

Guideline

# GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

English Version

**Guidelines to gender-sensitive and inclusive language for employees, students and teachers at the IU International University of Applied Sciences.**

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# INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most important instruments of communication. It shapes our thoughts and influences our perception. We, therefore, need to speak and write in non-discriminatory and gender inclusive language. Until the 1970s the generic masculine was in standard use and considered the neutral form for pronouns. Subsequent changes in society, such as the women's movement, have led to questioning the generic masculine. Today, we cannot ignore these changes in society and language and need to include and address everyone in our texts, whether oral or written, formal or informal. By 'everyone' we mean not only women or men, non-binary people, or people with disabilities, but all individuals and collectives. We, at IU want to be a part of this change. We want to overcome stereotypes and gender bias, treat each other with respect and ensure equal opportunities. These guidelines for gender inclusive language are created for these reasons. The guidelines are not a set of strict rules that must be adhered to, but should rather raise awareness for gender sensitivity, provide best

practices and specific assistance to those who are unsure how to communicate in a gender inclusive way.

**WE, AT IU WANT TO OVERCOME STEREOTYPES AND GENDER BIAS, TREAT EACH OTHER WITH RESPECT AND ENSURE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES.**

**The main goals of inclusive language are:** to only mention the gender, if it's relevant for the text; use gender neutral expressions and; if necessary, both female and male pronouns. The following best practices and strategies for gender inclusive language are just examples and may or may not be suitable for your situation. The best strategy always depends on the type of text. Ideally, the strategy used should make the text more gender inclusive without affecting its readability or understandability.





# BEST PRACTICES FOR GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

The following strategies aim to help make your language more inclusive. You can use them in oral speech or in written documents. Depending on the situation or type of document, you may find some strategies more useful than others. Whether you are staff or a student at IU, our goal is to give you some best practice examples, so you can choose which one is best for your situation.

## PLURAL FORMS

Using the plural form is a simple strategy to avoid gendered pronouns (his, her). It is inclusive and easy to use, as complicated sentence structures are avoided. You can use this strategy in an announcement or general statement about a specific group of people (students/tutors etc.).

### Avoid

**Every student** must show **his** ID to the examiner, before taking the exam.

**A representative** of the senate must fulfil **his** duties with great care.

### Use instead

**Students** must show **their** ID to the examiner, before taking the exam.

**Representatives** of the senate must fulfil **their** duties with great care.

## SINGULAR USE OF “THEY” AND ASSOCIATED FORMS

Nowadays it is acceptable to use ‘they’ and its associated forms (“their”, “them”, “themselves”) with singular nouns as a gender-neutral alternative in English (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d).

### Avoid

Every professor is responsible for preparing **his** lectures.

Each participant needs to fill in a form stating that the document was written by **himself**.

Every student needs to contact **her** supervisor at least once a week.

### Use instead

Every professor is responsible for preparing **their** lectures.

Each participant needs to fill in a form stating that the document was written by **themselves**.

Every student needs to contact **their** supervisor at least once a week.





## OMITTING PRONOUNS

Sentences can easily be restructured, to remove the need for gendered pronouns. However, depending on the (con)text, this strategy may seem too impersonal and should be used sparingly. In legal texts, for example, this is a frequently used strategy which shows gender inclusivity.

Avoid	Use instead
A student must have completed the course before <b>he</b> may <b>register</b> for the exam.	A student must have completed the course before <b>registering</b> for the exam.
A person must have completed high school before <b>he</b> may <b>apply</b> for a course of study at a University.	A person must have completed high school before <b>applying</b> for a course of study at a University.

<sup>1</sup> The strategies in this guideline are not invented by IU, they are a collection of well-known strategies which have been/are used for gender inclusive language in European institutions and universities (see literature).

## MULTIPLE PRONOUNS

It is also possible to use multiple pronouns. However, this strategy should be used with caution, as it makes sentences longer and may distract the reader. It can also seem outdated, as unlike ‘they’, it does not include non-binary persons.

