# Fairness in Job Descriptions and Postings: What You Should and Shouldn’t Say



## The Importance of Fair and Inclusive Language

Inclusive language in job descriptions helps signal to all potential applicants that your workplace is welcoming and equitable. Using gender-neutral terms, avoiding stereotypes, and clearly focusing on skills and qualifications instead of assumptions or personal traits are the foundations of fair communication.

For example, avoid words like “young,” “able-bodied,” or “salesman,” which suggest bias toward certain genders, ages, or physical abilities. Instead, use inclusive alternatives like “energetic professional,” “applicants able to meet physical requirements of the job,” or “sales representative.”

Even subtle language cues can make a difference. Words like “aggressive,” “competitive,” and “dominant” may discourage women or more collaborative applicants from applying, while phrases like “team-oriented,” “strategic thinker,” or “results-driven” are more neutral and inclusive.

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Recruitment

Fair hiring begins with DEI principles: ensuring all candidates have equal opportunity to apply, be evaluated on merit, and succeed. Job postings should reflect your organization’s commitment to diversity by including a statement that welcomes applicants from all backgrounds and abilities. For instance:

*“We are committed to fostering an inclusive workplace that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve. We encourage applications from individuals of all genders, sexual orientations, abilities, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds.”*

Including a DEI statement signals that your organization values representation and belonging. However, it must be backed up by action, such as training hiring staff on unconscious bias, using structured interviews, and reviewing job criteria regularly to ensure they’re fair and relevant.

## Language Requirements and Fairness in Hiring

Requiring proficiency in a specific language can be legitimate, but only

if it’s essential to the job. For example, if a role requires frequent communication with clients who speak French, a French-language requirement is reasonable. However, demanding “perfect English” for a back-end technical position may constitute indirect discrimination if it excludes qualified applicants unnecessarily.

Under Canadian human rights laws, language requirements must be “bona fide occupational requirements” (BFOR)—that is, genuinely necessary for performing the job. If you include a language requirement, specify the reason clearly and ensure it’s proportionate to the actual work performed.

## Sensitive Questions to Avoid

Employers and HR professionals must steer clear of questions – written or verbal – that touch on protected grounds under human rights legislation. This includes:

- **Ethnicity and Race:** Never ask where a candidate is “from originally” or to disclose their race or ancestry. Focus only on their eligibility to work in Canada.
- **Immigration Status:** You may confirm that an applicant is legally entitled to work in Canada, but you cannot ask whether they are a permanent resident, citizen, or on a specific visa type.
- **Gender and Sexual Orientation:** Avoid asking about pronouns in a way that feels intrusive or tokenizing. Instead, include optional self-identification forms for equity reporting, handled confidentially.
- **Family and Future Planning:** Questions like “Are you planning to have children soon?” or “Do you expect to get married?” are discriminatory. Such inquiries can reflect bias against women or caregivers and have no bearing on job performance.
- **Religion and Cultural Practices:** Don’t ask about religious observances or holidays. Instead, ask whether a candidate has any scheduling constraints, without linking it to religious or cultural reasons.
- **Disabilities or Health Conditions:** Avoid questions like “Do you have any health issues?” Instead, ask whether the candidate can perform the essential duties of the job, with or without accommodation.

These topics are not only inappropriate but also risk violating privacy and human rights laws. Instead, center the conversation around skills, experience, and ability to meet bona fide job requirements.

## Respecting All Identities and Abilities

Fair job descriptions must recognize the diversity of the modern workforce. This includes acknowledging gender diversity, disability inclusion, and cultural awareness.

Use gender-neutral titles and pronouns – e.g., “they/them,” “the candidate,” or “the successful applicant.” Avoid “he/she” or “his/her.” Ensure that your organization’s accessibility statement is visible and clear, inviting applicants to request accommodations during the hiring process. For example:

*“We are committed to an accessible recruitment process. If you require accommodations at any stage, please let us know.”*

Similarly, think about how job requirements may inadvertently exclude people with disabilities. For example, specifying “must have a driver’s license” when the role

only requires travel between accessible locations may unnecessarily eliminate strong candidates.

## Building a Culture of Respect and Compliance

Fairness in job postings goes hand-in-hand with a culture of respect. Train recruiters and managers on bias awareness, equitable evaluation, and the legal standards governing recruitment. Review your postings regularly for language that may unintentionally discourage applicants from underrepresented groups.

Creating fair job descriptions isn’t just about compliance, it’s about reputation, retention, and results. A fair hiring process attracts a broader talent pool, improves workplace morale, and builds trust in your brand as an employer of choice.