

Gender-neutral job descriptions

Guidance

What is a gender-neutral job description?

Job descriptions are often the most visible part of the hiring process. They are also a key tool in ensuring diversity in hiring to get a more inclusive, balanced and broad range of applicants. A gender-neutral job description removes vocabulary, terminology and structure that could be considered as biased towards one gender or another. It is a lot more than removing pronouns!

Why is a gender-neutral job description important?

Research shows that more diverse workforces improve business performance. You may be limiting your talent pool through the language, structure and information you include – or exclude – from your job descriptions. Although the use of gender-biased words may not be intentional, the language structure and vocabulary we choose can have a direct impact on how people unconsciously scan, interpret and react. This can reduce the appeal of the job and leave the applicant feeling excluded from a particular organisation.

Who should be using this guidance?

This guidance can be used by teams and/or individuals responsible for the recruitment process, for example Human Resources, Diversity and Inclusion teams, and hiring managers.

How to use this guidance

This guidance should be used to develop a gender-neutral job description template that is relevant to your organisation and the specific role(s) you are recruiting to fill. It should be noted that a job description is only one part of the hiring process; the right procedures and frameworks should be put in place to remove gender bias from all stages of recruitment, such as gender-balanced interview panels and structured, competency-based interviews.

Next steps

Once you have discussed and agreed the guidelines and template for a gender-neutral job description, you should circulate this with internal stakeholders and ensure relevant teams and individuals are aware of its importance in the hiring process. You could also consider rolling out training and/or workshops to raise awareness of unconscious bias and how to mitigate it

when recruiting.

Guidance for developing a gender-neutral job description

1. Start by **building an understanding** of what biases are, and the negative impact they might have on the hiring process. Training for employees can help to raise awareness and identify ways in which your organisation can make changes to minimise biases throughout the hiring process (and beyond).
2. **Avoid gendered job titles** - this can be explicit such as ‘*Waitress*’, or implicit such as ‘*Superhero Sales Manager*’. Instead, use terms such as ‘*Waiting Staff*’ or ‘*Sales Executive*’. These gender-neutral terms are more likely to show that your organisation is inclusive and not targeted at a specific group or set of qualities.
3. **Ensure your language is balanced** when describing roles, responsibilities and requirements. Research shows that male-gendered words can include: *ambitious*, *competitive* and *determined*, while words like *committed* and *collaborative* are considered female-gendered¹. It is important to avoid superlatives too (e.g. ‘*world-leading*’) in case there are few female experts in a certain field and therefore women may be discouraged from applying.
4. **Be clear and concise in your requirements.** Avoid industry jargon that may exclude certain groups. Instead, only list the requirements you really need. Studies show that female applicants are less likely to apply if there are long lists of requirements, whereas male applicants are less likely to apply if there are short lists. It is important to strike a balance and only list requirements that demonstrate the necessary skills for the job.

If there are specific skills that you need to include, consider using language such as: “*some experience in...*”, “*familiarity with*”, or “*the ideal candidate will have all or a good selection of the following...*”.

5. **Tell the applicant about your organisation in a gender-neutral way.** List your organisation’s values, and benefits that could apply to male or female candidates (e.g. parental leave rather than maternity leave policies, community groups/employee activities, learning and development). Where possible, offer remote working (working from home), and flexibility over start and end times, or the ability to spread working hours into the evening to enable people to fit family and other outside-work responsibilities around their role.
6. **Be explicit about your commitment to diversity and inclusion.** It is important for applicants to know that your organisation is committed to diversity and inclusion and that your recruitment processes are not discriminatory.

Here’s an example statement: “*Company X is proud to be an equal opportunities employer and we are committed to diversity and inclusion. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, ethnicity, gender,*

¹ Gaucher, Friesen and Kay, *Evidence That Gendered Wording in Job Advertisements Exists and Sustains Gender Inequality*, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 2011, Vol. 101, No. 1, 109 –128

gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, age, or any other protected characteristic as required by applicable law.”

7. **Use software to help develop gender neutral job descriptions.** But be cautious of over-use. It is still important for a job description to feel personal and to reflect the values, culture and benefits of your organisation. You do not want to lose out on talented job candidates because they are not interested or motivated after reading the job description.