How to write an inclusive vacancy text

A guick guide

Introduction

At Maastricht University (UM), we aspire to be an academic community open and accessible to everyone. Recruitment obviously plays an important part in this. One of the first things that potential new colleagues see is the vacancy text. This text is not just a way to advertise a position, it's also a way to advertise UM as an environment that welcomes and values them.

This short guide is designed to help you write attractive and inclusive vacancy texts. A good vacancy text should list things that attract great candidates, rather than listing requirements and qualifications, and encourages potential UM academic or non-academic employees to become part of the UM family.

You want all possible candidates to feel represented, included, and welcome to apply for the position because of their expertise, their background and identity. This means paying attention to the adjectives you use to describe people and being aware of the possible stereotypes attached to these adjectives.

The guide is organised in multiple short sections. First, in **Section 1 we present you with a few easy tips and tricks to avoid some common mistakes** in writing vacancy texts. Then, **Section 2 presents the proposed structure of the vacancy text** in six parts and gives examples that will help you when writing the individual section of the text. While this guide proposes a specific structure that your vacancy text should include, the order does not have to be like this. If needed, you can adjust the order and the vocabulary that you use according to the format of the website where the job will be posted. For instance, job postings on Academic Transfer may require you to re-organise the sections. This is always possible, as long as you keep the sections, and the main message of each section is clearly communicated to the candidates. **Section 3 provides you with a succinct checklist** to use while writing and reviewing a vacancy text.

Structure of the guide

Section 1

Tips and Tricks for an Inclusive Vacancy Text

• Short sentences and overall not more than 800 words for the whole vacancy text

• Use verbs and active language (e.g. the candidate will be involved)

• Address the candidate with 'you' (e.g. You will be involved in...)

• No directive language (avoid suggestions that there is already a profile of an ideal candidate, but show openness)

• Avoid filler words, long sentences, buzz words, exaggerations, too many bullet points, self-congratulatory language, longwinded prose

• Be realistic (e.g. expectations, working hours, flexible working options)

• Pay attention to words that are exclusive and should be avoided, and instead opt for words that are inclusive to everyone (see example list) on the next page.

• Use gender inclusive language

• Be proactively inclusive (e.g. ask whether a candidate needs special facilitation for the recruitment and interview process, highlight secondary employment benefits)

Section 2

1. Title and Introduction text

The first 6 seconds decide whether a candidate continues to read the vacancy text or scrolls to the next vacancy. **Therefore, the vacancy title and the introduction of a vacancy are very important.**

Key takeaways
- The title should not be longer than 7-8 words.
- The Introduction text should set the tone for the position and organisation.
- The Introduction text should include common search terms (keywords).
- Make use of direct questions addressed to the reader as 'Interested in bringing your research to the next level?', 'Want to be part of an international, interdisciplinary environment?, etc.
- Be creative in the introduction text.

Example of the Title and Introduction Text:

Senior Policy Advisor Education

Maybe, you were once a researcher yourself. Now, you no longer want to do the research yourself, but you prefer to advance science in a different way. Do you now wonder what needs to be done to reduce the pressure that comes with applying for external funding for research? If yes, then Maastricht University has a new challenge for you.

2. The Job Description

The job description is vital. Candidates need to know concisely what the job entails and what to expect. **Emphasize the aspects that are important for your department, and highlight those which are interesting for the candidate.** The **Job Description** has multiple paragraphs.

The **first paragraph** should communicate the main tasks and the type of work. You should always mention what the candidate can learn in this job. The **second paragraph** of your text should specify which faculty or department is offering the position. You should communicate in which team the candidate is going to be working in, and whether teamwork is part of the job.

The next two paragraphs are only applicable to academic positions. The **third paragraph** should describe the education-related activities that the job entails. For instance, the percentage devoted to education, the career development prospects, or qualifications. The **last paragraph** should be dedicated to the research-related tasks that the job entails. For instance, what research tasks are expected of the candidate, what research-related competencies they need to have, or mention the expectations that the employer has in relation to research and grants.

