



GENDER SENSITIVE LANGUAGE

GUIDELINE - ENGLISH

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INTRODUCTION

“Language is a reflection of the attitudes, behaviours and norms within a society. It also shapes people’s attitudes as to what is ‘normal’ and acceptable.”^[1]

Language is a strong source of perceptions of the world, which means that if we want a society that focusses on gender equality, we should be careful on how we use our languages. In this protocol of gender sensitive language, we want to highlight some of the most important and most common ways on how to use our language(s) so that all genders feel included. By using gender sensitive language, we support gender equality and respectful addressing of everyone. There are so many options between male and female that we cannot leave them unnoticed!

WHAT DOES GENDER SENSITIVE LANGUAGE MEAN?^[2, 3]

- **Use language in order to make clear who you are talking about.**
Remember not to use gender if it is not necessary but fosters stereotypes (p.ex.: “The cleaning lady used a full day to clean all the windows in the house.” If this is a fact and needs no discussion, you could omit the lady and just write about the “cleaning person”.)
- **Find forms of language that represents all genders equally** so that everybody feels addressed
- **Use language in an inclusive and respectful way**
- **Recognize and challenge stereotypes**
p.ex. by acknowledging that not all women like to shop and that it is ok if boys cry. Being exposed to stereotypes like that hurts people of all genders by placing expectations on what they should be like.

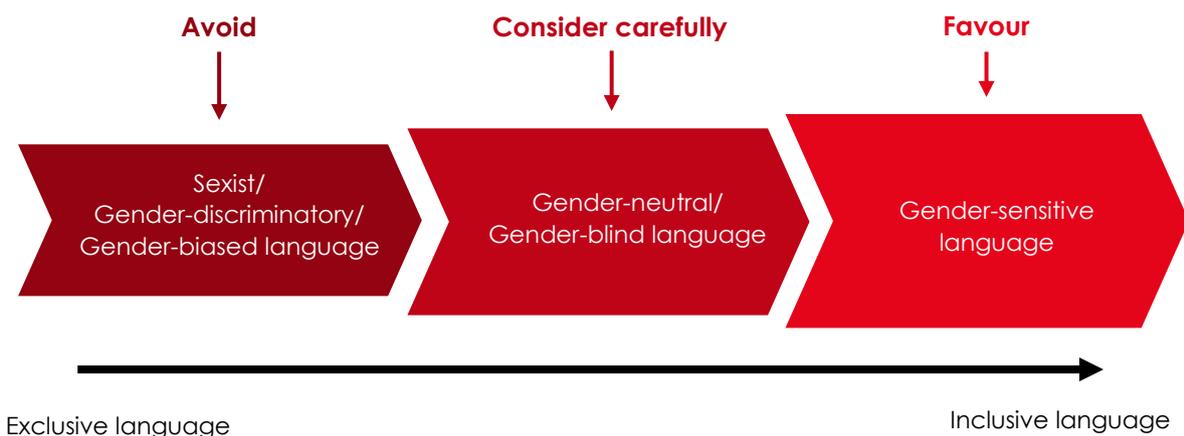


Figure 1: The inclusivity scale in language (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020)^[4]

It is recommended to favour the most inclusive form of language: gender-sensitive language. In certain contexts, it may also be acceptable to use gender-neutral language.

WHY SHOULD I EVER MENTION GENDER?[5]

One way to not use discriminating language is to use gender-neutral expressions. This is p.ex. recommended when discussing occupations (police officer instead of police man, chair/chairperson instead of chairman, workforce instead of manpower, ...)

When it comes to situations where gender-neutral expressions would hide important differences in the roles, situations and needs of some genders, gender-sensitive language might be more appropriate. This is p. ex. the case when discussing male violence on women:

| EXAMPLES OF GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE | WHY GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE IN THIS CONTEXT | BETTER LANGUAGE (GENDER-SENSITIVE) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| In 2014, 14% of people aged 18-65 stated that they had experienced sexual violence in the previous year. | This language may obscure that fact that women are disproportionately exposed to sexual violence and result in support services not being designed in a way that takes this into account. For example, insufficient numbers of women doctors may be employed to examine victims. And if sexual violence is a relatively uncommon experience for men, male victims may need extra support to come forward. | In 2014, 23% of women and 5% of men aged 18-65 stated that they had experienced sexual violence in the previous year. |

Table 1: Avoiding Invisibility or Omission: Take care with "false generics"

! TIP

We recommend that **law-** and **policymakers** always aim to use **gender-sensitive language** rather than gender-neutral language. Giving visibility to gender is an important way for public policy to positively affect all members of society. The gender perspective may not immediately be obvious, but there is almost always an important gender dimension to public policy.^[6]

HOW DO I DO THAT? – IDEAS ON HOW TO ADDRESS ALL GENDERS EQUALLY

Underline and asterisk

In English (as well as in German) the underscore _ as well as the asterisk * become more and more popular. Their meaning is that people do not have to decide whether they feel male or female, but that each gender is addressed.

