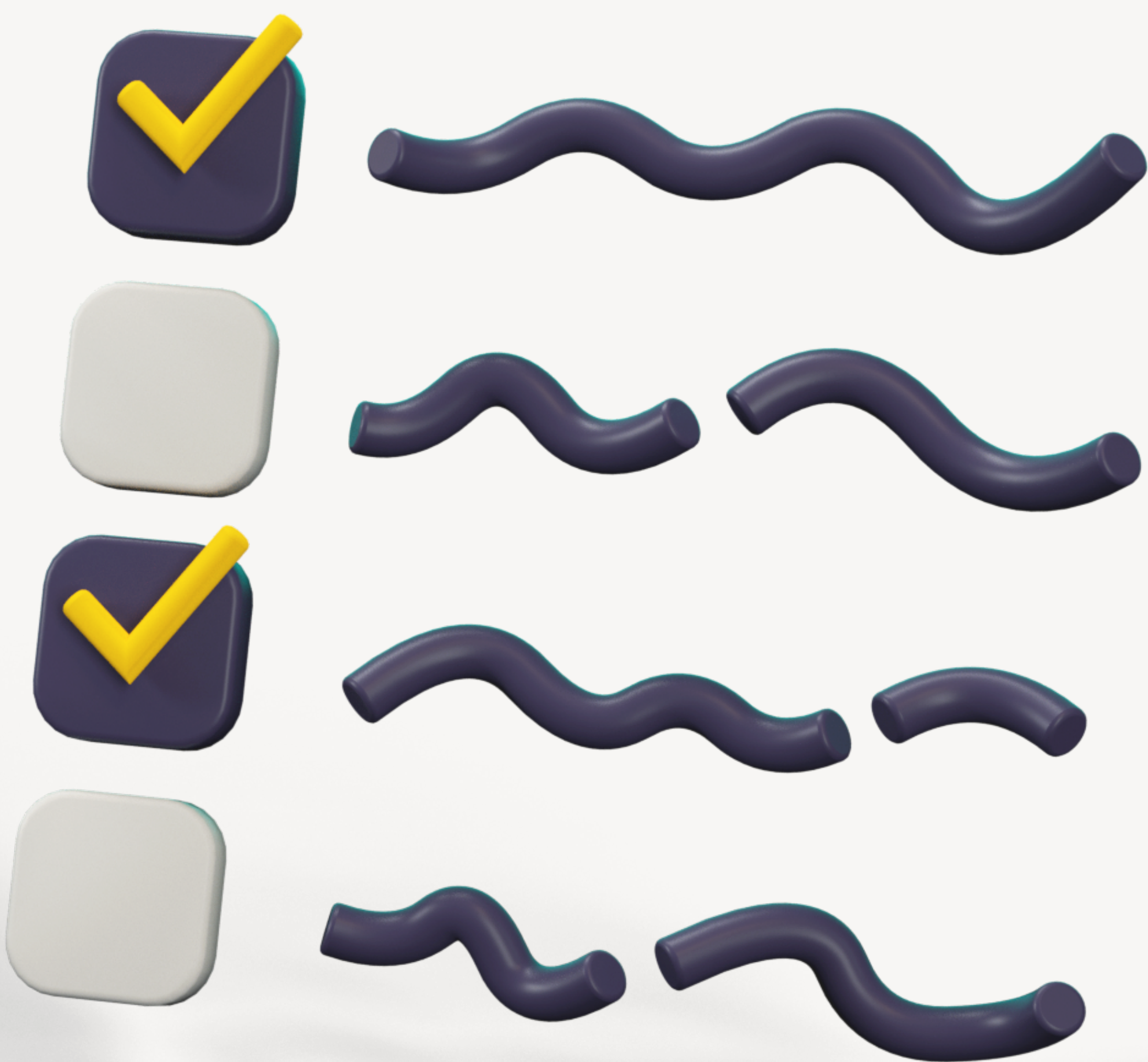


Make your job descriptions work

The WhoCo guide to writing effective, honest, and compelling job descriptions.

