Crafting Better Job Descriptions

## If you want people to apply for or accept a role with your team, it’s necessary to describe the role, responsibilities, expectations, and qualifications. However, more generic descriptions tend to produce a deluge of mismatched applicants. A great exercise to guide the words in your posting and/or interview process is to envision a day or week in the life of the person fulfilling that role and write it as a story. Use the below prompts to help you write the story, and use the story to build a more robust description that attracts better candidates. Even if you have to format a job posting in a particular way based on organizational HR requirements, thinking through the position and environment carefully can help you present the role better for those candidates who advance in the process.

# A Day in the Life:

1. What’s the role/title?

Ex: Research assistant

2. Does this person arrive to a physical location, or sign in virtually? Where/when?

Ex: You arrive to the campus in the morning and get a wave as you pass the PI’s office, then you receive a greeting from the postdocs and students as you get to your personal work area. You check your email and confirm your tasks for the day in your project board.

3. What is the work environment like?

Ex: You join in friendly conversations as each person works on their own research duties, and you make a plan to meet the colleague from down the hall for a late-morning coffee at the café downstairs.

4. What are some specific examples of tasks the person might perform in the course of a typical workday?

Ex: You set up a PCR to run, then head over to the animal resource facility to wean some juvenile mice.

5. What kinds of interpersonal interactions might they have?

Ex: You participant in casual and professional conversations throughout the day with our research team. You talk to staff from the service core to get their help on processing some samples. You touch base with the postdoc who provides day-to-day guidance on your project to ensure progress and troubleshooting.

6. What types of activities or events might they attend?

Ex: You hear about an interesting paper at the departmental journal club while enjoying the free box lunch and chatting with researchers from other groups.

7. What are some tasks or responsibilities they will do less frequently?

Ex: You attend group meeting to learn about progress on other team members’ projects, get important updates, and ask questions or contribute insights when relevant, and you present your research progress at least twice per year. You occasionally work on a weekend or holiday break (on a rotating schedule with other team members) to ensure continuity of research.

8. What are the impacts of their contributions?

Ex: Your work is integral to our mission to define XYZ.

9. How do they wrap up their day?

Ex: You update your project board and notes, check email, and sign off for the day.

10. What do they bring to the team? What are their values?

Ex: You bring a sense of curiosity and a commitment to continuous growth and learning. You embrace collaboration over competition and mutually encourage and support team members. You value you inclusivity and integrity.

11. What knowledge, skills, or experience are non-negotiable requirements for the position?

Ex: You have bachelor’s degree in a science-related field. You have experience and comfort with working with research laboratory animals.

12. What’s your “value proposition” for them?

Ex: salary, benefits, opportunities for learning/professional development, group activities to foster belonging, etc.

Draft a paragraph or two that captures what a day in the life of this position might be like. If you can envision a specific person you think would be a great fit for the role, or even someone you’ve loved working with in the past, imagine that you’re writing directly to them. Try to capture some enthusiasm about what having this team member would be like.