

NCWIT TIPS FOR WRITING BETTER JOB ADS

TIP #1: AVOID SUPERLATIVES OR EXTREME MODIFIERS.

Avoid phrases like “best of the best,” “off the charts,” “world-class,” or “unparalleled.” Research shows that these kinds of superlatives tend to prevent women (as well as many men) from applying. Anyone who has been raised or socialized to downplay their expertise, or to not “toot their own horn,” will be less likely to categorize themselves in these ways, even when they are very highly qualified. *Suggested alternatives:* “truly innovative”; “a genuine curiosity”; “highly respected”; “excellent, thoughtful, or perceptive [insert type of skills]”; “dedicated or committed to creative problem solving and getting things done.”



Also avoid similar language that describes a singular focus on a narrow set of abilities such as “perfectionists” or “forever tinkering.” Highly-qualified talent is unlikely to self-identify this way. They would typically like to be able to practice a broader set of valuable abilities and can be dissuaded by this language. *Suggested alternatives:* “enjoys tinkering and teamwork to arrive at solutions to critical problems” (or any similar kind of combination that describes a broader set of applicable skills).

TIP #2: AVOID GENDER-SPECIFIC PRONOUNS (HE OR SHE).

It may seem obvious, but this kind of mistake is more common than you would think. Rephrase to avoid the need for these pronouns. If they must be used, be sure to strike a balance between masculine and feminine terms. Also look for more subtle cases, such as “manpower” or “chairman.” *Suggested alternatives:* “staffing” or “workforce”; “chair.”

TIP #3: MAKE SURE THAT ALL “REQUIRED” QUALIFICATIONS ARE TRULY REQUIRED AND TRY TO BUILD IN AS MUCH FLEXIBILITY AS POSSIBLE.

Research shows that even when highly qualified, women are less likely than men to apply for a job if they do not have ALL of the required qualifications. Remove any criteria that are not necessary for the job. If some of the required qualifications actually could be learned on the job, move these to preferred qualifications or delete altogether. Also avoid restrictive year requirements (e.g., 5 years experience in...). Instead, include year ranges (3-5 years), indicate that the range is preferred, or do not list a range at all.

TIP #4: AT THE BEGINNING OF THE AD, INCLUDE A SHORT BUT ENGAGING OVERVIEW OF THE JOB.

This overview (1-4 sentences) should include a description of the jobs’ major function, how it contributes to larger company objectives, and why it is important or how it makes a difference to the company and/or society as a whole (e.g., how does this role contribute to making people’s lives better, solving existing business or social problems). Invitational language such as “Come join a creative team of.....dedicated to.....” tends to be particularly effective.

TIP #5: AVOID LONG BULLETED LISTS OF RESPONSIBILITIES OR QUALIFICATIONS.

Long lists like these are difficult to absorb and the minute details tend to mean very little until one is actually in the job. Try to describe the key functions of the job in 5-7 bullets. Grouping 2-3 bullets under larger categories of responsibilities can also be effective (e.g., Technical skills; Management skills; Communication, Presentation, or Relational skills). Try to be consistent in how you format these bullets (e.g., start them all with an introductory phrase such as “will be responsible for...”)

TIP #6: MAKE SURE THAT ALL PICTURES AND GRAPHICS INCLUDE A DIVERSE RANGE OF PEOPLE.

Also make sure that the kinds of things pictured do not subtly conjure up masculine stereotypes (e.g., foosball tables, beer bottles, Star Trek posters). It's not that women do not also like beer, Star Trek, or foosball but a preponderance of these kinds of images can convey the sense that this might not be an environment that would "see me as a good fit.")

TIP #7: EXAMINE ADS FOR SUBTLE BIASES IN "MASCULINE/FEMININE" ASSOCIATED LANGUAGE.

Some words have been traditionally associated with men or with women. It's not that these words actually are masculine or feminine, but that they tend to carry these historical connotations. An imbalance in language has been shown to deter highly qualified talent from applying because it unconsciously lowers their expected sense of "fitting in" or belonging. The goal, then, is to achieve a balance of language, or if you are having trouble attracting a particular sex to particular jobs, you might want to weight the language slightly in that direction. The examples below, based on Aaron Kay's research, illustrate some of the differences between more masculine- and feminine-associated ads.

See www.ncwit.org/12summit_slides_jobads for more info.

MASCULINE-ASSOCIATED	FEMININE-ASSOCIATED
<i>We are a dominant engineering firm that boasts many leading clients.</i>	We are a community of engineers with effective relationships with many satisfied clients.
<i>We are determined to stand apart from the competition.</i>	We are committed to a deep understanding of the technology sector.
<i>Self-starter with ability to perform individually in a competitive environment.</i>	Takes initiative and is able to work effectively in a team environment.

The examples below are subtler. In these examples, we are not suggesting that one should never use words like "manage," "resolves," "analyzes," "interfaces," but that an overuse of these words, especially when referring to interactions with people can depersonalize these and also can be problematic in terms of gendered language.

BEFORE	RECOMMENDATION
<i>Manages the successful resolution of client issues, including competing demands, sensitive situations, and conflicts with other groups.</i>	Thoughtfully works with the client to resolve issues, including competing demands, sensitive situations, and conflicts with other groups.
<i>Mobilizes team, establishing the tactical plans, projects and objectives needed to accomplish these goals and ensure their attainment.</i>	Mobilizes and encourages team, establishing the specific (or concrete, day-to-day) plans, projects and objectives needed...
<i>Proactively manages the talent in their area, establishing performance goals and objectives, providing ongoing constructive and formal performance feedback and establishing and implementing development plans.</i>	Proactively develops (or cultivates, nurtures) the talent in their area, co-constructing performance goals, objectives and development plans, and providing ongoing constructive performance feedback.
<i>Manages and resolves the diverse perspectives of stakeholders.</i>	Is sensitive to (or understands) the diverse perspectives of stakeholders and works with them to resolve differences.