

THE SECRET LANGUAGE OF

Sourcing

The latest recruiting data shows what passive job candidates really think of your recruiting emails, and how to get them to respond

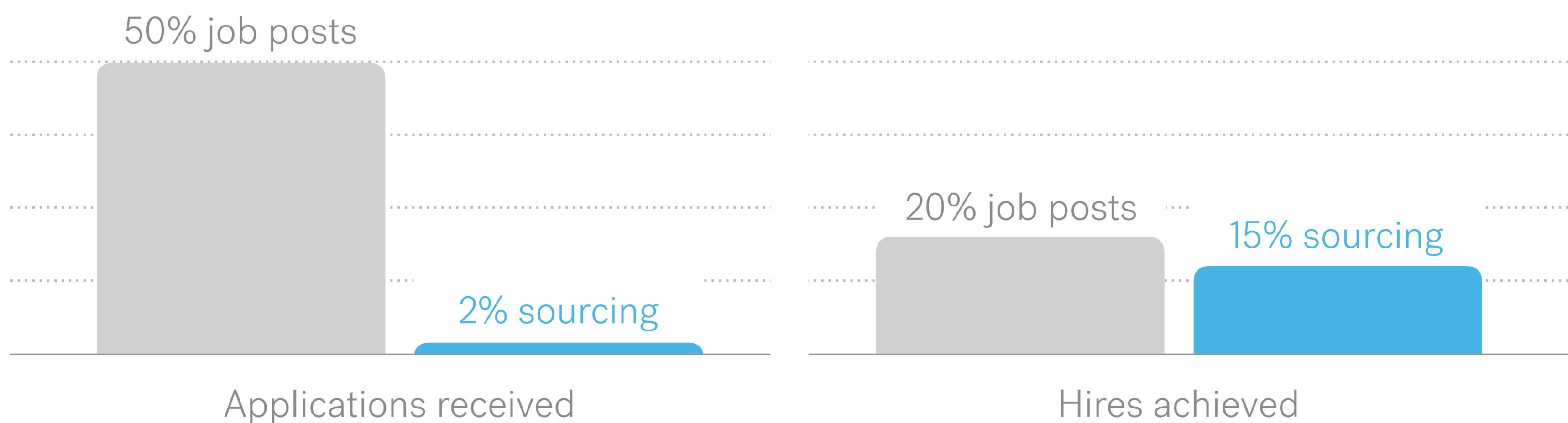
HIRING BY WRITING

What's an email worth?

When you look at where most job candidates come from, it's tempting to conclude that recruiting by email is a waste of time. For most companies, more than half of the applicant pool comes from active job-seekers through publicly posted job listings. Sourced candidates make up just 2% of the hiring pipeline.

But those figures shift dramatically when you see who gets hired in the end. By the time all the contracts are inked, only 20% of hires come through job listings, while 15% are the result of sourcing.

- Statistically, every passive candidate that your team recruits is worth more than 18 active candidates applying through external job boards
- Word-of-mouth is often touted as the best way to hire, but the data shows that sourcing is 1.5x more efficient than referrals



Use your words

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

Recruiting mail: pass or fail

There's only one metric that matters when you send an email to a passive job candidate: will they respond or won't they? And let's face it, most recruiting emails fail on first read. Here are just a few of the gems recently received at Textio from sourcers trying to recruit our team.

Hey {!firstname_fix},

I recently came across your profile and knew you would be absolutely perfect for this role I have.

This greeting really makes me feel perfect for your role

Would you have an interest in a Sr. level Machine Learning Data Scientist position for [REDACTED]. The position is in their Bellevue office. We just had a candidate that was offered the position but declined.

We like you! Just not as much as that first person.

Hi [REDACTED]

I hope you're not avoiding me.

