

LET'S THINK INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION!

GENDER-SENSITIVE LANGUAGE

A lot of people are left out by the use of binary language. Here's how to include everyone in a few simple steps:

TIP: Always respect how a colleague self-identifies!

To support everyone, you may add "he/him, she/her or they/them" in your signature if you wish.



AVOID

- ⊘ He/she, him/her, s/he
- ⊘ Both genders
- ⊘ Husband/wife
- ⊘ Ladies and Gentlemen



FAVOUR

- ✓ He or she, him or her, They/them
- ✓ All genders
- ✓ Spouse/partner
- ✓ Dear Colleagues/Dear Guests/
Dear Participants/Dear Attendees

Using this option at least once in combination with the **general rules**, signals your intention to be gender-neutral

General rules:

- **Use plural forms**
(*'officials/ staff members/ staff shall carry out their duties ...'*)
- **Use the imperative**
(*'please send your CV to ...'*)
- **Omit the pronoun altogether**
(*'an official's salary is dependent on ~~his/her~~ the length of service'*)
- **Use gender-neutral job titles**



AVOID

- ⊘ Chairman/Chairwoman
- ⊘ Spokesman/Spokeswoman



FAVOUR

- ✓ Chair/Chairperson
- ✓ Spokesperson

On the few occasions when the focus is specifically on women, remember the following:



AVOID

- ⊘ Mrs or Miss
- ⊘ Female/Male



FAVOUR

- ✓ Ms
- ✓ Women / Men

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



AVOID

- ⊘ Phrases like 'suffers from' and passive 'victim' words, or expressions such as 'disabled' persons
- ⊘ Terms that define the disability as a limitation
- ⊘ Do not use collective nouns such as 'the deaf' as these groups are not homogeneous



USE

- ✓ Use person-first language: a person with a disability **e.g. Persons with disabilities, Persons who are blind**
- ✓ Emphasise each person's individuality and capabilities rather than defining them by a condition **e.g. Person with autism or child with Down's syndrome**

Remember that a large majority of disabilities are **invisible**.

For more information, check the [guide on inclusive communication for persons with disability](#).



FURTHER TIPS ON BIAS-FREE LANGUAGE

Avoid words, labels or expressions that can offend, demean or exclude people, including factors such as age, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, ethnicity or appearance.



AVOID

- ❌ Gypsies
- ❌ Homosexuals
- ❌ Transsexual
- ❌ General terms such as Asian or African
- ❌ Old person/ old people / the elderly
- ❌ Christian name



FAVOUR

- ✅ Roma
- ✅ Gay/lesbian/LGBTI persons
- ✅ A trans/transgender person
- ✅ Specific nationalities such as Indian, Nigerian or people living in Southeast Asia/Northern Africa, etc.
- ✅ Older colleagues, older people, people over XX years old
- ✅ First name, forename or given name

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE AT WORK



AVOID

- ❌ *Man up!*
- ❌ *That is such a woman thing to say.*
- ❌ *One of the lovely ladies (=administrative assistants) in the office will answer your call.*

Some 'compliments' risk being received as put-downs

- 👎 *You think just like a man.*
- 👎 *You are very feminine for a career woman.*
- 👎 *Despite his age, he has a grip on Webex.*
- 👎 *Congratulations! Even as a woman, you managed to become a Director.*



European Union
EXTERNAL ACTION

This factsheet is not exhaustive and you are welcome to get in touch with the Diversity & Inclusion at Work team for further information.

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