

Tips on writing job descriptions and adverts



Guidance on writing job descriptions and adverts is available in full on the Personnel Services website. This document provides further tips and advice on writing effective job descriptions and adverts. Job description and job advert checklists are available from the Personnel Services website.

General tips:

- Do not write the job description as a step-by-step guide on how to do the job or include minor or occasional tasks, which are not unique to a specific job.
- Refer to job titles rather than individuals.

Style, format and language tips:

- Focus on the essential activities and use a logical sequence in describing the duties and responsibilities. For example, list key responsibilities first, followed by the corresponding duties.
- Be consistent with terms such as “may” and “occasionally.” These should be used to describe tasks that are performed once in a while, or those only some employees perform
- Use short sentences. More than 15 words in a sentence reduces the clarity of the meaning. Seek out commas and ‘ands’ and replace with full stops.
- Use short bite-sized paragraphs and bullet points – this is particularly important for online adverts.
(NB Bullet points may be more costly for print media which is charged according to space)
- Use “you” instead of “we need” and “must have”. This will make applicants feel more affinity with the role, eg “*You should be passionate about (.....) and you will (.....)*” sounds softer and will appeal more to a jobseeker than: “*The successful candidate will be passionate about (.....); s/he must have a (.....)*”.
- Try to avoid upper-case (capitals) even in headings as it is slower to read owing to the absence of word shapes, and could also be less accessible for people with reading difficulties. Increase prominence by using a larger point-size and boldening.
- Avoid italics, shadows, and light colours reversed out of dark, all of which reduce readability. Use simple black (or dark coloured) text on a white (or light coloured) background for maximum readability.

Be careful not to inadvertently discriminate against any applicants, for example:

- Consider offering a full-time post on a part-time basis: full-time only jobs may be considered to indirectly discriminate against people with caring responsibilities.
- Care should be taken not to inhibit applications from applicants possessing one or more protected characteristics (unless this is fully and objectively justified under an occupational requirement exemption, see: [Citizens Advice website](#) for more information).
- Do not ask for specific number of years’ experience, as it could rule out younger people who have the skills but have not had the opportunity to demonstrate them over an extended period. Instead, use criteria with a requirement for proven skills in that area.

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- When asking for specific qualifications (such as GCSEs) make it clear that equivalent alternative qualifications will be considered, so as to be inclusive of people of different ages or nationalities. Careful consideration should be given as to whether particular qualifications are strictly necessary. It is preferable to focus instead on the competencies required in the post, eg 'proven skills of analytical thinking, innovation and problem solving'.
- Do not state 'must hold a clean driving licence' or 'must be physically fit', as it could discriminate against disabled applicants. Instead, if driving is infrequent, consider whether a disabled applicant could undertake the duties by other transport means. Physical requirements, such as lifting, driving, etc, should be clearly described, to enable candidates to assess whether they would be able to meet the criteria, and whether adjustments might be possible.