The last person who tried to avoid me was attacked by a pelican :)

Threats aren't cute, even if you mention cute wildlife

Hi [REDACTED]

I hope this mail finds you well. I am a Recruiter here at [REDACTED]. A lot has changed for the better at [REDACTED] since you left in 2013, and wanted to see if you would be interested in hearing about opportunities. If so, please do feel free to respond back or email me at [REDACTED]

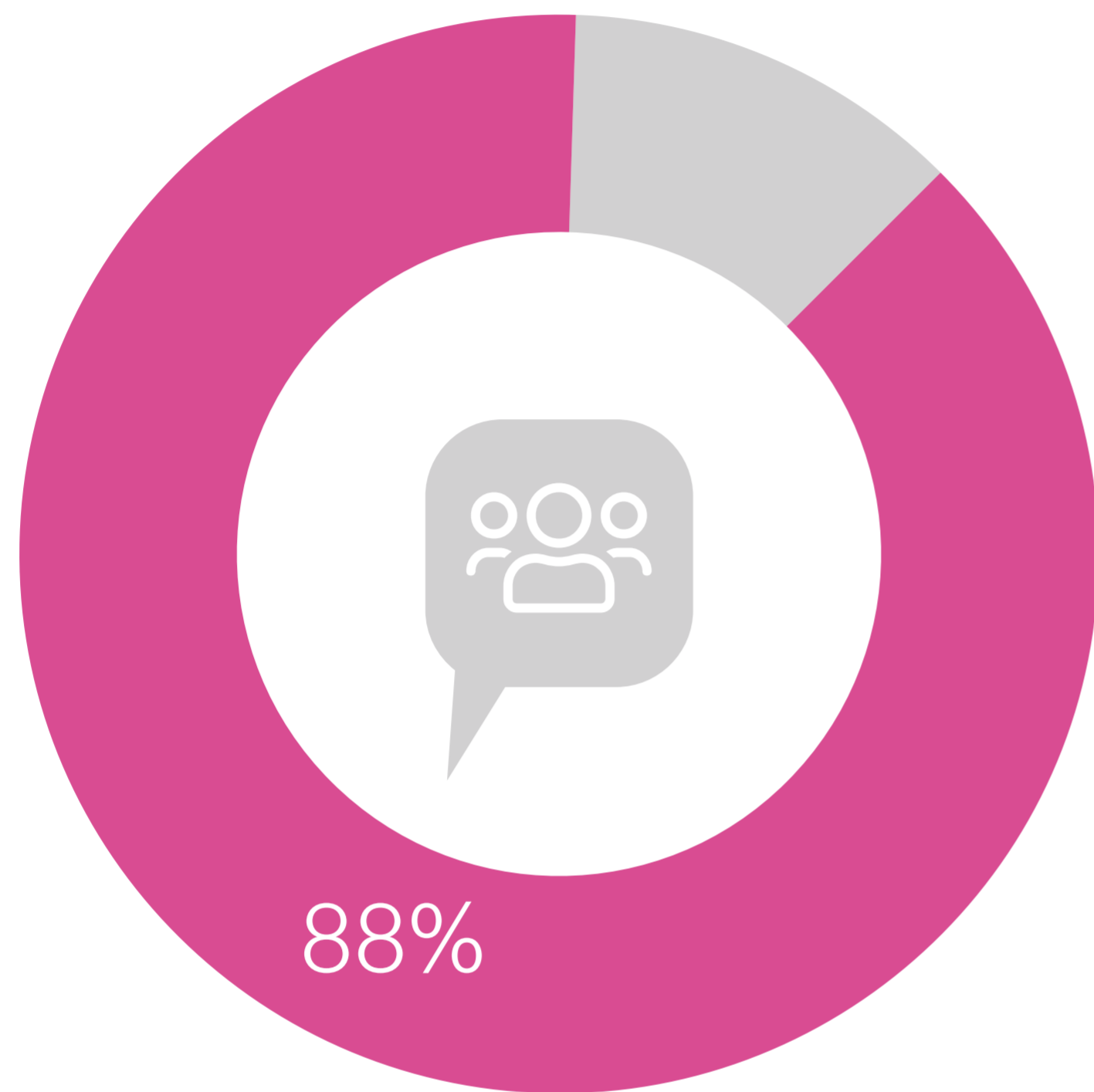
This place was the pits before, but it's better now, I swear.

