



UQ GUIDE TO USING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE



THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

Create change

The University of Queensland is committed to further developing and maintaining an, equitable, diverse and inclusive place of work and study. By practising the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion we seek to create a vibrant and inclusive environment that allows ideas to flourish, people to be empowered and communities to grow. Inclusive language is an important aspect of practising diversity and inclusion.



What is inclusive language?

Inclusive language is language that is respectful and promotes the acceptance and value of all people. It is language which is free from words, phrases or tones that demean, insult, exclude, stereotype, infantilise or trivialise people on the basis of their membership of a certain group or because of a particular attribute.

Inclusive language is not about impinging on free speech or political correctness; it is about communicating in a way that is accessible and respectful and values, includes and empowers all members of your audience.

Language is dynamic and fluid and the meaning and connotations of words can change rapidly. It is important that you apply the inclusive language principles outlined in this guideline, rather than learning specific appropriate phrases, as these may change over time.

Why is language important?

Language is extremely powerful. Language can consciously or unconsciously offend, intimidate, belittle, exclude, reinforce harmful stereotypes and contribute to the unequal status of individuals. Language can also have very positive effects on people. When inclusive language is used it can make people feel included, valued and empowered. The University of Queensland values people-centric inclusive language which values and respects the diversity of people, and sees people as people – not as a stereotype, attribute or characteristic.

Principles of inclusive language

- Any group interactions should be applied with care and consideration, with an **awareness of the diversity** within and between groups, and always be couched in inclusive terms.
- Use **people-centric language**, which focuses on the person and reflects the individuality of people. People-centric language doesn't classify or stereotype people based on their association or identity with a group or culture.
- Only reference personal attributes or characteristics when it is **relevant to the context**.
- Consider a **strengths-based approach** (recognising the resilience of individuals and focussing on abilities, knowledge and capacities), rather than a deficit approach (focussing on deficiencies or supposed failings of a person, or group of people).
- Where appropriate, ask about the language the person prefers and respect their wishes. **Don't make assumptions** about people or their characteristics based on stereotypes or limited information.
- **Be conscious of the implications of your language.** Avoid excluding others or making people invisible by your choice of language. Avoid language and expressions that disparage or trivialise others.
- Where possible, empower the person or group to **speak for themselves**. If you do need to speak on the behalf of a group of people, it is very important that you consult widely to ensure that the language you use is reflective of the group.
- **Address and remove stereotypes and myths.** If someone uses inappropriate language in your presence speak out against it and correct the inappropriate language used, if safe.
- Ensure that the language and the delivery of your material is accessible to a diverse audience with diverse needs.
- Be aware of the **context of the language** being used. Some terms are ok to use by people as a means of claiming their identity, but are not ok, and can be seen as derogatory, when used by others.



In using inclusive language, it is useful to keep the following generic questions in mind:

- Is it necessary to refer to a person or groups' personal characteristics?
- If it is, are the references to personal characteristics couched in inclusive terms?
- Do the references to people reflect the diversity of the intended audience, and is the material accessible to the intended audience?
- Are you excluding people in the design and delivery of your material?

Use of inclusive language in educational and workplace settings

Each of us has a responsibility to appreciate the diversity of our community, and take care to ensure we are inclusive of all members of our community; whether this is talking informally with one person, in a lecture, or addressing a meeting. We also have a responsibility to make sure that reasonable members of our community do not perceive what we say as being discriminatory, sexist, racist, homophobic, or otherwise offensive. The University will not tolerate the use of discriminatory or offensive language.

Some specific ways that you can implement inclusive language in educational and workplace settings are:

- Ensure educational and professional development materials, for example case studies and examples in lectures and professional development settings, accurately reflect the diversity of the audience and society generally.
- When referencing material that includes non-inclusive language, use [sic] to demonstrate that this was used by the original author and is unacceptable language.
- When using examples in lectures or professional development workshops, avoid limiting the inclusion of people to only the area of their diversity.
- Ensure everything you do in the work and study space, such as developing lecture slides, developing and maintaining websites, scheduling meetings, is accessible for a diverse audience. This includes the language used and the way it is delivered.
- Educate yourself on cultural differences to ensure that your material and the delivery of your material are not offensive in cross-cultural communications.
- Address and remove stereotypes or inappropriate language in all instances, including casual conversation, such as a catch up over coffee, or discussions in tutorials.
- If someone uses inappropriate language in your presence, it is good practice to use a positive, educative approach to inform the person why the language they used is inappropriate, and offer an alternative approach they could use next time.



Examples

Please see the table below for some examples of good practice inclusive language when referring to a person's characteristics, or a group of people, and examples of language to avoid.

