My name is Elizabeth Wynn. I'm the Equality and Diversity Manager at the Babraham Institute, and today I'm going to be talking about inclusive language. I'm going to be covering some guidelines, some specific examples, and then a couple of useful concepts.

Let's start by talking about why is this important, why is using inclusive language important? This is a lesson we probably all learned in primary school but it's worth repeating: your words have power.

The, our words can have huge impact. It can be positive: it makes you more approachable, it creates an inclusive and welcoming environment for everyone. But on the other hand language can be, unintentionally very often, hurtful, or offensive, or generate bad feeling between people.

So that's why we're talking about using inclusive language. It's not necessarily about memorising a list of what to say and what not to say. It's being aware of the impact of your words, being considerate about that and making a conscious effort for the language you use to reflect the values that you have.

I have a few caveats.

This isn't about controlling or judging what anyone says or thinks. This is not about censorship, it's about improving communication.

Language is always evolving and people have different opinions, and it can vary a lot by culture or by generation. So I do have a couple of specific examples, but I'm going to be focusing more on guidelines. So it's about being able to understand and work out the potential impacts of language. No one can give definitive answers on inclusive language.

If there's only one thing you take away from this this talk. I'd like it to be: the most important things are respect, empathy and an open mind. So by this I mean a learning mind set is what's the most important thing.

Moving on now to some guidelines. I'm going to start at the top and go clockwise round.

So first of all, be relevant. If someone's gender or ethnicity isn't relevant to the conversation you're having, there's no need to mention it. It can be quite othering to bring it up if it's not important to the conversation.

Be gender neutral and non-binary inclusive. Examples of being gender neutral: instead of using gendered words like fireman saying firefighter. Instead of saying chairman or chairwoman, say chair. So this helps us avoid assumptions about people and another really good example of this is instead of saying 'he or she' when you're talking about an abstract person is to say they. Microsoft Word has a proofing tool which will catch gendered words, some of them, not all of them, and I have a link at the end which includes a tutorial on how to do that. I think that can be quite useful.

Being non binary inclusive. This is things like saying all genders, rather than both genders. I was having a conversation with my father about this earlier this week (Hi, Dad. Sorry to put you on blast) and he asked me, why is it important to be inclusive of non-binary people, why make that effort for a group that's a really small percentage of the population.

And I would say in response to that, there's enough discrimination and unkindness in the world. Once you know how you can avoid that, I don't see why you wouldn't. And I think that says a lot about me, I wouldn't be in this role if I wasn't passionate about this sort of thing, but that's my response. And also, even though it might be a small percentage of people, they are still people who deserve respect and inclusion.

Avoid euphemisms about and victimhood of disabilities. So saying things like handicapable or differently abled. Disability is not taboo. We can be straightforward about it. And victimhood of disabilities: so associating having a disability with a very negative state. For example, saying someone suffers from or is afflicted by a disability, rather than that they just have a disability.

Also on the topic of disabilities don't make light of disabilities. For example, saying someone was deaf to my request. The underlying message there is that deaf people can't communicate when they can. The language that we use has an awful lot of phrases and things like that that we often don't consider the impact of the underlying message. And I'll be going into that a bit more later on.

Use language a person uses for themselves. That really just goes back to respect. I have a few examples coming up next of specific terminology but if someone wants to use, does use specific language for themselves that's how you should refer to them. Don't tell them, 'Oh, but I heard we're meant to say x and y now instead of that.'

The most important general guideline I have is: if you aren't sure look it up or ask. There are a lot of resources out there that can help you make your language more inclusive. I have some links at the end, which I will be tweeting out later. So you can absolutely find a lot of information on this.

Moving on to some specific examples now. I'll go through these quite quickly.

So confined to a wheelchair, use wheelchair user.

Oh, sorry. One thing I should have mentioned before I started this: as I said earlier, language can change, evolve. A lot of the time, there aren't definitive answers on what language is or isn't inclusive, but these are examples which there is currently a large consensus about so I feel confident saying don't use that, use this.

So confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair user. The reason for this is that a lot of wheelchair users don't regard their wheelchair as a negative. It's something which helps them move around and do things they wouldn't be able to do otherwise. And another way you can think about this: no one says of a person who wears glasses, 'Oh, they're confined to glasses. They are lens-bound.' It's an aid and so is a wheelchair.

The common man, say instead the average person. Being gender neutral.

Christian name. I don't think this is very common anymore, asking someone their Christian name or having a form that asks for it. But I did want to try and present a diverse array of examples here. So instead of Christian name saying first name or given name.

