OneTen Research Snapshot

Creating Effective Skills–First Job Descriptions: An A/B Test and How–To Guide

ONETEN
RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

Background

For companies who hope to attract and retain a diverse, capable workforce through skills-first hiring, learning how to effectively recredential jobs is essential. At first glance, recredentialing a job description may seem as simple as removing an explicit degree requirement, yet that alone may not be enough to attract broader talent pools.

Initial assessments of job descriptions from the OneTen Jobs Engine reveal that 61% of postings use subjective and ambiguous language to describe degree and experience requirements, which can deter qualified candidates without degrees from applying.

By clearly outlining the essential skills and competencies necessary to succeed in a role in its initial job description, companies can engage a wider array of applicants to find the right candidate. Unlocking this broader talent pool through a skills-first focus ultimately allows organizations to foster greater innovation and better align their workforce with the dynamic needs of the business.

Our research, conducted in collaboration with Ipsos, evaluated whether skills-first job descriptions are more effective than traditional, credential-based job descriptions in attracting a more diverse talent pool.

Research Objectives

Through this research, OneTen sought to:

- Measure the behavioral and emotional impact of an optimized skills-first job description versus three traditional job descriptions [1]
- Identify language that most effectively increases and diversifies the applicant pool and optimizes job descriptions for candidates without four-year degrees

Method and Sample

An A/B test was conducted among 1,000 respondents from May 1–May 13, 2024. The sample included Black talent aged 18-60, without a four-year college degree who earn a personal income of $40K+ or household income of $80K+ and who are either actively searching or planning to search for a job within the next year.

Respondents were exposed to either a traditional or optimized skills-first job description and were subsequently asked to assess them based on:

- Likelihood to apply
- Clarity of stated qualifications
- Job appeal
- Likelihood of obtaining the job
- Perceived ability to meet qualifications
- Likelihood of sharing the job with others

Respondents also highlighted words in the job descriptions that were most/least motivating as well as most/least helpful in evaluating job fit.

Results

The optimized skills-first job description increased the likelihood of application and significantly outperformed in clarity and job attainability, compared to traditional descriptions.

[1] Three traditional job descriptions based on the three categories (Equivalent tradeoff, Equivalent experience, Preferred qualification) were tested: (1) Equivalent Tradeoff: "Bachelor's degree with a minimum of 6 years related experience or a Master's degree with a minimum of 4 years related experience. Will consider 10+ years of related experience in lieu of degree"; (2) Equivalent Experience: "A Bachelor's degree preferred and 5 or more years of experience preferred – in lieu of these educational requirements, an equivalent combination of education and experience may be considered"; (3) Preferred Qualification: "Bachelor's degree preferred."

Key Findings

Approximately 82% of respondents evaluating the skills-first job description were extremely/very likely to apply, 93% found the qualifications extremely/very clear, and 83% believed they would likely obtain the job (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

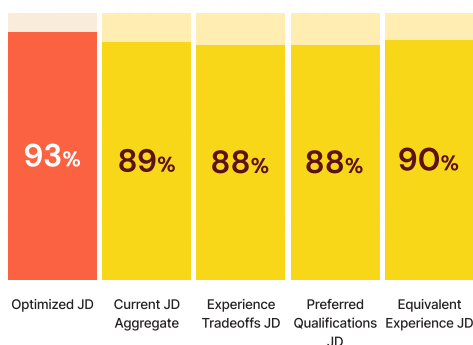# Optimized Skills–first Job Description Performance Relative to Traditional Job Descriptions

Likelihood to Apply
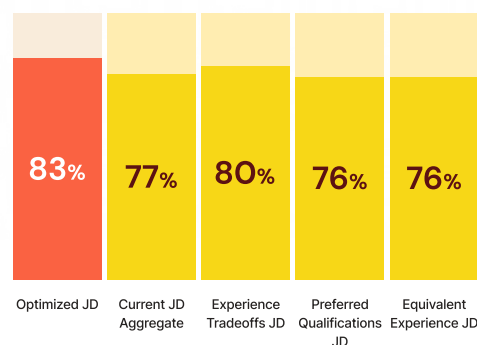Extremely / Very Likely to Apply (Among Total)
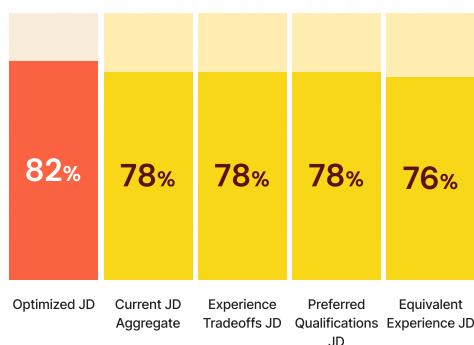
Clarity in Stated Qualifications
Extremely / Very Clear (Among Total)

