

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Writing Inclusive Job Descriptions & Position Announcements

You may not realize it, but some words and phrases could be turning away a large segment of your potential pool of candidates. Developing a well written, gender-neutral and inclusive position announcement will demonstrate to candidates that the University of Illinois is an inclusive employer that considers all applicants regardless of their background.

Glassdoor's 2020 Diversity Hiring Survey (conducted by The Harris Poll; N = 2,745) revealed that **76%** of job seekers consider workplace diversity to be an important factor when evaluating job positions and offers. Furthermore, members of underrepresented groups are much less likely to apply for jobs at companies that do not demonstrate a clear commitment to diversity and inclusion (Glassdoor Team, 2021).

Below are some best practices to keep in mind when writing a job description and position announcement.

Carefully review the required and preferred qualifications

- Take time to consider what is required to start in a position, versus what can be learned on the job
- Members of underrepresented groups are less likely to apply for positions if they do not meet all the listed "requirements"
 - A famously cited report found that women are unlikely to apply for a job unless they meet 100% of the qualifications, whereas men tend to apply for jobs when they meet 60% of the qualifications (Mohr, 2014)
 - A 2018 study by LinkedIn, which analyzed data from 610 million users, found that women apply to 20% fewer jobs than men, and are 16% less likely to apply to a position after viewing the job posting (Ignatova, 2019)
- "Nice to haves" (e.g., familiarity with specific programs/software) can often be learned on the job, and thus eliminated from the job requirements
- Requiring "___ years of experience" in a particular area or type of position can exclude ideal candidates with transferrable skills, especially those who have faced institutional barriers

If applicable, consider including criteria related to diversity

- There is a positive correlation between the diversity of the applicant pool and including criteria with diversity language. Some potential examples include:
 - A demonstrated commitment to improving access to higher education for underrepresented students through teaching and mentoring is desired.
 - Experience with teaching and mentoring women and minorities in STEM fields is desired.
 - We seek candidates whose experiences in teaching, research and community services has prepared them to contribute to our commitment to diversity and inclusion.
 - Individuals with experience in and a commitment to mentoring students from diverse backgrounds are strongly encouraged to apply.
 - The department of [insert name] is particularly interested in candidates who have experience recruiting and retaining a diverse community of scholars.

Ensure the duties and qualifications are inclusive to people with disabilities

- Our university welcomes workers of all abilities and our job descriptions should reflect this. Certain words or phrases could discourage a qualified candidate from applying if they are someone with a disability. Below are examples of non-inclusive language, follow by an example of more inclusive language.
 - **Non-inclusive:** Must have excellent written and oral communication skills
 - **Inclusive:** Must be able to communicate effectively with others
 - **Non-inclusive:** Ability to lift 50 pounds
 - **Inclusive:** Able to move equipment weighing up to 50 pounds
 - **Non-inclusive:** Must have a valid driver's license
 - **Inclusive:** Must have access to reliable transportation
 - **Non-inclusive:** Ability to stand for entire shift
 - **Inclusive:** Ability to remain in a stationary place for entire shift
 - **Non-inclusive:** Ability to hear directions and see hazards
 - **Inclusive:** Ability to respond to directions and hazards
- Please do not add a statement that a position is “not available for remote or hybrid” work, until you have consulted the [Office for Access and Equity](#)

Ensure the format is accessible to people with disabilities

- Recommendations for writing and format:
 - Use clear, concise sentences
 - Use an active voice (e.g., “We will notify applicants by November 1st”) versus a passive voice (e.g., “Applicants will be notified by November 1st”)
 - Use bullet points and numbering where possible, instead of paragraphs of text
 - Left-align all text to ensure consistent character and word spacing
 - Add extra white space between sections and paragraphs
- Recommendations for text:
 - Use sans serif fonts, such as Calibri, Arial, Verdana, Helvetica, for readability
 - If you want to add emphasis, use **bolded** text; avoid underlining or italics, which can make the text appear crowded and difficult to read
 - Make sure that all text is at least 12-14 pt. font size or larger

Avoid gender-specific or gender-coded terms

- Use “they/them/their” pronouns
 - “He or she” and “s/he” are not inclusive of all genders
- Gender-coded language—language that carries gendered associations or expectations—discourage those who do not “fit” such expectations from applying
 - A study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that job descriptions with masculine-coded language are significantly less appealing to women, and signal to women that they will not experience a sense of belonging in the position/company (Gaucher et al., 2011)
 - Examples of masculine-coded terms and gender-neutral alternatives (shown in parentheses): strong (try excellent or solid), competitive (try enthusiastic or results-oriented), expert (try professional or trained), driven (try energized or motivated), and individuals (try people or team members); (see Kelly, 2019; Gaucher et al., 2011)
 - The [Gender Decoder](#) can be used to quickly check if subtle bias exists in the job advertisement.

Showcase any inclusive benefits offered

- Example of benefits to highlight include paid parental leave, childcare financial assistance, flexible work hours, remote or work-from-home options, etc.

