuming? Thinking you've got other things to do?

Do this properly and you'll get a big payoff. It'll help you to recruit the right people into the right jobs for the right reasons. 60% of new hires succeed, 40% fail. A smarter approach will help you increase your chances of making successful hires and mitigate for risk.



A memo, an addendum or notes

It's not unusual for employers to hesitate when defining a job spec too precisely — especially when circumstances can change, and the needs of the role may evolve. There's also a desire to avoid being boxed in or exposed to disputes down the line. With that in mind, you may choose to keep the official job spec relatively high-level, while preparing a separate set of working notes that offer a fuller picture. These can be used during conversations with candidates or shared in an accompanying email, along with a simple disclaimer:

"Please note: the details below reflect our current thinking about the role. As with many positions, the specific responsibilities and focus areas may evolve over time based on business needs."

This gives you room to adapt without misleading the candidate — or tying your hands unnecessarily.

Job specification

Date: XX/XX/XX

Job title:	ABC Title / XYZ Business Unit
Reporting line:	Reporting into / Title of the person into whom the role reports
Direct reports:	Individual contributor or number e.g. 5 direct reports, 40 total
Department:	Manufacturing Marketing Sales Customer services Finance
Location:	Office location
Job number:	1234

Opportunity overview:

This serves as a short introduction to the opportunity. For example: [Company Name] is hiring for a [Job Title]—an exciting, high-impact role within a growing organization. In this role, you'll own [key responsibility or goal]. It's a standout chance to make a real impact and help shape the future of a business on the rise.

Company background info

Briefly describe what the company does—its line of business and main focus. Perhaps 3-5 lines.

- Mention impressive facts: number of employees, recent growth, key milestones, or market leadership.
 - Consider what you can say that presents your company as being an exciting one to work for, for example by highlighting how the company adds value to its clients/customers or society.
 - State why it's a great place to work—culture, mission, innovation, or career opportunities. Keep it energetic, positive, and succinct—this is your chance to spark interest!
 - Phrases like “dynamic leader,” “team player,” or “drives results” are widely used consider how you can use language that reflects the real culture, specific challenges, and actual tone of your business.
-

Key objectives

It would be appropriate to state here the most important outcome for the role is. This might be an objective or specific goal together with a timeframe in which it is to be achieved. For example, this could be something which has to be accomplished within the first 12 months, and which would be assessed when reviewing performance or undertaking an appraisal. This should outline the scope, objectives, and overall purpose of the role.

- List 3–5 high-impact outcomes expected over the course of the year.
- These should reflect what's required of the individual's core contribution to team and business success, as well as any specific responsibilities outlined in their job specification.
- Include both performance and growth-oriented goals. These may be quantitative (e.g. revenue targets, project completions) or qualitative (e.g. collaboration, innovation, leadership development).

Job specification (continued)

Primary responsibilities

If you have not previously stated in the opportunity overview or key objectives sections where the role sits: team, function, reporting lines, and location, then do so here.

Clarify what is expected of the person, what needs to be accomplished—and by when.

Primary responsibilities are those which count most, list the most important responsibilities (probably five to seven).

- These would be responsibilities / tasks which if completed well would suggest the hire has performed well in the role. Likely to be well defined.
- Once again, these are likely to be those outcomes for which the job holder is likely to be most accountable and where performance is reviewed informally or as part of an appraisal.
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- Nunc tortor est, aliquam quis accumsan egestas, suscipit nec dui. Proin elementum nec sem bibendum pharetra.
- Morbi dignissim augue nunc. Pellentesque accumsan diam id lectus porta, sit amet ultrices sapien volutpat. Aenean id erat purus.

Other responsibilities

- This broader list may include 15–20 items and should reflect both ongoing duties and high-impact deliverables.
- The more clearly defined and outcome-focused your responsibilities are, the more meaningful and measurable your performance assessment will be.
- You may wish to include a note such as: “Additional responsibilities include, but are not limited to:” followed by your list. Be realistic about the number of items you include.
- Using the phrase “not limited to” allows for flexibility.
- It's common for primary and secondary responsibilities to consume a full page - or even a page and a half - of text.

Salary package

Depending on your circumstances, you may or may not choose to share salary package details. If you do, it's standard practice to include headline figures — such as base salary, bonus, and key benefits. Otherwise, you might prefer to simply state that the package is competitive, generous, or open to negotiation, depending on the candidate's experience and fit.

Misc

Consider what if anything you may wish to add for example about: Hours: Standard hours plus any key exceptions. Travel/Physical: Any travel or physical requirements. Pressure: Typical pace and deadline demands. Attractions & Challenges: What excites and tests in the role. Working Style: Remote, hybrid, solo, or team-based. Outlook: Career path and growth potential

Person specification

Qualifications:	Essential / desirable	
Degree qualified / MBA etc or	✓	
Degree calibre or commensurate experience desirable	✓	
Industry or professional certifications.		✗

Knowledge and skill requirements:

It is quite common to state candidates should possess a certain number of years of experience gained in a role type / discipline.	✓	
This may take the form of requiring a number of years of experience in two stated areas considered critical to the success of the prospective hire.		✗
It may be appropriate to state experience gained in a particular type of role (function) and or in a particular industry.	✓	
Furthermore you may wish to include specialist areas within a particular industry or function.	✓	
This could include a level of seniority in the role not necessarily determined by number of reports. Instead, it might be the ability to perform in the role, complete tasks with minimum supervision and to coach others or act as a mentor.		✗

Competencies, strengths & personal qualities:

Such as.... Achievement orientated, analytical ability, communication skills (oral, written, presentation), creativity / innovation, decision-making, Integrity / honesty, flexibility / adaptability, initiative, interpersonal skills, leadership, management, persuasiveness / influencing, planning & organising, problem solving, team builder / player, time management.	✓	
Focus, work rate, reliability, attention to detail, drive....	✓	
You may wish to include in this area any aspects relating to cultural fit and what core values may be of importance to your employer organisation or specific department.	✓	

Misc.

For example language skills.		✗
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Legal statements:

It may be appropriate for you to include statements to the effect of: Applicants should possess suitable work permits / entitlement to work in the country. The successful applicant will be subject to a background check, credit check... XYZ is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

See competency based interview question bank.... Which includes typical qualities people would look for when hiring into role as well as example questions.

Candidate check list & rating sheet

Candidate name:	Interviewed by:
Position:	Date:

- Ratings:
- 5) Excellent: Does the candidate meet all aspects of the characteristic?
 - 4) Good / suitable: The candidate gave suitable responses – meets the standard well.
 - 3) Satisfactory: The candidate gave suitable responses – meets the standard.
 - 2) Poor / some doubts: Not an area of strength – responses lack substance.
 - 1) Unacceptable: Evident weakness – responses did not meet the standard.

Weighting	Dimension (competency, experience, track record....)	Rating	Comments:

Notes:

Qualify as appropriate: Is the candidate genuinely interested? What’s their notice period, availability, and salary expectations? If needed, verify and request proof of their current package. Would they accept an offer? How might they respond to a counteroffer? When would they resign? Have you checked references, qualifications, or done any background checks or soundings?



The Litmus Test! Whether hiring a Chef or CEO, its essential be able to say “yes” to these three questions.

- 1) Can they do the job? 2) Do they want the job? 3) Will they fit in?