Would you like to discuss an exciting Natural Language Processing Opportunity at a world class SF Startup this Sunday at 2:15pm, 3:15pm, or 4:15pm, or Monday at 10:15am, 11:15am, or 12:15pm?

All the best job interviews happen on Sundays!

WHAT'S IN YOUR RECRUITING MAIL?

Company culture counts



88% of people say culture has some importance when applying to a company

Data: Jobvite 2018 Job Seeker Nation Study

When it comes to taking a new job, it's not all about the money. 48% of people would quit their job to take an "ideal" role, even if it meant less pay.*

But what's an ideal job? Many studies point to workplace culture and environment as the leading factors. An *HRO Today* survey found that work environment is "the single most important element of the workplace to passive candidates." 88% of people say that corporate culture is of some importance in applying to a company, and 46% report that it's a "very important" factor.

So how do you convey your team's culture and environment in your first message to a passive candidate? There's only one tool at your disposal: your words. You have to use language to paint a picture of what it *feels like* to work at your company.

LANGUAGE IMPACTS RESPONSE RATES

The right words get the reply

What makes good writing? The answer, as you might expect, is: “It depends.” Even just within the talent acquisition field, there are wide variations in what language is most effective for different locations and different job types—and the patterns that work are always changing over time.

Some no-brainer advice is clearly validated by the data, like never write in ALL CAPS. But the best word choices aren’t always obvious or intuitive. Data shows that describing your job opening as an “opportunity” will hurt your response rate, but using either “position” or “role” instead is fine. And who would guess that putting a friendly greeting in your subject line like “Good morning!” (or even just “Hey”) would statistically lower your response rate? But it does.

The point is, words matter a lot, but not always in the way your fourth grade English teacher—or just conventional wisdom—would suggest.

Johnson & Johnson

By using augmented writing to compose recruiting emails, Johnson & Johnson improved their candidate response rate by 25%.

 Zillow® GROUP

Zillow Group recruiters with high Textio Scores have seen a 16% lift in email responses.

“The results and the data don’t lie. It’s pretty powerful for us to see how much a subtle shift can make a huge impact in engagement and response rate.”