Perceived Likelihood to Obtain Job
Extremely / Very Likely (Among Total)

Likelihood to Apply:
Optimized JD	Current JD Aggregate	Experience Tradeoffs JD	Preferred Qualifications JD	Equivalent Experience JD
82%	78%	78%	78%	76%

Clarity in Stated Qualifications:
Optimized JD	Current JD Aggregate	Experience Tradeoffs JD	Preferred Qualifications JD	Equivalent Experience JD
93%	89%	88%	88%	90%

Perceived Likelihood to Obtain Job:
Optimized JD	Current JD Aggregate	Experience Tradeoffs JD	Preferred Qualifications JD	Equivalent Experience JD
83%	77%	80%	76%	76%

✳ Current JD Aggregate represents an aggregate view of the Experience Tradeoff, Preferred Qualifications and Equivalent Experience job descriptions

The optimized skills-first job descriptions performed the strongest with the following groups (Figure 2):

● **Younger talent (ages 18-34):** 88% would be extremely/very likely to apply, 97% found the qualifications extremely/very clear, 79% found the job extremely/very appealing and 85% believed it would be extremely/very likely that they would get the job

● **Less experienced talent (Those with 0-3 years of experience):** 83% would definitely/probably apply, 93% found the qualifications extremely/very clear, 81% found the job extremely/very appealing and 80%would share the job with others

● **Male applicants:** 90% would be extremely/very likely to apply and 96% found the qualifications extremely/very clear
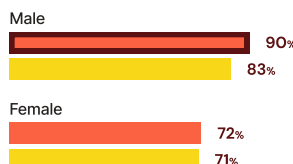
Figure 2.

Optimized Skills–First Job Description Performance Compared to Traditional Job Descriptions, by Talent Attributes
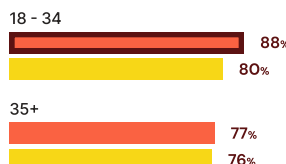
Likelihood to Apply
Extremely / Very Likely to Apply (Among Subgroups)
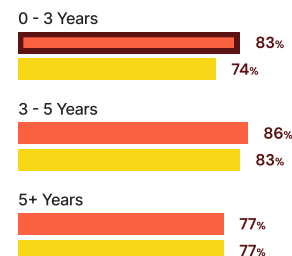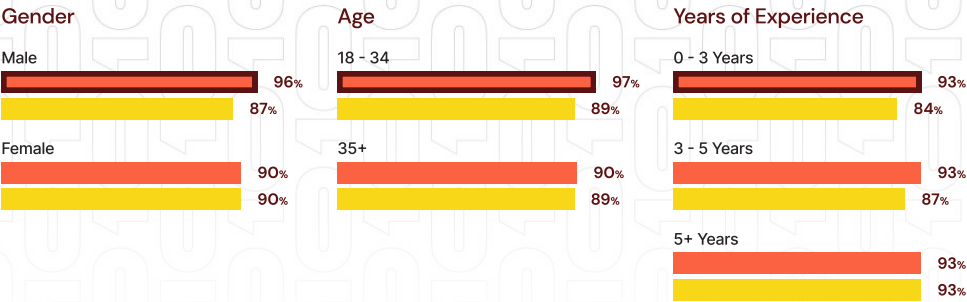
● Optimized JD   ● Current JD Aggregate

Gender

Male
90%
83%

Female
72%
71%

Age

18 - 34
88%
80%

35+
77%
76%

Years of Experience

0 - 3 Years
83%
74%

3 - 5 Years
86%
83%

5+ Years
77%
77%

Clarity in Stated Qualifications
Extremely / Very Clear (Among Subgroups)

■ Optimized JD   ■ Current JD Aggregate

Gender	Age	Years of Experience
Male 96% / 87%	**18 - 34** 97% / 89%	**0 - 3 Years** 93% / 84%
Female 90% / 90%	**35+** 90% / 89%	**3 - 5 Years** 93% / 87%
		5+ Years 93% / 93%

Perceived Likelihood to Obtain Job
Extremely / Very Likely (Among Subgroups)

■ Optimized JD   ■ Current JD Aggregate

Gender	Age	Years of Experience
Male 87% / 81%	**18 - 34** 85% / 77%	**0 - 3 Years** 89% / 75%
Female 79% / 73%	**35+** 82% / 77%	**3 - 5 Years** 82% / 79%
		5+ Years 80% / 78%
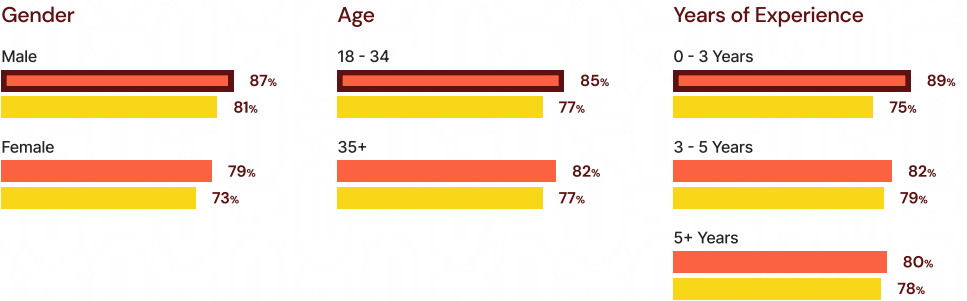
✳ Maroon outline indicates statistical significance at a 90% confidence level

