



A Guide to Inclusive Language

What is inclusive language?

Inclusive language is the use of words and phrases that avoid biases and discrimination. It involves carefully considering the impact of the language we use in order to create environments where every individual feels they belong and is accepted for their true, authentic selves.

What are the principles?

Language is always evolving and everyone has different personal preferences when it comes to identity, which means there are no definitive rules.

But there are key principles that will help you build a more inclusive approach.

Don't use language that:

- Reinforces stereotypes
- Reinforces derogatory labels
- Excludes certain ground by making assumptions
- Patronises or trivialises the experiences of certain groups
- Causes discomfort

Do use language that:

- Acknowledges diversity and conveys respect for all
- Challenges biases
- Avoids assumptions that may exclude certain groups
- Respects people's wish to share information about themselves if and when they feel comfortable to do so
- Recognises the individual lived experiences within certain groups

What if I get it wrong?

It's ok to make mistakes. Changing embedded habits and learning new habits takes time and practise. Apologise, correct what you said, learn from the mistake and continue to work to communicate more inclusively.



Language Dos and Don'ts

Age

Avoid

The elderly, old, pensioners
The young, youths

The boys/girls in the office

A young and vibrant team
A mature workforce

Try

Elderly person or people
Young person or adults

The men/women in the office

An effective and vibrant team
An experienced workforce

Why

These are generalisations that imply people are defined by being part of a certain group

Addressing adults with childlike terms is patronising

Avoid using phrases that imply that a particular age group is more or less able

Disability

Avoid

The disabled/handicapped

Normal, healthy, able-bodied

Disabled toilets/lifts

Wheelchair-bound
Cancer or dementia victims

Down's Syndrome person
Autistic child

Challenged, special, retarded, slow
Deaf and dumb
Mad, psycho

Try

People with disabilities

People without a disability

Accessible toilets/lifts

Wheelchair user
Person living with cancer or dementia

Person with Down's Syndrome
Child diagnosed with autism

Person with a learning disability
People who are deaf
People with a mental illness

Why

These are blanket terms

Suggests health or "normalcy" only applies to people without disabilities

Focus on positive language rather than that which applies limitations

Avoid negative terms that overstate the effect of a person's disability or illness on their abilities

This implies that a person is defined by their disability

These are outdated, offensive and euphemistic

Gender

Gender identity refers to an individual's own sense of gender, i.e. they may identify as a man, woman, both, neither, or something else, regardless of biological sex. The most inclusive approach is to avoid references to a person's gender and use gender-neutral terms instead.

Avoid

She, her, hers
He, him, his

Ladies and gentleman
Anyone who wants his work
evaluated

Wife, husband, boyfriend, girlfriend

Ladies, girls, son, love, sweetie,
darling

Mankind
Man up
Best man for the job

Try

They, them, theirs (you can use "they"
in the singular)

Friends and colleagues
Anyone who wants their work
evaluated

Spouse, partner

The person's name, their professional
title, or friends and colleagues

Humankind
Toughen up
Best person for the job

Why

Respect the preferences of those who
want to be referred to by gender-
neutral pronouns

Use gender-neutral phrases that
don't assume people's gender identity

Avoid terms that don't respect all types
of relationships

These terms are patronising

Avoid outdated, misogynistic phrases

Sexual orientation

Avoid

Sexual preference, lifestyle choice

Lesbians, gays, bisexuals

Mother and father

Try

Sexual orientation

Lesbian, gay or bisexual people

Parents, guardians, caregivers

Why

Implies a level of choice in sexual
orientation

Use language that is people focused

This doesn't recognise the diversity
of families

Race, ethnicity or nationality

The UK is a racially diverse country so it's important not to assume that a person's appearance defines their nationality.

Avoid

Asians, Africans

The Asian Doctor

Chinese people are really good at maths
You speak such good English

Coloured

Try

Asian people, African people

The doctor

Just don't say it!

Person of colour, although it is much better to be as specific as possible for example black or brown person

Why

When it is necessary to refer to someone's race, use it as a description rather than a pronoun

Avoid using irrelevant ethnic descriptions - this only encourages discrimination

These are stereotypes that promote negative and patronising generalisations about certain groups

This is outdated and offensive

Religion or belief

Avoid

Christian name
Surname, last name

What is your religion?
Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Other

Try

First name, given name
Family Name

Do you regard yourself as belonging to a particular religion or belief? If so, what is your religion or belief?

Why

Avoid Christian-centric terms, as well as the term "last name" as this excludes people that place their family name first

Forms should avoid placing prominence of certain religions over others, and provide options for both religion and beliefs

How can Tell Jane help?

Tell Jane works with organisations across the UK to build diverse and inclusive workplaces where every individual feels they belong.

Call us on 0800 689 0802
Email us at hello@telljane.co.uk
Visit us at telljane.co.uk