Filter out any jargon

- Jargon sends the message, “insiders only,” and suggests that members of underrepresented groups are unwelcome
- Remove company-specific and industry-specific terms
- Remove (or define) any abbreviations

Highlight our university’s commitment to diversity and inclusion

- Include a personally written statement that emphasizes our university’s (and your department/division’s) commitment to diversity and inclusion
 - Statements that required for compliance purposes often seem insincere or overly generic
- Example of a personalized statements include:
 - The University of Illinois is committed to creating an equitable working and learning environments for all members of the university community. Our department strongly believes in this mission. We actively strive to build and maintain an environment where each person feels valued and supported and can bring their full self to work.
 - Diversity and inclusion are at the center of both our research (e.g., research questions, recruitment of participants, reporting standards) and what we teach in our classrooms. We value the diverse perspectives and life experiences of our department members, and how they contribute to innovation and learning.
 - The department of [insert name] is committed to building and sustaining an inclusive and equitable working environment. We believe that diversity benefits and enriches the development of all, and we value the cultural diversity of our team.
 - Diversity is a core value of the department of [insert name]. A diverse and inclusive team enriches all of us, as we work together to engage with the community, identify challenges and provide solutions to our customers.

Ask your colleagues to review the job description before posting

- It is important to recognize that we may have unconscious biases that affect how we write job descriptions, despite our best intentions (O’Meara et al., 2020)
- Getting feedback from colleagues can help to further eliminate any bias present in the descriptions

References

- Alexandra. (2020, July 28). *6 must-know tips for writing inclusive job descriptions*. Harver.
<https://harver.com/blog/inclusive-job-descriptions/#KyleSnyder>
- American Psychological Association. (2019, August). *Bias-free language*. American Psychological Association. <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language>
- Beales, J. (2021, November 12). *How to write inclusive job descriptions*. Lever.
<https://www.lever.co/blog/how-to-write-an-inclusive-job-description/>
- British Dyslexia Association. (n.d.). *Creating a dyslexia friendly workplace*. British Dyslexia Association. <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/advice/employers/creating-a-dyslexia-friendly-workplace/dyslexia-friendly-style-guide>
- Gaucher, D., Friesen, J., & Kay, A. C. (2011). Evidence that gendered wording in job advertisements exists and sustains gender inequality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(1), 109-128. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022530>
- Gauthier, D. (2020, September 16). *5 tips for writing inclusive job descriptions*. Development Guild DDI. <https://www.developmentguild.com/executive-search/5-tips-for-writing-inclusive-job-descriptions/>
- Glassdoor Team. (2021, July 12). What job seekers really think about your diversity and inclusion stats. Glassdoor. <https://www.glassdoor.com/employers/blog/diversity/>
- Harvard University. (2022). *Design for readability*. Harvard University.
<https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/design-readability>
- Huppert, M. (2018, April 9). *5 must-do's for writing inclusive job descriptions*. LinkedIn.
<https://www.linkedin.com/business/talent/blog/talent-acquisition/must-dos-for-writing-inclusive-job-descriptions>

Ignatova, M. (2019, March 5). New report: Women apply to fewer jobs than men, but are more likely to get hired. LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/business/talent/blog/talent-acquisition/how-women-find-jobs-gender-report#:~:text=Research%20shows%20that%20in%20order,20%25%20fewer%20jobs%20than%20men.>

Kelly, R. (2019, July 12). *The top 10 masculine biased words used in job descriptions*. OnGig. <https://blog.ongig.com/writing-job-descriptions/top-10-masculine-biased-words-in-job-descriptions/>

Maurer, R. (2021, July 6). *Learn how to write inclusive job postings*. SHRM. https://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/Pages/Learn-How-Write-Inclusive-Job-Postings.aspx?hsenc=p2ANqtz-88wdhSDidKYrLogW2SUI3kBcJrOSXkg15TfjyHqhRZVkdNcn_itu7cURbYLAa6aPP8lrWE

Mohr, T. S. (2014, August 25). *Why women don't apply for jobs unless they're 100% qualified*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2014/08/why-women-dont-apply-for-jobs-unless-theyre-100-qualified>

O'Meara, K., Culpepper, D., & Templeton, L. L. (2020). Nudging toward diversity: Applying behavioral design to faculty hiring. *Review of Educational Research*, 90(3), 311-348. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654320914742>

Princeton University. (2022). *Design accessibility*. Princeton University. <https://accessibility.princeton.edu/how/design>

Reilly, K. (2021, July 1). 6 ways to successfully signal your company's DEI commitment in a job posting. <https://www.linkedin.com/business/talent/blog/talent-acquisition/ways-to-signal-company-dei-commitment-in-job-posting>

Rello, L., & Baeza-Yates, R. (2016). The effect of font type on screen readability by people with dyslexia. *ACM Transactions on Accessible Computing (TACCESS)*, 8(4), 1-33.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/2897736>