Before you create a job description, you need to know the job. Seems obvious, but job descriptions are rarely as useful as they can be. At best, this means not hiring efficiently. At worst, it can lead to unintended discrimination and even lawsuits. Let's go over the steps to building job descriptions that are consistent, fair, and will set up your new hires for success.



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First, identify job tasks

Start by defining the job using task statements. These are simple descriptions of the behaviors or activities done to carry out the work.

- Task statements capture what someone does. Minimally, this requires a verb and an outcome (e.g., "Herd all of our cats").
- When possible, link the task to measurable outcomes (e.g., "Herd 20 cats per hour"). Focus on the significant tasks a job requires; trivialities and minor components are less important.
- Reference any software, materials, equipment, or tools that the new hire will use, if applicable.

Pro tip

Systematically identify a job's tasks. Putting effort into a rigorous job analysis (and the resulting job descriptions) doesn't just help you hire well. It also provides a foundation for equitable compensation, training and development programs, and effective performance management.

Administering surveys, interviewing, and observing folks doing their jobs is all part of a specialized field called job analysis. The team at WhoCo has run analysis for most startup roles and can give you a huge leg up with writing awesome job descriptions. [Check us out and request access.](#)

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Then use the job tasks to define your ideal applicant

Next, connect task statements to relevant worker characteristics by identifying the knowledge, abilities, or skills required to carry it out. These categories are collectively referred to as KSAOs—Knowledge, Skills, Abilities, and Other characteristics. “Other” includes things like education or special certifications (e.g., Certified Professional Accountant, Registered Nurse, Professional Engineer).

Exercise

Map out your worker characteristics with a sheet of paper divided into two columns. List on the left side all the task statements, or what someone does in the role. Across from those, jot down the correlating knowledge, skills, or abilities (KSAs) required for the ideal candidate to do that task well. You have now connected your task statements to relevant worker characteristics. Hang on to these, you need them for the next step.

Sample tasks and KSAOs for a Software Engineer

Tasks	KSAOs
Develop new application features	Fluent in HTML, CSS, and Javascript frameworks such as Angular and React. Able to articulate major product features and functionality and their business relevance, ...
Review and optimize code of peers	Able to evaluate and prioritize working out bugs and enhancing existing code, ...
Follow agile process methodology	Able to run effective scrum meetings and resolve blocks, ...

Pro tip

Search for your role on [O*NET](#) if you really want to nerd out on task statements and KSAOs (O*NET is a collection of occupational data sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor). For most jobs, O*NET will suggest task statements under the headings “Tasks”, “Work Activities”, and “Detailed Work Activities.” Find KSAOs under their respective headings. There’s a lot there to help you. Go nuts.

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Last, put it all together and add some color

You did the hard part; now it's time to put it all together. List your task statements as "job duties" and KSAOs as "desired knowledge, skills, and abilities" (you can also make up your own headings). Bonus points for working from the tasks and skills you outlined to define goals for what you hope the candidate to accomplish after 60 days, six months, and one year. You may also want to add a disclaimer that the job description does not cover all required activities, duties, or responsibilities.

Next, add in relevant details such as location, whether the role is remote, whether travel or odd working hours are required, etc. Include worker eligibility/citizenship requirements and information on how to apply.

Provide transparency about the position as you round out the job description: pay and benefits, reporting structure, development opportunities, and company mission, vision, and values. Especially with early-stage startups, candidates will want to know more about your company. Describe what you do, your founding story, how much you've raised, and your company culture (steer away from bro-ey language that may turn some people off). Craft your organizational info so you can re-use it across roles.

Want some help? WhoCo makes it easy. Use our [job description template](#) to pull all the details together.

Pro tip

Ensure you select folks based on real job requirements by providing a Realistic Job Preview (RJP) to prospects. In other words, don't just pitch the fun parts in your job description, be clear about the less savory aspects of the work as well. Communicating a realistic preview of the role helps you avoid the costly mistake of overselling to a candidate who won't stay in the position. We're all about building the funnel, but quality matters too. You want folks to self-select out of the hiring process if they aren't a good fit.

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