

Decoding the Job Ad For Graduate Students



Decoding the Job Posting

Carefully read through the job ad and note what skills, experiences, duties and key responsibilities are included in the job description. Then read through the required and preferred skills, education/knowledge, experience, qualifications, and competencies. They are telling you about what they want you to be able to do and what you need to be successful in this position. What are the keywords they use? Use these in your resume or C.V.

What is the organization/company looking for? What are the required education and/or technical skills? Make sure you have the minimum required qualifications for the position. No one will have every requirement they want, but if you have half of the requirements, you might consider applying. Talk with a professional to determine which experiences and skills are critical for an application. Research¹ shows that women don't apply for jobs unless they are 100% qualified, whereas men apply for jobs when they meet only 60% of the qualifications. Apply for those jobs!

What are the skills and experiences they are looking for? You will probably note that there are certain keywords that are repeated throughout the ad. These will give you a clue that these are skills that they value highly, and you should address them in your resume and cover letter.

Do you have time/project management skills or leadership skills? What is your experience working in a collaborative setting? These are common job ad skills. Do you have experience scheduling projects and managing timelines? Did you provide leadership on a project? Did your research require you to collaborate with other labs or individuals? These are often a common component of graduate education as you collaborate with others and keep a project on task and on time. Identify your contributions toward the management and leadership of that project and match those with the job ad.

Communication skills? What experience do you have with writing papers or reports or giving oral or poster presentations? Have you worked with both discipline-specific and general audiences? These are all terrific examples of your communication skills.

Does the ad provide hints about organizational culture? What does the organization value? They often have a section on what it's like to work at this company, and it's usually good to do some additional research. What keywords seem to be prominent in their materials? Be sure to use those keywords in your resume and cover letter.

- 1) Mohr, T.S., 2014. Why women don't apply for jobs unless they're 100% qualified. *Harvard Business Review*, 25.