Some general principles to consider

| ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES | |
|---|--|
| GOOD PRACTICE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE | LANGUAGE AND PRACTICES TO AVOID |
| <p>Be conscious of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Acknowledge the historical context and present systemic barriers faced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.</p> <p>Always use capitals when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, i.e. 'First Peoples', 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' peoples or 'Indigenous Australian' peoples or 'Aboriginal' person.</p> <p>Where possible, consult with the local Traditional Owner groups to ensure that the language and practices are reflective of the community.</p> <p>Refer to an Aboriginal person by their clan if it is known, for example 'Turrbul woman' rather than 'an Aboriginal woman'.</p> | <p>Always use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in full and don't abbreviate to 'ATSI'.</p> <p>Aboriginal shouldn't be used as a noun, e.g., the aboriginal. The word 'aborigine' should be avoided when referring to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as it is a generic term for the original inhabitant of any country.</p> <p>Don't isolate or exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, for example stating that 'all Australians have access to quality medical care' excludes the lived experience of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.</p> <p>Don't trivialise or misrepresent important cultural beliefs and practices such as referring to the Dreamtime as myths or legends.</p> <p>Don't make assumptions about someone's ancestry based on their physical features. Terms such as 'half-caste', 'full-blood' and 'part Aboriginal' should not be used.</p> |
| GENDER | |
| GOOD PRACTICE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE | LANGUAGE AND PRACTICES TO AVOID |
| <p>Only use gendered language when it is appropriate for the context, e.g., use the Chair rather than Chairman.</p> <p>Ask someone what their preferred pronouns (e.g., he, she, they, zie) and respectfully use them correctly.</p> <p>Use gender neutral pronouns where possible e.g., avoid 'the new employer may exercise his right' instead use 'the new employer may exercise their right'.</p> | <p>Avoid using unnecessary gender references, e.g., the male nurse or the woman doctor, unless it is appropriate for the context.</p> <p>Don't make an assumption about someone's gender based on their name or physical features.</p> <p>Don't use gender references in a demeaning or trivialising way, e.g., 'throw like a girl'.</p> <p>Don't infantilise particular groups (referring to groups or individuals as a child or in a way which denies their maturity in age or experience), for example, the 'girls in the office'.</p> |
| CULTURE | |
| GOOD PRACTICE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE | LANGUAGE AND PRACTICES TO AVOID |
| <p>Only reference someone's cultural background when it is appropriate for the context. Generally it is unnecessary to refer to someone's cultural background, but if you do need to use people-centric language e.g., person of Sudanese descent.</p> <p>Educate yourself on someone's culture and respect cultural differences that may be present. In cross-cultural communication you should ensure that your language is simple and accessible and body language isn't offensive.</p> | <p>Avoid undue emphasis on differences, e.g., introducing all your colleagues, but describing one as 'Chinese'.</p> <p>Avoid making someone's culture invisible, e.g., the use of umbrella terms such as 'Asians' ignores the multiple ethnicities within Asia. Instead refer to the persons ethnicity where appropriate, e.g., Indonesian, Chinese etc.</p> |

| DISABILITY | |
|--|--|
| GOOD PRACTICE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE | LANGUAGE AND PRACTICES TO AVOID |
| <p>Use people centric language: the disability doesn't define the person; i.e., person with disability or people with disability.</p> <p>Use a strength based approach, such as 'person experiencing poor mental health', rather than 'they are schizophrenic' or 'crazy person'.</p> <p>Ensure that the language and delivery of your message is accessible to all audiences. Utilise the accessibility check in programs, such as Microsoft Word, and ensure that you practice website accessibility.</p> | <p>Avoid inappropriate language such as cripple, handicapped, mental patient, 'wheelchair bound', 'disabled person'.</p> <p>Avoid using language like 'retard' or 'spaz' in any way or context, e.g., 'the computer is having a spaz' or 'you are such a retard'.</p> <p>Avoid using 'inspiration porn' language, e.g., saying someone with a disability is 'an inspiration' or 'brave' or 'amazing' for doing everyday things such as going to work.</p> <p>Never make assumptions about disability, some disabilities may be invisible.</p> |
| SEXUALITY | |
| GOOD PRACTICE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE | LANGUAGE AND PRACTICES TO AVOID |
| <p>If you don't know use inclusive language such as 'partner' (rather than 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend'), to refer to someone's significant other, unless the preferred term is specified by the person.</p> <p>Considering referring to 'sexuality, gender and sex diversity' rather than the LGBTI acronym to be more inclusive.</p> | <p>Avoid using 'gay' in a derogatory way, e.g., 'that's so gay'.</p> <p>Avoid using the word 'queer' as this can be offensive to some people. Generally 'queer' is used by some of the community.</p> <p>Avoid making assumptions about someone's sexuality, or building stereotypes e.g., he must be gay he's so flamboyant.</p> |
| AGE | |
| GOOD PRACTICE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE | LANGUAGE AND PRACTICES TO AVOID |
| <p>Only refer to age when relevant to the context, and when it is necessary use people-centric language e.g., older adults or younger people.</p> | <p>Avoid stereotypes, e.g., old men are grumpy, old people won't adapt to new technologies or "Millennials" are compulsive job-hoppers.</p> |

More information

For more information about inclusive language, please contact the **Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Unit** and/or the **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit** or [Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor \(Indigenous Engagement\)](#).

Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment Policy.

People may also consult with a UQ **Discrimination and Harassment Contact Officer (DHCO)**.

Support for staff is also available through the **Employee Assist Program**.

Student Services provides **counselling services** for UQ students.





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