



Diversity & Inclusion

Inclusive Language Toolkit



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Align Your Words with Your Intentions. An impulse by Suzanne Wertheim, Ph.D.

To create an inclusive work atmosphere means acknowledging and confronting bias, seeking out different perspectives, and creating safe spaces where everyone feels included. In our daily work we can contribute to this by incorporating inclusive language into our interactions and communication.

Every single thing you say and write can cause a relationship to improve or deteriorate. This includes relationships between coworkers, between a manager and report, between a job candidate and an interviewer, and between a company and a prospective client.

Inclusive language makes people feel seen, heard, and valued. Like they have been taken into consideration and are safe. Like they matter. Simultaneously, inappropriate language has a deep impact and the potential to drive away prospective candidates, demotivate high-performing employees or even end a sales deal worth millions. So, in order to optimize your personal and professional relationships, it is important to identify and shift away from problematic language.

Instead of memorizing a long list of “good” and “bad” words, you can use the **Six Principles of Inclusive Language** as your guide. These principles will allow you to navigate inclusive language both today and in the future. They are:

- Reflect reality
- Show respect
- Draw people in
- Incorporate other perspectives
- Prevent erasure
- Recognize pain points

The specific words you use to be inclusive will change from language to language and region to region, but the principles will hold true. You can use the following toolkit to shift to more inclusive language, and make sure that your language is aligned with your good intentions.

Adapted from The Inclusive Language Field Guide.

The Six Principles of Inclusive Language



The Six Principles of Inclusive Language allow you to navigate communication without an official guide of “acceptable” and “unacceptable” words. You can use the principles to discuss language on your own and identify both inappropriate and inclusive communication in your own language and region. Learn more about two of the principles below:

Reflect reality

Description:

Inclusive language reflects reality. Inappropriate language distorts, ignores, or manipulates reality.

Examples:

It is common in many languages to use masculine words as if they represent people of all genders (such as English mankind or sportsmanship). It is also common to use language that suggests that there are only two genders (such as English “ladies and gentlemen” to address a crowd).

Implementation:

Whenever possible, shift away from words that only represent specific genders. Instead, you can use words that acknowledge all kinds of genders and that represent everybody. A good example is addressing an audience as “esteemed guests” rather than “ladies and gentlemen” or using words like humankind and artisan instead of mankind or craftsman.

Incorporate other perspectives

Description:

Inclusive language incorporates other perspectives, while inappropriate language presents a single perspective, as if it is universal.

Examples:

Sometimes, words like “everyone”, “we”, “you” and “all of us” are used in ways that forget about people’s experiences. For example, a statement like, “We all honor our mothers on Mother’s Day!” leaves out all kinds of people — people with two fathers, people raised by grandparents, people raised in foster care, and more.

Implementation:

When using words like “everyone” and “we” and “you” and “all of us”, run a check to see if someone’s perspective is being forgotten about. Examples of people whose perspectives are commonly excluded are ethnic and racial minorities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community and people who didn’t grow up middle class or above.



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Show respect

Description:

Inclusive language shows respect for other people. Inappropriate language expresses disrespect.

Examples:

People with low-frequency names often find that their names are misspelled, mispronounced, or given up on altogether. They also are often given nicknames against their will by people who find their full name too challenging.

Implementation:

Put in the time and effort to correctly spell and pronounce the low-frequency names of people you encounter through work. Do not jump to a nickname if it is not offered to you. Whenever possible, ask for and then use a way of addressing someone or title that match someone's gender.

Draw people in

Description:

Inclusive language draws people in. Inappropriate language excludes or marginalizes people.

Examples:

People with perceptible disabilities are frequently marginalized or ignored in conversations. For example, wheelchair users report that people often act as if they are not there, speaking only to people near them. Or people act as if they are incompetent, and express surprise that they are intelligent, able to hold jobs, etc.

Implementation:

When interacting with someone with a perceptible disability, treat them the way you treat people who aren't perceptibly disabled. Talk directly to them and avoid language that expresses surprise that they are intelligent and competent.



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Prevent erasure

Description:

Inclusive language prevents erasure. Inappropriate language erases people and histories.

Examples:

Phrases like English “Hey, guys” and “you guys” erase people who aren’t male. Their use can alienate and offend people who don’t feel represented by the word guys.

Implementation:

Whenever possible, replace phrases like English “Hey, guys” and “you guys” with phrases that include people of all genders. In English, this can include, “Hi, everyone,” and “hey, team,” and “you all...”

Recognize pain points

Description:

Inclusive language recognizes pain points and avoids them whenever possible. Inappropriate language ignores or lightly references painful history and experiences and itself causes pain.

Examples:

Avoid loosely using terms for mental illness, such as English crazy, psycho, and insane. Using these words can be harmful to individuals actually dealing with mental health issues.

Implementation:

Come up with alternatives for mental health terms you might use too loosely. For example, in English instead of saying something is crazy good, you could use words like super, extremely, or incredibly.



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