Dear Sirs, ^[7, 8]

Here are some suggestions on how to address different groups of people in a gender sensitive way:

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  Dear Sirs, Dear Sir or Madam, Dear Ladies or Gentlemen |  To Whom it May Concern |
|  Miss, Mrs. |  Ms |
|  landlord |  owner, proprietor |
|  brotherhood kinship |  solidarity, human fellowship, human |
|  businessman |  business manager, business person, business people |
|  Fire is the man's greatest invention |  Fire is humanity's greatest invention |
|  Come on, guys! (for a mixed group) man – lady men - girls spokesman chairman postman policeman salesman |  Come on everybody! man – woman, gentleman - lady men – women, boys – girls spokesperson, representative chairperson, chair, president letter carrier police officer sales assistant, shop assistant |

Him*her*they ^[9, 10]

In case you address a third person, you can use one of the forms below:

 A student must bring his textbook to class.

 A student must bring his*her textbook to class.
A student must bring a textbook to class.
A student must bring their textbook to class.
Students must bring their textbook(s) to class.

 Each employee should report his progress to the supervisor.

 You should report your progress to the supervisor.

It also becomes more and more popular to state the pronouns which one would like others to use for him*herself directly with the name. A business card or email signature then might look like that:

Francis Helford
he/him/his

Maria Bonfire
she/her/her

Amber Righteous
ze/zir/zirs

TIP

Do not automatically assume transgender people identify as “non-binary”. Many transgender people do identify with one gender; this gender may just differ to the one assigned to them at birth.^[11]

If the preferred pronoun for a person is unknown, it becomes more and more common in standard English to use “they”:

*“The number of years an electrician will spend in training depends on what country **they** are from.”*

Despite some grammar experts claim that “they” cannot be used with a singular person, the reality is that people use it that way. If you still prefer to use plural with they, this is just as easily done:

*“The number of years **electricians** will spend in training depends on what country they are from.”*

| SUBJECT | OBJECT | POSSESSIVE | REFLEXIVE | EXAMPLE |
|---------|---------|------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| She | Her | Hers | Herself | She is speaking. I listen to her. The backpack is hers |
| He | Him | His | Himself | He is speaking. I listen to him. The backpack is his |
| They | Them | Theirs | Themselves | They are speaking. I listen to them. The backpack is theirs |
| Ze | Hir/Zir | Hirs/Zirs | Hirself / Zirself | Ze is speaking. I listen to hir. The backpack is zirs |

Table 2: Overview of Gender Pronouns. (adapted from Trans Student Education Resources ^[12])

Variations of she and he to combat stereotypes

In case you need to emphasize the action of an individual, you should ideally choose pronouns that work counter to prevailing stereotypes:

*Gradually, a child will see the resemblance between block creations and objects in **her** world and **she** will begin to name some structures, like “house” and “door”.*

*The kitchen can serve as a center for new experiences, an interesting place where important things happen, and where **he** has a chance to learn about the way adult things are done. ^[13]*

GENDER SENSITIVITY BESIDES SPOKEN OR WRITTEN LANGUAGE

Gender sensitive images

In order to break with stereotypes, it is very important to use images in a gender-sensitive manner. The following is essential:

- All genders should be depicted with equal frequency
- Equivalent representation for portrait photos (size, facial expression, colour, foreground, background etc.)
- All genders are to be positioned and arranged equally
- All genders are to be represented equally in picture details
- Avoid and break down stereotypes > consciously present each gender in the "other" roles
- Good tool for analysis: imagine the reverse

Using emojis in a gender sensitive way

Emoticons are already very popular on social media and more and more possibilities to express your thoughts or underline your arguments are developed and offered. If using those emojis, be careful to also use women in active roles (sports, professionals) and men in non-stereotypical pursuits (cutting hair, dancing, ...). Also remember to use different genders and skin colours throughout your communication.

Color as a marker of gender

If something is pink, it is for girls and if something is blue, it is for boys. In order to combat those stereotypes, it is very important to NOT use colors this way. Furthermore, stereotypes can be transported by some words that are usually used when addressing women in a derogatory way. Try to omit them or find better alternatives:^[14]

✘ bossy

✔ assertive

✘ emotional

✔ passionate

✘ shrill

✔ high pitched voice

✘ hysterical

✔ irrational

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