

Excavator operator Job Description

A free job description template for Australian mining operations

Company Name: _____

Location: _____

Employment Type: _____

Reports To: _____

Date: _____

DISCLAIMER

This excavator operator job description template is designed to reflect Australian workplace standards and mining industry practices at the time of publication. Confirm the applicable modern award or enterprise agreement for your site and ensure compliance with all relevant work health and safety and employment laws.

1. Position overview

An excavator operator on a surface mining and haulage operation runs hydraulic excavators, face shovels and front-end loaders to dig, load and move ore and overburden. The role combines precise machine control with a strong focus on safety, productivity and teamwork in a demanding pit environment.

Excavator operators dig and load material into haul trucks, build and maintain benches, cut drainage and prepare the pit floor, all while working to grade and dig plans set by supervisors and engineers. They spot and load trucks efficiently, conduct pre-start inspections and coordinate constantly with haul-truck operators over two-way radio to keep the loading cycle safe and productive.

In Australia, excavator operators are typically covered by the Mining Industry Award 2020 (MA000011), usually around Level 2 to Level 4 depending on the machines operated and experience. Many operators work on fly-in fly-out (FIFO) rosters at remote sites. Once your crews are hired, plan complex shift patterns and pay them correctly with mining rostering software.

2. Key responsibilities

Digging and loading

Operating hydraulic excavators, face shovels and front-end loaders to dig, load ore and overburden into haul trucks efficiently and safely.

Bench and pit development

Building and maintaining benches, cutting drainage, preparing the pit floor and working to grade and dig plans provided by supervisors and engineers.

Truck spotting and loading

Spotting haul trucks correctly, loading to target payloads without spillage and maintaining an efficient loading cycle.

Pre-start and equipment checks

Conducting pre-start inspections, monitoring machine performance, reporting faults and completing daily maintenance checks and logs.

Team coordination

Communicating with haul-truck operators, supervisors and other plant operators over two-way radio to keep the pit safe and productive.

Safety and compliance

Following site work health and safety procedures, wearing PPE, applying fatigue management practices and complying with the site's safe operating procedures.

3. Skills and attributes

- Machine control: Precise, smooth operation of heavy earthmoving equipment with an understanding of dig plans, grade and payload targets.
- Safety focus: Strong commitment to WHS, hazard awareness, safe operating procedures and looking out for others working around heavy machinery.
- Communication: Clear two-way radio communication with haul-truck operators and supervisors to coordinate the loading cycle.
- Fatigue management: Ability to stay alert and consistent across long 12-hour day and night shifts, managing fatigue on FIFO and continuous rosters.
- Mechanical awareness: Understanding of machine systems to complete pre-starts, spot faults early and report maintenance issues accurately.
- Teamwork: Collaborative attitude, reliability across the crew and willingness to support production targets in a demanding pit environment.

4. Qualifications and requirements

The requirements for excavator operator positions vary depending on the site, the machines operated and the commodity. Some are mandatory, while others are preferred or desirable.

- Site inductions (required) — Standard 11 (or state equivalent) generic mining induction plus site-specific induction
- Excavator competency (required) — RIIMPO320 conduct civil construction excavator operations, or a site verification of competency (VOC)
- Working rights (required) — Eligibility to work in Australia
- HR driver licence — Heavy Rigid licence is desirable for site driving and machine relocation
- Pre-employment medical (required) — Fitness for work medical and drug and alcohol screening as required by the site
- Previous operating experience — Experience on hydraulic excavators, shovels or loaders in a mining or civil setting is advantageous

5. Working conditions

- Fly-in fly-out (FIFO) or continuous roster arrangements at remote sites
- 12-hour day and night shifts, including weekends and public holidays
- Sitting and operating heavy machinery for extended periods
- Exposure to dust, noise, vibration and varied weather conditions
- Mandatory personal protective equipment (PPE) at all times
- Compliance with site fatigue management and drug and alcohol policies

6. Award information

Mining industry award 2020

Most excavator operator positions in Australia are covered by the Mining Industry Award 2020 (MA000011), unless an enterprise agreement applies. This modern award sets minimum pay rates, penalty rates, allowances and conditions for employees in the mining industry. View current Mining Award pay rates.

For FY2026/27 the award classifications run from Introductory at \$27.53 per hour up to Level 7 at \$37.62 per hour, with excavator operators typically sitting around Level 2 to Level 4 depending on the machines operated and experience. Casual employees receive a 25% loading. Where a registered enterprise agreement applies it can set different rates, provided they pass the better off overall test. Use award interpretation software to calculate pay accurately.

Penalty rates and allowances

Under the Mining Industry Award, penalty rates apply for weekend and public holiday work: Saturday is 150% for the first 3 hours and 200% after, Sunday is 200% and public holidays are 250%. Afternoon and night shift loadings of 15% apply, rising to 30% for permanent night shift, and an underground allowance of \$2.06 per hour applies where relevant.

Because mining rosters combine long shifts, night work and overtime, calculating pay by hand is error-prone. Model shift costs before you publish rosters with the overtime and penalty rate calculator and the shift cost calculator.

7. Frequently asked questions

About the role

Q: What does an excavator operator do on a mine site?