If the job listing refers to a non-academic position, you can follow the same logic for the role-specific activities. In essence, you should describe what is expected of the candidate in terms of qualifications and competencies, and specify what opportunities there are for the career development of the applicant.

Key takeaways
- Avoid extensive and vague descriptions of all tasks
- Avoid modal verbs – i.e., *must, could, can, should* etc. as these can have an outsized effect on how the information will be perceived and understood.
  - For example, the word "should" could be read as "it is advisable" or "it is necessary". This will change the way the text is read, understood, and responded to by the reader, particularly when dealing with an international audience, where such words can be interpreted as obligatory in some cases, or as a suggestion in others.
- Interconnect the task with the overall vision, mission, and goal of the organisation.
- Mention societal relevance and impact of the job

The guiding questions to write a good job description
- What is the main task?
- What 'soft' competencies should they have?
- What qualifications should they have?
- Which faculty or department is offering the position?

- Does the position entail teamwork?
- What can the candidate learn in this position?
- What are the potential career developments?
- What is unique or attractive about this position?

Example of the Job Description:

Each paragraph of this example has a different role in your vacancy text. Pay attention to what each paragraph communicates to the candidate and make sure that all the information that you want to communicate has its own 'place' in your vacancy text. See the text below as an example.

Paragraph 1

Microbiome research is becoming increasingly important in our institute. We study the interaction in different types of biological systems. The use of big data is an important aspect of this work. This means that we work with metagenomics and other types of big data, and integrate these to understand our biological systems. In this position, you will gain experience in high-level understandings of tools for metagenome analysis, data analysis and systems biology modelling.

Paragraph 2

You will be embedded the international xxx group which is part of the xxx faculty. This group is specialised in xxx. We are particularly looking for candidates who strive and value working in an international department.

Paragraph 3 (if applicable)

We aim to recruit someone who is willing to devote 50% of their time to teaching and 50% to research. You will be teaching subjects related to your research line, but you are also expected to contribute to teaching on a broader range of subjects in the interdisciplinary (BSc and MSc level). In time, you should also be able and willing to take on management roles in education. We are particularly interested in candidates who have experience working with students and colleagues from diverse backgrounds.

Paragraph 4 (if applicable)

We look forward to welcoming a new colleague with original ideas and a healthy research ambition that will setup a new research line on xxx, with special emphasis on the analysis of xxx
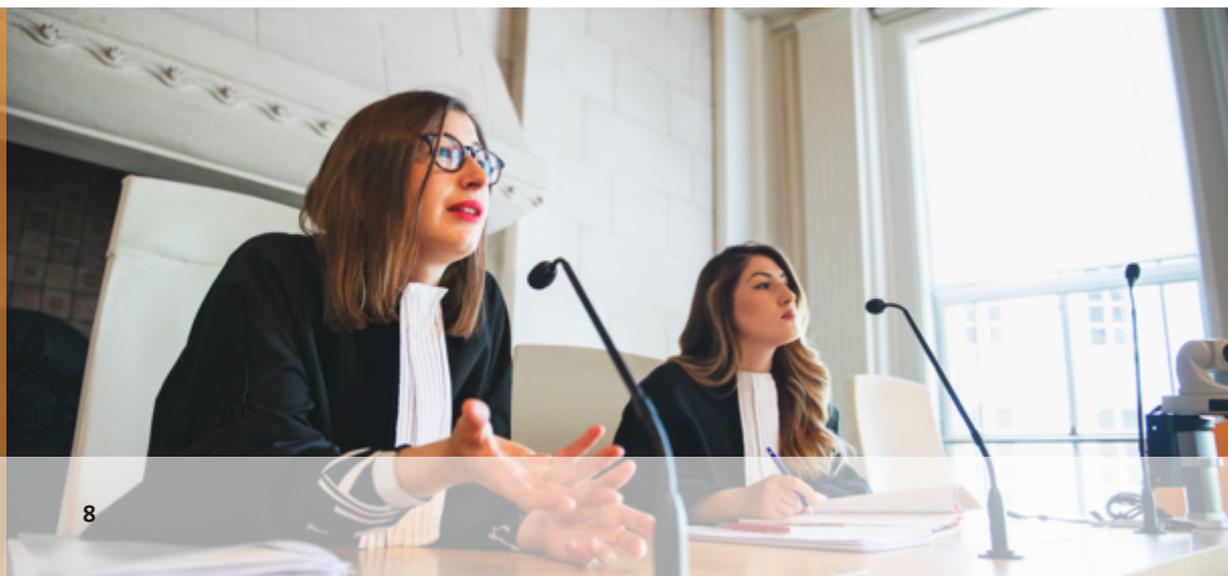
3. Job Requirements

