

**Background:** The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) requires that an employer must carefully describe the job functions. It is illegal for an employer to not hire a qualified individual because of a disability if the disability can be reasonably accommodated. Therefore, the employer must distinguish between essential and occasional job functions.

Accurate descriptions can be useful for several employment purposes:

1. As a resource for hiring, both in determining the minimum qualifications for a job and providing applicants with a realistic view of the job;
2. As documentation of the essential job functions for consideration in evaluating reasonable accommodations for a disabled employee and, if necessary, in defending a lawsuit under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA);
3. As criteria for conducting performance evaluations; and
4. As a guide for physicians to use in pre-employment and return-to-work physical examinations.