An excavator operator on a surface mining site runs hydraulic excavators, face shovels and front-end loaders to dig and load ore and overburden into haul trucks. They also build and maintain benches, cut drainage, prepare the pit floor to grade, conduct pre-start checks and coordinate with haul-truck operators over two-way radio to keep the loading cycle safe and productive. Once operators are hired, mining rostering software helps manage their shift patterns.

Q: What award covers excavator operators in Australia?

Most excavator operators are covered by the Mining Industry Award 2020 (MA000011), unless a registered enterprise agreement applies at the site. Always check which instrument applies to your specific operation.

Q: What classification level should I use for an excavator operator?

Under the Mining Industry Award, excavator operators typically sit around Level 2 to Level 4 depending on the machines operated, experience and any additional duties. Introductory and higher levels also exist. See our Mining Award pay rates guide for current rates at each level.

Q: What is FIFO and how does it affect the role?

FIFO stands for fly-in fly-out, where workers are flown to a remote site for a set roster period (for example two weeks on, one week off) then flown home. Excavator operators on FIFO rosters usually work long 12-hour day and night shifts. Read more in our guides on FIFO roster patterns and FIFO worker pay.

Qualifications

Q: What tickets does an excavator operator need?

Requirements vary by site, but operators generally need a generic mining induction (Standard 11 or state equivalent) plus a site-specific induction, and an excavator competency such as RIIMPO320 conduct civil construction excavator operations or a site verification of competency (VOC). A pre-employment medical and drug and alcohol screening are usually mandatory, and a Heavy Rigid (HR) licence is often desirable.

Q: Do excavator operators need previous experience?

Many sites prefer operators with proven experience on hydraulic excavators, shovels or loaders in a mining or civil setting, but this can be listed as preferred rather than mandatory. Some operations run traineeships or VOCs to build competency. Focus your mandatory requirements on inductions, competencies, medicals and working rights, and treat prior hours as a preferred qualification.

Q: What qualifications should I require vs prefer?

Mandatory requirements typically include the relevant mining inductions, an excavator competency or site VOC, a passed pre-employment medical and drug and alcohol screen, and working rights in Australia. Preferred qualifications often include an HR driver licence, prior operating experience, and dozer or haul-truck tickets. Avoid over-qualifying the role in a way that shrinks your candidate pool.

Q: Is a medical assessment required?

Yes, most mining sites require a pre-employment medical to confirm fitness for work, plus drug and alcohol screening, before an operator starts. Ongoing medicals and random screening are common under site work health and safety policies. Confirm the exact requirements for your operation and reflect them in the job description.

Employment

Q: Should I hire casual or permanent excavator operators?

This depends on your production needs. Casual operators offer flexibility for peaks and cover but come with a 25% casual loading under the Mining Industry Award. Permanent staff provide consistency and stronger retention on continuous rosters. Many operations run a mix of permanent crews with casual or contract cover. Use digital employment contracts to set out the terms clearly.

Q: What penalty rates apply to excavator operators?

Under the Mining Industry Award, Saturday work is paid at 150% for the first 3 hours and 200% after, Sunday at 200% and public holidays at 250%. Afternoon and night shift loadings of 15% apply, rising to 30% for permanent night shift, and an underground allowance of \$2.06 per hour applies where relevant. Casual employees receive a 25% loading. Use award interpretation software to calculate rates accurately.

Q: How does an enterprise agreement change pay?

Many large mining operations run under a registered enterprise agreement rather than relying solely on the award. An agreement can set different rates, rosters and allowances, provided employees are better off overall than under the Mining Industry Award. Always check which instrument applies before setting pay and rosters.

Q: What should I include in an excavator operator employment contract?

Key elements include the position title and classification level, employment type (casual, part-time or full-time), hourly rate or salary, the applicable award or enterprise agreement, roster and point of hire, main duties, site location, and required tickets and medicals. For casuals, include the casual loading. Use our digital employment contracts to simplify this process.

Rostering

Q: How do I roster excavator operators on a FIFO site?

FIFO and continuous operations run on set swing patterns with 12-hour day and night shifts, so rosters need to balance coverage, fatigue and travel. Our how to roster mining staff guide walks through the process, and rostering software helps you build compliant patterns and give crews visibility of their upcoming swings.

Q: How do I manage fatigue for excavator operators?

Long 12-hour shifts, night work and rotating swings make fatigue a serious safety risk when operating heavy machinery. Build adequate breaks and rest periods into rosters, limit consecutive night shifts and monitor hours. See our guide on managing fatigue on mining FIFO rosters for practical strategies.

Q: What WHS obligations apply when rostering operators?

Mining employers have strict work health and safety duties, including managing fatigue, ensuring competency and providing safe systems of work around heavy machinery. Rostering directly affects fatigue and coverage, so it forms part of your WHS controls. Read more in our overview of mining WHS employer obligations.

Q: How can I control labour costs on mining rosters?

Mining rosters combine long shifts, night loadings, weekend penalties and overtime, so costs add up quickly. Model shifts before you publish with the overtime and penalty rate calculator and shift cost calculator, then track actual hours with time and attendance to keep costs under control.