— Annie Rihn, VP Talent Acquisition

5 common myths

THE MYTH OF BREVITY

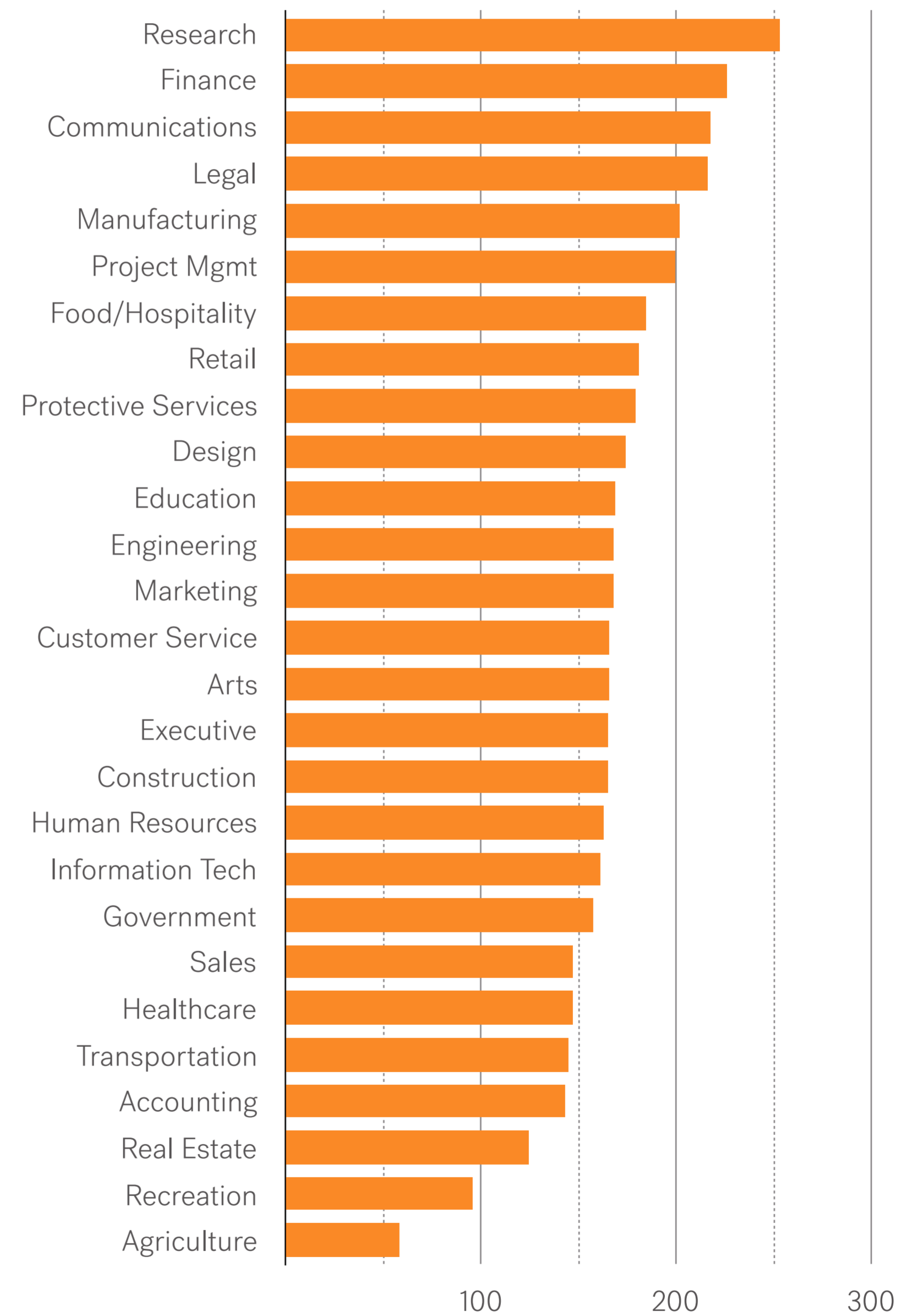
“I’ll keep this really short...”

As with all forms of writing, good recruiting messages are not one-size-fits-all. Some industries are much, uh, wordier than others. People hiring for Research jobs write the wordiest recruiting messages of them all, writing four times as many words as people hiring for jobs in Agriculture or Sports and Recreation.

The average word count across industries is 150 words, while LinkedIn recommends 200 to 500 words in total. But the response rate data paints a more nuanced picture of what works best.

Turns out that paragraph count has a more significant impact on response rate than overall length. Messages with several shorter blocks of text get higher response rates than messages containing just one or two long paragraphs.

Average recruiting mail word count



THE SOURCING ORIGIN MYTH

“I found you on LinkedIn...”



80%

Response rates drop by 80% when you use phrases like: “I came across your profile on LinkedIn”

With passive job candidates, you only have one chance to engage their interest. And with that message you need to somehow differentiate your company and culture from the hundreds of other recruiting emails the candidate may get.

As a sourcer, it’s natural to want to open your email by explaining how you discovered the candidate. But that’s probably why you shouldn’t: because everyone else is doing it. Recruiting mail data shows a shockingly steep 80% drop in response rates to emails that include sentences like “I came across your profile on LinkedIn.”

Even if you don’t say that in all your emails, it sure sounds like you do, and nobody likes a form letter. When you’re making a first impression, every word counts—telling someone where you found their profile simply isn’t the kind of information someone will find useful or compelling.

THE MYTH OF GOOD TEMPLATES

“I love your background...”

Recruiters often use email templates for sourcing. But if all you ever do is copy, paste, and send your “best” recruiting email to every candidate because it’s tried and true, the chances that it winds up in the recycling bin are much higher. That’s not just common sense: response rate data shows that personalization statistically matters.

Instead of sending everyone your best boiler plate, try finding specific achievements in each candidate’s background that are relevant to your search. Don’t just check the box on this; the more unique your insight, the more likely you are to pique the interest of your reader, so do your research.

