

Guidelines for inclusive language

Using language that is as inclusive as possible is a key part of creating a welcoming environment where everyone feels included. This guide contains general principles, some specific examples, and a partial glossary.

Language is always shifting, varies across cultures and people hold different opinions so there isn't a universal consensus. These recommendations are provided only as guidelines and aren't meant to censor opinions but rather improve communication. This document isn't definitive and will continue to evolve as we gain more perspectives and language changes so feedback is always welcome. The most important thing is to consider the impact of your language and be willing to learn and change.

General principles

- 1) **Don't mention a person's gender, ethnicity etc. unless it is relevant.**
- 2) **Be gender neutral** whenever you aren't speaking about a specific individual. Use *they/them* instead of *she/her* or *he/him* and use terms like *chair* and *humanity* instead of *chairman* and *mankind*. You can turn on a gender-specific proofreading tool in Word:
https://wordribbon.tips.net/T007543_Marking_Gender-Specific_Grammar.html
- 3) **Be inclusive of non-binary identities** by using phrases like *regardless of gender, all genders* or *different gender* rather than *men and women, both genders* or *opposite gender*.
- 4) **Use person first language.** For example, *people with disabilities* as opposed to *disabled people* or *the disabled*.
- 5) **Avoid phrases that suggest victimhood** when speaking about disability, e.g. *afflicted by, victim of, or suffers from*. Instead, say *person with [condition]*.
- 6) **Avoid euphemisms for disability** like *differently abled* or *special needs*.
- 7) **Don't use phrases or terms that make light of disabilities** like *blind/deaf to [something], lame, or crazy*. Mental health diagnoses like bipolar or OCD are conditions with serious impacts so don't use them to describe everyday behaviours.
- 8) **Avoid using language that promotes damaging stereotypes**, for example saying *man up* or referring to a woman as *emotional*.
- 9) **When talking about an individual**, use the language they use to refer to themselves.
- 10) **If you aren't sure, look it up or ask.** There are many resources to help you find inclusive language, including some links at the end of this document.

Specific examples

Avoid	Consider using
confined to a wheelchair; wheelchair-bound	wheelchair user
mentally handicapped; mentally defective; retarded	person with a learning disability
able-bodied	non-disabled
mental patient; insane; mad	person with a mental health condition
deaf and dumb; deaf mute	person with a hearing impairment; hard of hearing
(the) blind	people with visual impairments; people who are blind and partially sighted

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Avoid	Consider using
disabled toilet/parking space	accessible toilet/parking space
the common man	the average person
man-made	synthetic; artificial; machine-made
manpower	workers; workforce; staffing
ladies and gentlemen (when used as an announcement)	(esteemed) guests; one and all; friends; colleagues
guys (to refer to a group)	everyone; folks; people; all
wife/husband; girlfriend/boyfriend	spouse; partner; significant other
transsexual; transgendered	trans(gender)
transman; transwoman	trans man; trans woman
sexuality; sexual preference	sexual orientation
class	socioeconomic status
Oriental (when referring to a person)	East Asian
Christian name	first name; given name; forename
the elderly; senior citizen; pensioner	older person; older people; older adult
minorities	marginalised group; underrepresented group
normal; usual; default	a term that describes the group you are referring to e.g. non-disabled, cis(gender)

Glossary

Ableism: Practices and dominant attitudes in society that assume there is an ideal body and mind that is better than all others.

Cisgender: People whose gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth. Used as a counterpart to **transgender:** people whose gender identity does not match the gender they were assigned at birth.

Heteronormativity: A default assumption of heterosexuality and stereotypical gender norms.

Intersectionality: The interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, disability, and gender that can create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; [coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw](#).

Invisible (or hidden) disability: A disability that is not externally apparent such as a mental illness, chronic fatigue syndrome or diabetes.

Neurodiversity: The idea that neurological differences like autism and ADHD should be recognised and respected as any other human variation.

Nonbinary: Any gender identity that does not fit the male and female binary.

Privilege: A right or advantage that only some people have access or availability to because of their social group membership. Here's a well-known [exploration of white privilege](#).

Reclaimed language/words: Words with a history of derogatory use that members of the oppressed group have decided to use for themselves. Sometimes these types of words are still controversial within the community, like *queer*, and sometimes it is acceptable for members of the group to use a word but not those outside it, like the n-word, so care should be taken when using them. Here is an explanation around [reclaimed LGBTQ+ terminology](#).

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Links

Inclusive language

[Buffer](#): An Incomplete Guide to Inclusive Language for Startups and Tech

[Medium](#): 70 Inclusive Language Principles That Will Make You A More Successful Recruiter

[Care Quadrant](#): Inclusive Language Examples

[Idealist](#): A Guide to Inclusive Language in the Workplace

[British Medical Association](#): A guide to effective communication: inclusive language in the workplace

[Chartered Insurance Institute](#): Inclusive language guidelines

LGBT+ specific

[Stonewall](#): Glossary of terms

[The Safe Zone](#): LGBTQ-Inclusive Language Dos and Don'ts

[University of Maryland LGBT Equity Center](#): Good Practices: Inclusive Language

Disability specific

[Colorado State University Student Disability Center](#): Inclusive Language: Unhandicap Your Language

[National Center on Disability and Journalism](#): Disability Language Style Guide

[Disability Wales/Anabledd Cymru](#): Inclusive Language and Imagery

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