Instead of minorities, under represented group.

Disabled toilet or disabled parking space, instead using accessible toilet or accessible parking space. That's again focusing on the positive rather than negative side of that.

Transsexual is an older term. It's not commonly used much. There might be some one older who does use the term transsexual to describe themselves because that's the term they've used their whole life. But nowadays, the preferred terms are transgender, which is often shortened to trans, and it's transgender rather than transgendered because it's an adjective.

Guys to refer to a group. That's gendered so saying everyone, folks, all, something like that. And another example of this might be saying when addressing a group, 'ladies and gentlemen', instead say, depending on the formality of the event, perhaps 'honoured guests' or 'one and all'.

Mentally handicapped. The preferred terminology in the UK, and this does seem to be quite a UK specific thing, but in the UK, person or people with a learning disability. And this is something that charities, medical professionals, people with learning disabilities themselves, this is the terminology that's widely used in the UK.

Those are the specific examples I wanted to cover.

I'm going to be moving on to some useful concepts now. And this is where this talk becomes a bit of a mini sociology lesson so I hope I've managed to make it quite streamlined and straightforward. The reason I wanted to talk about these concepts is because a lot of what makes language inclusive or not is down to underlying assumptions and attitudes in society that are reflected in our language. And I think by having a better understanding of these underlying ideas, what makes language inclusive or not, it will help you identify why language is inclusive or not. So then it becomes less about memorising lists of what to say and what not to say and you'll be able to understand why language is inclusive or not and work it out yourself.

So some of the concepts I want to go over.

Ableism: practices and attitudes in society that assume there is an ideal body and mind that is better than all others. So you can see this attitude is where language like confined to a wheelchair or suffers from a disability comes from. Associating having a disability with being Inferior to not having a disability.

Heteronormativity: a default assumption of heterosexuality and stereotypical gender norms. An example of this would be asking a man, 'Do you have a wife?', rather than asking, 'Do you have a partner?' And I think that's less common nowadays but there are other times where it does come out and so by understanding the idea of heteronormativity, that there is this default assumption, it can help you understand where that language comes from.

Microaggression: brief and common communications that transmit derogatory or negative messages to a person because they belong to a marginalised group. This is quite a dense concept and I actually gave a talk on microaggressions a couple of weeks ago and you can find the slides, the recording and the transcript of that on the Babraham Institute website if you want to learn more about it. The reason I include this is because one thing which I think can come up a lot with inclusive language, a criticism that can come up, is that people are being too sensitive. It's just words. Understanding microaggressions, one of the most harmful things about them is how common they are how, sorry, how common they are. And it can really be the straw that breaks the camel's back. The ubiquity of them is one of the most harmful things about microaggressions, an example of which can be language which isn't inclusive.

Privilege: a right or advantage that only some people have access to because of their social group membership. Talking about privilege can be difficult. A lot of people can get defensive about it because they think, 'well, this isn't something I can help. I can't change the fact that I'm white, or male or straight.' Privilege I think, going back to that learning mind set idea, is an opportunity to learn about other people, about things you haven't thought about. A nice definition of privilege is the things we don't see because we've never had to see them. So if you view privilege not as an opportunity for guilt, but an opportunity for learning, that can help you understand why something might be harmful that you've never had to think about before.

Reclaimed words or language: words with a history of derogatory use that members of the oppressed group have decided to use for themselves. This might, this is another criticism perhaps, of

inclusive language that comes up sometimes, 'isn't it against the spirit of inclusion and equality and fairness if that group is allowed to use a word, but I'm not?' I think a good way to think about this is, 'I'm allowed to joke with my friends and make fun of them but if someone else makes fun of my friends, that's not okay.' That's where that sort of idea comes from. So one of the most obvious examples of this is the N word. Another example is the word queer to describe people who aren't straight and aren't cisgender. This one does have more leeway, less consensus about it. There are some queer people who use that word for themselves and are happy for anyone to use it. Other people really object to that word. So that's one to be cautious of.

Those are only a handful of concepts which can help you understand the underlying principles that make language inclusive or not. If you want to do your own research there's a lot more out there. For example, intersectionality is a useful one to know. And I do have links at the end with more information where you can do more research.

The final thing I want to remind you of again is: respect, empathy and an open mind. As I stated at the beginning, using inclusive language is all about being aware of the impact our words can have. And it really is about respect I think: being aware of people as individuals and wanting to be respectful and inclusive of everyone.