When you're getting to the heart of something they've accomplished, learned, studied, or are curious about, you'll see as much as a 20% lift in the likelihood of getting a reply. Telling them “I love your background!” just won't cut it—you've got to prove it.



20%

You'll see as much as a 20% increase in response rate when you reference something specific and unique that the candidate has achieved or learned

THE TELL-A-FRIEND MYTH

“Please pass this on...”



50%

Your chances of getting a candidate to respond to your email drop by 50% when you include phrases like “Please share this with your colleagues.”

Everyone knows that job hunting—and candidate sourcing—is all about networking. So it seems logical when reaching out to a passive candidates that you should let them know that it’s okay to forward the email to their friends and colleagues who might be interested.

But guess what? That simple request has a major chilling effect on whether the recipient replies to you. Saying things like “If this isn't right for you, please pass it on to your networks” drops the response rate to sourcing emails by 50%.

We could speculate on the psychology behind that statistic: maybe the language makes people feel like they’re just being used, or it implies that they aren’t uniquely suited for the role. Whatever the reason, the data is clear.

What other common phrases may be lurking in your emails that are driving down your response rate?

THE CALL-TO-ACTION MYTH

“I’ll call you on Tuesday at 4pm...”

Many sourcers have picked up on the notion of including a strong “call to action” in their candidate emails from experts in direct-mail marketing. There are a lot of good lessons to be learned from thinking like a marketer, but getting pushy with passive job candidates definitely isn’t one of them.

Emails that close with presumptive language pinning people into specific dates and times for follow-up—like “Let’s have a phone chat Tuesday at 4:00 pm” or “Can you reply to me by tomorrow morning?”—are more likely to go unanswered by a factor of about 25%.

However, an open invitation to an event works just fine. Having a team happy hour Thursday at 4pm? Go ahead and invite people in your message, it won’t hurt. As is common in language, context is everything. You can’t always guess ahead of time where “Thursday at 4pm” is going to get the response you’re hoping for. Only having data at very large scale can reliably tell you where certain types of phrases work, and where they don’t.



25%

Response rates drop by 25% when you push people to agree to a specific time and date for a follow-up, but a subtle shift in the context makes a big difference.

Write culture forward

BUILDING YOUR TALENT BRAND

You are what you write

It's not a coincidence that Amazon job posts use the word "maniacal" 11 times more often than the rest of the industry, or that Uber uses "whatever it takes" 30 times more.

Especially among companies that hire a lot, hiring language provides a fantastic place to observe these linguistic and cultural patterns in action. Hiring managers across a huge enterprise rarely coordinate with one another, and yet they have specific language patterns in common.

When thousands of people in the same company use the same words without having been told to, it isn't an accident; the language they choose illuminates real shared cultural values. You already have a talent brand in the minds of your job candidates, and it's based mostly on what they read.

The question you have to ask yourself is: how intentional are we in the language that we use?

One way that your talent brand shows up in passive candidate emails is when you talk about your company benefits.

Zillow allows employees who are traveling to ship their breast milk. Evernote hosts classes through "Evernote Academy," which offers team-building courses like macaroon baking. What's the benefit that makes your company special? Share it!

Response rate data shows that if you write about company benefits in a recruiting mail, you concretely improve the chances of getting that person to reply.