This section provides the reader with the specific requirements needed to perform the job and be successful. **It should be a positive outlook and motivate the applicant.**

Key takeaways
- Avoid adjectives (do not write e.g. a 'strong' background in x. Strong is subjective. The same about 'preferred' as people might not be apply because they might overvalue the 'preferred' skills. TIP: if needed, include a table with requirements and sort them necessary/preferred/recommended)
- Avoid a compelling tone (it's not about should and musts)
- Avoid filler words
- When using bullet points, do not list more than 5-6 requirements
- Be as specific as possible
- Use gender inclusive language – i.e., not he, she, or he/she, use **they** instead[2].

The guiding questions to describe the job requirements
- What is required to fulfil this role?
- Why is this requirement important?
- What is the concrete message behind the requirement?
- What do I really want from a candidate?

Example of bad and good practice:
 Avoid: *"This should result in high-quality scientific output. Moreover, you are expected to attract research grants, and to cooperate in writing joint research proposals with other group members. This should result in national and international collaboration in research projects, and funding to attract a steady flow of PhD students and postdocs. In addition, you will extend and deepen the relationship between …"*

Instead: *"You are excited to work in an international project team to collaborate, and attract research grants"*.

[2] See Gender Inclusive Language Guide

4. The Job Offer

We want to highlight why the position is attractive, why it stands out. The aim of this section is to illustrate what the organisation can offer to the candidate and inform them about what benefits they can expect. **This requires a tailor-made approach for different sets of candidates.**

Key takeaways
• FTEs for the position (hours per week)
• Salary; example: salary scale 10-11 depending on qualifications and work experience, based on our Collective Labour Agreement (CAO-NU). Holiday allowance of 8% of your annual income gross and an end-of-the-year allowance of 8.3% of your annual income gross.
• Duration of contract (and opportunity to permanent contract, if applicable)
• Highlight secondary benefits (e.g. commuting and relocation allowance, parental and partner leave, insurance against loss of income in the event of partial disability)

• Highlight staff and student networks like Female Empowerment UM FEM, LGBTQ+ student and staff network UM Pride, Parents and Carers PAC network, and UnliMited Network for students and staff with a disability and/or chronic conditions, or who are neurodiverse.
• Include information about the city (e.g. Maastricht is a historical city with a dynamic cultural scene.)
• Refrain from negative descriptions about the job, city, organisation (e.g. this is a high stress position/environment...)

The guiding questions to describe our offers
• Why should a candidate accept our offer?
• Is this offer unique? Why does it stand out?
• What distinguishes our university from other organisations?
• Which benefits are attractive for the target group?

5. The Organisation

This section should inform the reader about the mission, uniqueness, and attractiveness of your faculty or unit, and UM as a whole. **The writer should present this information in reference to the type of job position. Be aware that your vacancy may attract applications from international candidates and model your text accordingly. Also pay attention to differences in your target audience when it comes to academic and non-academic staff.**

Key takeaways
- Avoid an overflow of information.
- Avoid numerical information that can be found online (how many students, employees, rather refer to facts and figures page).
- This section should make up about half of the vacancy text.
- Include videos about your faculty or UM as a whole (on the topic of the vacancy, on employability, on sustainability, etc.).

The guiding questions to write an organisational description
- Can I imagine myself working for the university?
- Which features of the university and department will help me to pursue my job?
- What is unique/attractive about this organisation? What is the mission? (academic and social)

Example descriptions of the organisation (UM level):

Academic Staff

Example 1

Located in the heart of Europe, UM is the most international university in the Netherlands with half of our students and one third of academic staff coming from abroad. In total, UM represents 100 different nationalities.

