



CODED LANGUAGE SHEET

Degree Preference vs. Years of Experience

Far too often, organizations limit their hiring potential by requiring degrees for positions that don't exactly need them. Sure, there are plenty of positions where, due to the knowledge and skills required to be successful in that specific field, having an earned degree is integral (specifically to the more theory driven work or fields, such as being a college professor, or a lawyer, or politician). However, there are just as many, if not more, positions where one's years of experience are more than adequate to carry out the duties and expectations of a given job in a meaningful way. Spend time discussing whether your next position requires a college degree or simply "x-amount" of years of experience in the field. This goes for whether one should require a Master's degree v. a Bachelor's degree, as well.

Terminal Degrees

If your position does in fact require a terminal degree, then it is okay to make this clear. However, terminal degrees are very specific to certain disciplines. For example, a J.D. is required to practice law while an MFA and an MBA are each terminal degrees for the Arts and Business worlds. However, one of the major challenges with reference to degree distinction involves the language of Ph.D. v. Ed.D. Because each form of degree (Ph.D. and Ed.D.) speak to two different methods (Ph.D. = research, Ed.D. = practice), an individual with one or the other may assume that their degree is not accepted by your organization or institution if you explicitly name Ph.D. or Ed.D. as the degree requirement in your description. Instead, use "Doctorate" or "Terminal" Degree as appropriate.

Binary Language

Be mindful of where and when you choose to use gendered language in terms of man/woman, male/female. Again, some organizations, and therefore, positions, are targeting certain identities specifically (*i.e.*, *Girl Scouts, Boys & Girls Club, Big Brothers, Big Sisters...*) in which leeway may be granted and should be considered; however, there are still ways to remain inclusive even in this process. As such, try favoring third party words like, "The employee, the student, the Director, or even the successful candidate..." as inclusive ways to format your descriptions.

Handicap

The use of the word handicap brings with it an inherent suggestion that the individual is at a disadvantage by virtue of them simply being who they are. Refrain from this term and use the more commonly accepted and appropriate reference of disability (*i.e.* *disabled people, people with disabilities, varying degrees of ability...*).



Organizational Jargon

It is easy to want to use the standard accepted jargon when creating a position description – which makes total sense and is completely fine if you’re looking to target applicants with that specific experience - however, you’ll want to remember that not all possible applicants, and sometimes not even the best applicants, come directly from your field. In addition, some of the jargon you use might be uniquely specific to your organization and not widely used or accepted among the field, as well (*i.e. JEDI or IDEA instead of DEI or D&I*). Be as clear and commonplace in your language regarding what should be expected from the position.

Confusing Job Title

Sometimes it’s enticing to think up the most clever and creative job title that we possibly can. However, sometimes overthinking it can lead to confusion which can turn applicants off altogether. If what you are really looking for is a Director of Marketing or Marketing Director, then say that. Titles like, “*Executive Director of Marketing Engagement for Global Communication and Organizational Media Initiatives*” might have people looking the other way.

Legal-Heavy Language

Language and terminology that is rather legalese can be off putting to many, especially those who do not have experience within that field. The language used by lawyers and legal scholars is rather intimidating and does not do a great job of capturing the true essence of an organization’s culture, since it is largely predicated upon protection. It is okay to make it clear that your organization is in accordance with the appropriate legal statutes in your state, city, county, or country, but monitor how frequent the use of this language is.

Required v. Preferred

This is one of the more common mistakes organizations make when trying to create an inclusive description. Most job descriptions make a distinction between what qualifications are required for the job and which ones are preferred. When done right, this is helpful because it helps the employer better narrow their application pool by having a read on where an applicant’s supplemental skills lie. On the other hand, this can be a deterrent when employers are requiring skills that are not actually necessary for the functionality of the job. One common example of this is when the description reads “Fluent in more than one language” as a required qualification v. preferred. For some positions, this may be a required skill (*i.e., an interpreter*), however, for many positions it is not. Spend time thinking about what is preferred and what should be required.



“Related Fields/Disciplines”

Revisit the ways in which, and to what degree, the position for which you’re hiring demands the expertise of someone who comes from that specific field. Many times, there are individuals who have experience in a related field who could do just as well in the field you are hiring for. An example of this would be social work and education. These two particular service fields have many areas of overlap to the point where it makes sense to state in your application that you are looking for someone with a background in education or related fields, “such as social work...” or vice versa if the position is posted by the opposite field. This type of openness is a great way to extend the pool beyond the “typical candidate” and diversify your options a fair amount.

Community Relations

Mentioning or acknowledging the role the desired position or the organization itself plays in the community has the potential to increase an applicant’s decision to apply for the position. When we think about diversity, equity, & inclusion, a piece of our discussion is always about value and belonging. Knowing that individuals might belong to an organization who is in tune with and invested in the surrounding communities brings a sense of purpose to the applicant that the exclusion of which would not bring.

Salary Posting

Refrain from asking applicants and candidates to disclose with you how much they’d wish to make in the open position. This question, more than most, tends to deter potential candidates from finishing an application. This is because the threat of naming one’s salary as too high or, in some cases, too low might send the wrong message and ultimately be exclusionary at its core. As an organization, your role is to either clearly state what the salary is or to not post it at all and, instead, talk through it at the appropriate time during the hiring process.

Emphasize Commitment to DEI

Most importantly, find ways to emphasize your organization’s commitment to DEI by infusing it throughout the framework of your job posting. This does not have to be central to one area, either; this could be a sentence or two in the opening paragraph which outlines the organization’s mission and values. It could also be in the wording of the duties and responsibilities, such as harkening to (underrepresented) community engagement as mentioned above. So long as the applicant knows that DEI is an integral part of your organization in one way or another, you will have a greater chance of appealing to diverse candidates for your search process.



When adopting the aforementioned, it is important to note that every job, field, organization, and classification is different. There are certain exemptions afforded to private and religiously affiliated organizations that are not afforded to public entities, for example. As well, there are some positions where the target may be so specific that the practice of inclusion is best manifested in the actual workplace rather than reflected in the workplace language (such as third-party funded organizations that support a specific identity). Too, it is important to note and remember that perceptions of inclusive language can change overtime. As a result, one must continuously educate oneself on the shifts in culture as each generation brings with them something that the last did not.