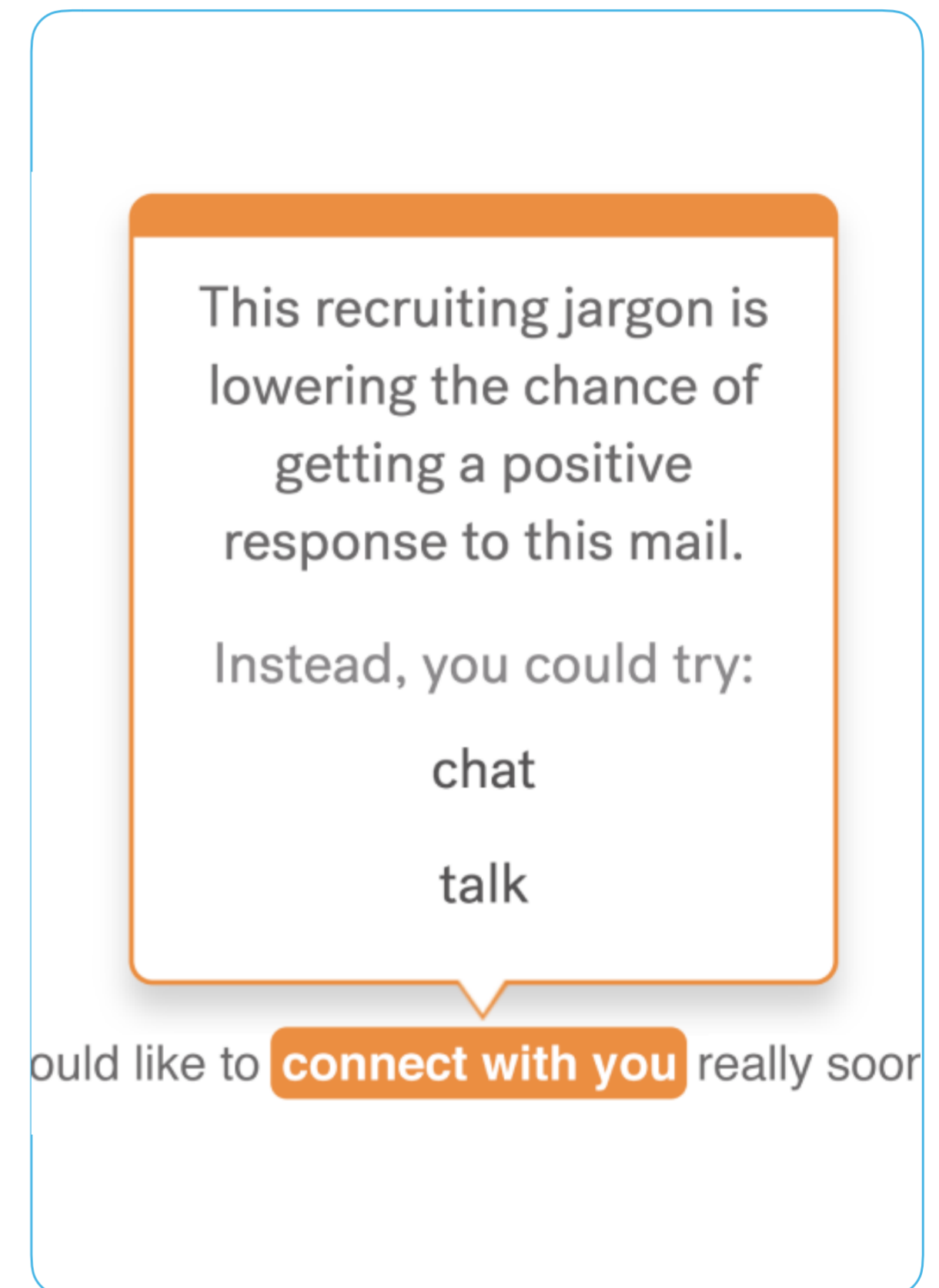
THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Words move people

Some of the language that leads to the highest response rates from candidates may not seem intuitive, but when you track the effectiveness of text from many thousands of real-world recruiting mails, some surprising linguistic patterns are bound to emerge.

There are millions of combinations of phrases and formatting choices that will lead you to more recruiting mail success. The guidance in this book is just a quick glimpse into what's working in the talent market today. The important thing to remember is that the words you use actually make a difference in how people respond to you.

You're asking someone to make a major life decision about where they want to be in their career. Take your time and be thoughtful about how you approach them, and you'll have a better shot at starting a real conversation.



This recruiting jargon is lowering the chance of getting a positive response to this mail.