Maastricht University is a stimulating environment where research and teaching are complementary, where innovation is our focus and where talent can flourish. Research and education are characterised by a multidisciplinary, thematic, and collaborative approach. This is at the core of the UM experience.
Eager to learn more? Watch this video to get a sense of our university culture, the city of Maastricht, and your potential working environment, or take our virtual campus tour.

Example 2

Located in the heart of Europe, Maastricht is a dynamic historical city with many other popular European cities just a short train ride away. UM is the most international university in the Netherlands with half of our students and a third of academic staff coming from abroad. In total, UM is proud to represent over 100 different nationalities.

The UM culture thrives due to its collaborative and innovative approach, with constant interaction between staff, students, and researchers, all working together to take on new challenges. This approach creates an exciting workplace. Our focus is to shape the future by critically reflecting on current situations, and valuing new ideas and developments.

We highly value personal and professional development, and thus invest in your journey within the university through a regular offer of workshops, courses and development opportunities. UM proudly provides a family-friendly environment, fitting with the city of Maastricht and its international population along with an international school.

Non-Academic Staff

Example 1

Located in the heart of Europe, Maastricht is a dynamic historical city with many other popular European cities just a short train ride away. UM is the most international university in the Netherlands with half of our students and a third of academic staff coming from abroad. In total, UM is proud to represent over 100 different nationalities. UM provides a family-friendly environment, fitting with the city of Maastricht and its international population along with an international school.

Example 2

Located in the heart of Europe, UM is the most international university in the Netherlands with half of our students and academic staff coming from abroad. In total, UM represents 100 different nationalities.

The UM culture thrives due to its collaborative approach, with constant interaction between staff, students, and researchers, all working together to take on new challenges. This approach creates an exciting and innovating state of the art workplace.

We highly value personal and professional development, and thus invest in your journey within the university through a selection of workshops, courses, and development opportunities.

6. Contact, Procedure and Diversity Statement

Key takeaways
- Communicate the next steps and timeline in the recruitment process
- Always add a diversity statement
- Provide contact details of the vacancy holder

Procedure
Clearly state what documents are expected of applicant. Already include a small section on the follow-up procedure to manage expectations (how fast can they expect a response, internal candidates first, if they are invited, when will the interview take place? etc.)

Accessibility Requirements
Invite candidates to inform you of any accessibility needs they may have, and how you can facilitate the application process for them (e.g. wheelchair access, sign language interpreter)

Diversity statement
The purpose of a diversity statement is to signal to the applicants that UM actively engages with questions related to diversity and an inclusive environment. People belonging to minoritized groups look for diversity statements to see if the insitution engages with diversity.

Examples for a good diversity statement:

Example 1
Maastricht University is committed to promoting and nurturing a diverse and inclusive community. We believe that diversity in our staff and student population contributes to the quality of research and education at UM, and strive to enable this through inclusive policies and innovative projects led by teams of staff and students. We encourage you to apply for this position because of your background and identity.

Example 2
Maastricht University is an international organisation, embracing a diverse student and staff population. We strongly believe that diversity is our advantage and creating an inclusive working climate in which students and staff feel a valued member of the UM community is therefore a top priority. UM values diversity within its community and encourages you to apply because of your background and identity.

Section 3

Checklist

Once your vacancy text is complete, use the following checklist to ensure you have considered all aspects mentioned in this document.

✓ Short vacancy title

✓ Keywords in introduction

✓ Addressing the candidate directly

✓ Clear description of tasks

✓ Organisation description is appropriate for job description

✓ Job requirements are intentional and motivating

✓ Job offer is tailored to the position and type of candidate

✓ Next steps and procedure are clearly communicated

✓ Diversity statement (from examples) is included

The vacancy text is only one stage of the recruitment procedure. To ensure inclusive recruitment, you should also pay attention to many other aspects. You can also consult this website including a Job Posting Checklist from the College voor de Rechten van de Mens.

References and Resources

[1] Gaucher, D., Friesen, J., & Kay, A. C. (2011). Evidence that gendered wording in job advertisements exists and sustains gender inequality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 101*(1), 109–128. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022530

D&I Education and Social Safety pages with the Gender Inclusive Language guide.