✳ Current JD Aggregate represents an aggregate view of the Experience Tradeoffs, Preferred Qualifications and Equivalent Experience job descriptions

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Using the right, skills-focused language can significantly boost interest and applications from talented individuals. During this test, respondents identified the absence of four-year degree requirements and time-based experience criteria, a commitment to diversity and clear benefits as key differentiators that would motivate them to apply. Clarity of language also increased their likelihood to apply as well as enhanced respondents' confidence in their ability to obtain the position. Below are some examples that appealed to respondents:

Most Motivating / Helpful Language in Job Descriptions	Examples
Explicit statement encouraging non-degreed applicants to apply	"Applicants without four-year degrees are encouraged to apply"
Clear action verbs that describe required/preferred skills	"Lead," "develop," "monitor," "recommend," "coordinate"
Inclusivity statements	"Diverse environment," "equal opportunity employer"
Language that highlights the "return" for the applicant and the promise of growth opportunities	"Compensation varies depending on a wide array of factors, including but not limited to the specific location, certifications, education and level of experience;" "This position is eligible for a discretionary incentive award;" "Take on new opportunities and tough challenges"

Degree and experience requirements deter candidates without four-year degrees from applying—potentially eliminating candidates that could thrive in the job. Our study showed that certain phrases can deter qualified candidates from applying and should be avoided when possible:

Least Motivating / Helpful Language in Job Descriptions	Examples
Degree requirements	"Bachelor's degree in a related field preferred;" "Bachelor's degree in related field or 4+years of related experience"
Experience requirements	"Minimum of four years of related work experience required"

Putting it into Practice

Creating job descriptions that prioritize a candidate's skills and abilities over traditional factors such as educational background or years of experience can help a company find and retain the right talent for the role. This approach not only unlocks a more diverse talent pool but also enhances efficiency in the hiring process. To adjust current or create new job descriptions that incorporate a skills-first approach, we recommend that you:

Encourage Non-Degreed Applicants

- Include a statement that explicitly encourages talent without four-year degrees to apply
- Remove unnecessary credential and years of experience required [2]

Use Clear, Skill-Centric Language

- Incorporate straightforward, skill-centric language and action verbs using tools such as O*Net, Skillitizer, and SkillsEngine to identify preferred/required skills for roles [2]

Highlight Career Advancement

- Include key information about career advancement and growth opportunities available

Emphasize Inclusivity

- Include an inclusivity statement to communicate your organization's commitment to fostering inclusive work environments [2]
- Check for bias using resources/tools such as Gender Decoder, Applied Text Analysis and ADA Compliant Language for Job Descriptions [2]

Educate and Train

- Include information on your organization's skills-first hiring approach in the job description and/or on your company website
- Encourage hiring managers to use more objective assessment methods, such as skills assessments, to evaluate candidates
- Provide training for hiring managers and HR teams on best practices for creating and using skills-first job descriptions
- Emphasize the benefits and mission of a skills-first approach to attract and retain younger workers, especially in industries with a skilled labor shortage

By adopting these key strategies, your company can effectively recredential your job descriptions to attract untapped, skilled talent and foster a more inclusive and dynamic organizational culture.

About OneTen

OneTen aims to create one million family-sustaining jobs for skilled talent without four-year degrees over ten years by advancing skills-first hiring practices in partnership with a coalition of America's top employers.

About The OneTen Jobs Engine

The OneTen Jobs Engine is a streamlined, automated solution for sourcing the best job opportunities for recredentialing and matching skilled candidates without a four-year degree. The OneTen Jobs Engine is more than a tool. It is a transformative force that saves companies time and resources by delivering actionable insights to:

- Identify hidden opportunities for recredentialing
- Reccomend modifications to job descriptions
- Improve job demand and candidate matching
- Efficiently build a more inclusive workforce

Power your Skills-First Strategy with the OneTen Jobs Engine

Ready to power your skills-first strategy with the OneTen Jobs Engine? Email us at **employers@oneten.org** and get started today.

✉ **employers@oneten.org**

[2] Skills-Based Sourcing & Hiring Playbook (2023). Rework Alliance America, a Markle Initiative.