Instead, you could try:

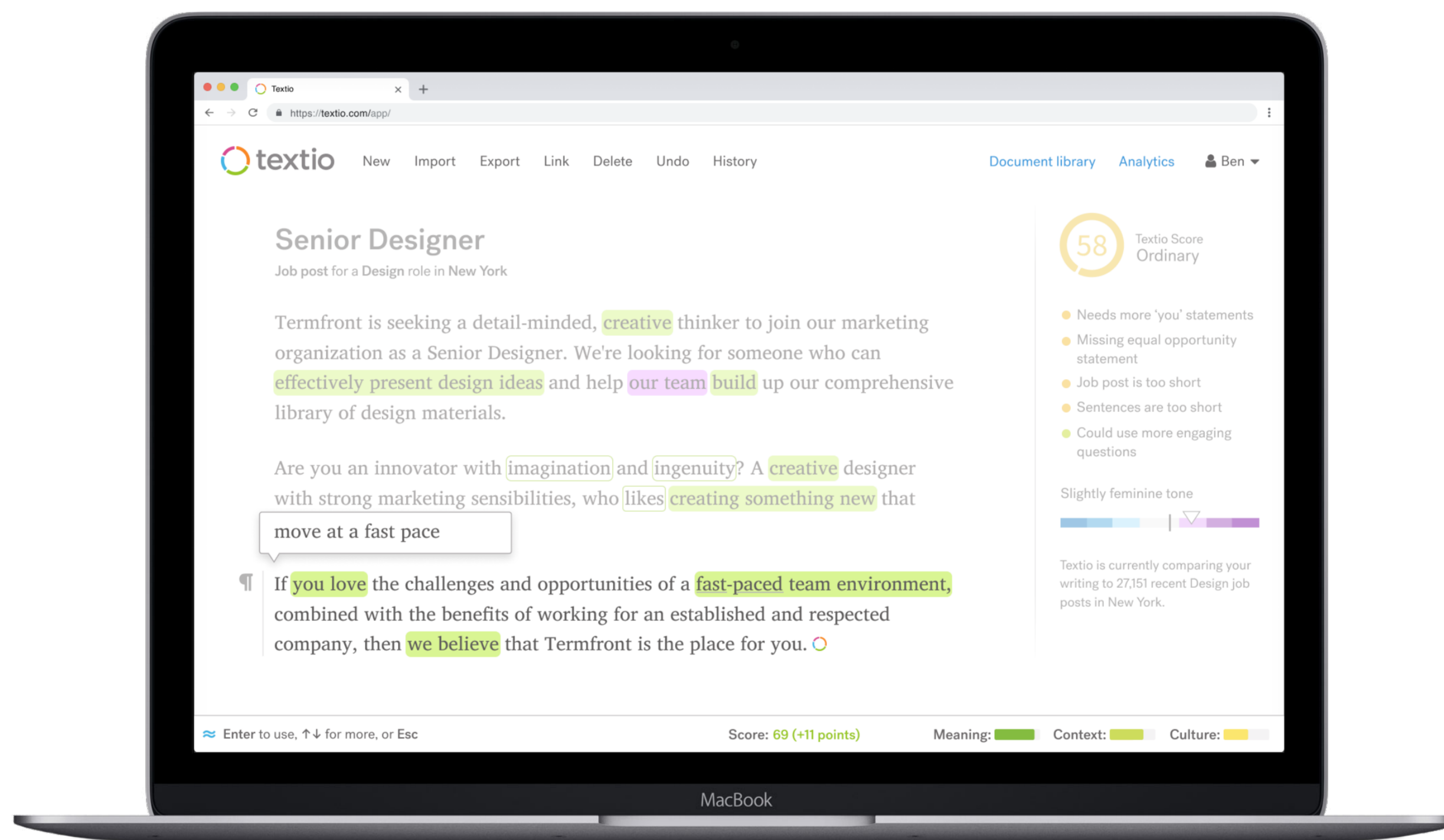
- chat
- talk

ould like to **connect with you** really soon

Augmented writing uses millions of real-world data points to provide insights into the language that will help your company reach its hiring goals.

Discover Textio Hire.

If people don't respond to your emails or apply to your job ads, you can't hire them. Textio Hire unlocks the best language to engage them, and puts it right on the page, wherever you're writing. Textio Hire gives you the words you need to attract the people you want to hire, using language that reflects the very best of your values and culture.



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