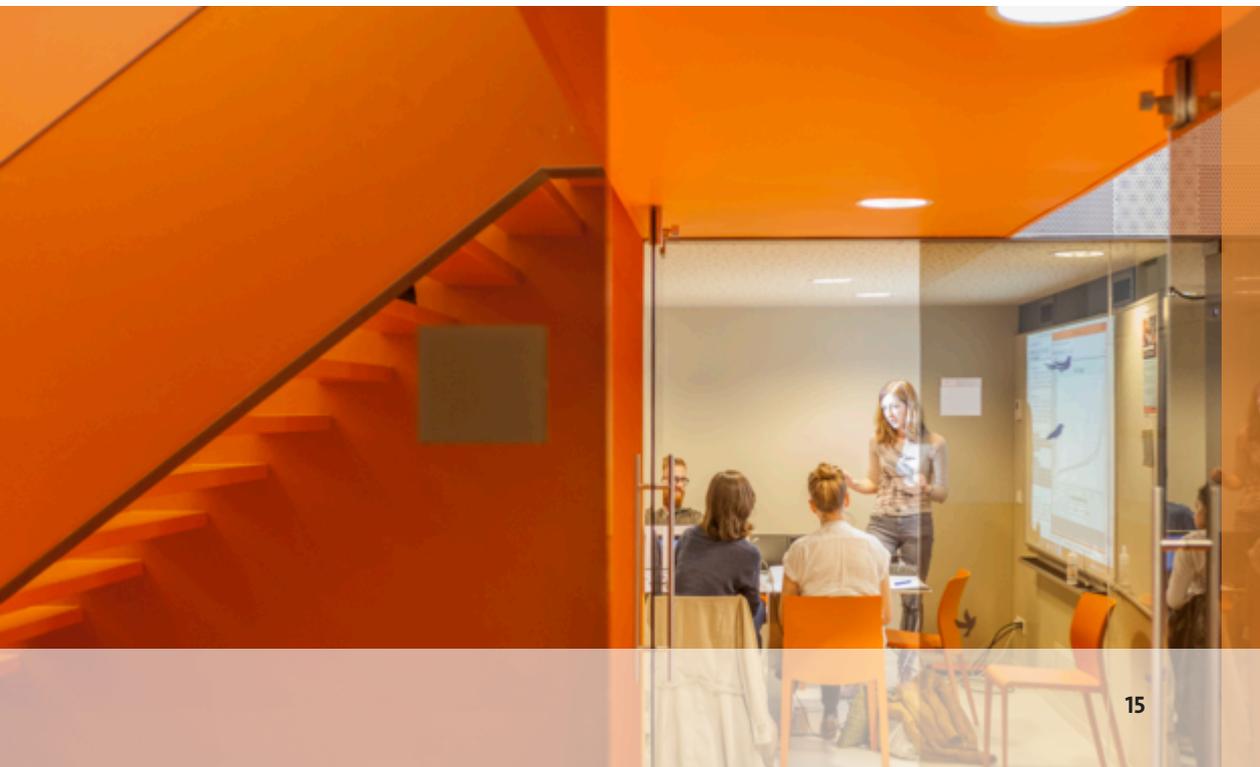Gender Coder available at: https://gender-decoder.katmatfield.com This is inspired by the same research as reference in Gaucher above. It detects gender-exclusive words in job adverts.

Additional Literature

Lindqvist, A., Renström Emma Aurora, & Gustafsson Sendén Marie. (2019). Reducing a male bias in language? establishing the efficiency of three different gender-fair language strategies. *Sex Roles : A Journal of Research, 81*(1-2), 109–117. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0974-9

Stout, J., & Dasgupta, N. (2011). When he doesn't mean you: gender-exclusive language as ostracism. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 37*(6), 757–769.

Wille, L., Derous, E. When Job Ads Turn You Down: How Requirements in Job Ads May Stop Instead of Attract Highly Qualified Women. *Sex Roles 79*, 464–475 (2018). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0877-1

Contact
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