If you choose to use this strategy, e.g. for job descriptions it is important to use one version e.g. : (he/she, s/he, he or she) , (his/her, his or her)

### Examples for job descriptions

**He/She** is responsible for establishing communication with different stakeholders.

**His/Her** main tasks are administrative.

### General examples

A student needs to report back to **his or her** supervisor once a week.

A student needs to report back to **his/her** supervisor once a week.

Pronouns	Sentence
S/he	
He or she	will reply within one or two days.
He/she	

## THE PASSIVE VOICE

Using the passive voice is another alternative to the generic masculine. However, the passive voice changes the emphasis of the text, and should therefore be used carefully. Nevertheless, depending on the type of text, this strategy may be a favourable solution. For example, when giving instructions to a group of people (students, employees etc.).

Avoid	Use instead
Every employee must complete his onboarding programme within two weeks.	The onboarding programme must be completed by all employees within two weeks.
Every student must submit his worksheet by Wednesday.	Worksheets must be submitted by Wednesday.

## IMPERATIVE

The imperative not only helps to restructure a sentence, making it more inclusive, but also emphasises a call for action, making the text more dynamic. Additionally, the rephrasing helps to avoid repeating the group of people you are addressing, thus shortening the sentence. We recommend using this strategy for requests. For example, if you want someone to submit, hand in, confirm, register etc.

Avoid	Use instead
Every participant must register with his facebook account.	Please register with a facebook account.
Every employee must submit his tax number to his workplace.	Please submit all relevant personal information, including your tax number.

## NEUTRAL EXPRESSIONS WITH “WHO” OR “ONE”

The word “one” and the pronoun “who” are both gender neutral. Therefore, they are a good alternative, when referring to anyone or everybody, or a group of people of whom you do not know the gender. This strategy is especially useful when making a general statement about a group of people.

Avoid	Use instead
If a student is not satisfied with his grade, he may ask for an exam review.	Students who are not satisfied with their grade can ask for an exam review.
If an employee has any kind of issues concerning his job, he should talk to his boss.	Employees who have any kind of issues concerning their job, should talk to their boss.

## FORMS OF ADDRESS

The table below gives examples of how to address people if you know or don't know their gender.

Ms.	<b>Ms.</b> is used for all women
Mrs.	<b>Mrs.</b> only for women, who explicitly wish to be referred to as such.
Miss.	<b>Miss</b> is an outdated form, which should be avoided.
Starting an e-mail	Hello, Good morning, Good evening, Hi (more informal)
Starting a letter	Dear Sir or Madam, Dear Madam or Sir

## EXCLUSIVE TERMS AND JOB TITLES

Below you can find a list of examples for exclusive language, this is mainly the case for some job titles. This list aims to show common negative examples you may have come across and gives you some options to avoid stereotypes and gender exclusive language. This is not a complete list.

Avoid	Use instead
mankind	humankind
manpower	workforce/staff/labour force
two-man office	two-person office
business women/business men	professional/expert
male/female doctor	doctor
male/female nurse	nurse
waiter/waitress	waiter/server
cameraman	videographer
cleaning lady	cleaner
spokesman	spokesperson
chairman, chairmanship	chair or chairperson, chairpersonship
policeman	police officer
statesman	political leader, political figure, head of state, diplomat
fireman	firefighter



# GENDER IDENTITY

When writing about or referring to a transgender person, make sure to use the appropriate title and pronouns for the person's gender identity. (NATO, 2020). In oral communication it is also important to use the pronoun the person wishes to be addressed with.

## CITATIONS

When quoting authors use the appropriate title and pronoun of the author, if you know it. If you are not sure, you can research or simply use a neutral form to quote the author by mentioning a surname in the text.

For example:

**List claims that...**





# IN A NUTSHELL

## WHAT DO I NEED TO BEAR IN MIND, IF I WANT TO USE GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE?

### 1 Avoid mentioning the gender when it is not relevant for communication

The goal of gender inclusive or gender-neutral language is to avoid mentioning the gender, if it is unnecessary in the text. For many English texts, this is simply the easiest and most natural inclusive language. It is often possible to

- **rephrase the sentence without using any pronouns.**
- **use neutral pronouns like 'who' or use the passive voice**
- **use the plural form:**

often a fast and simple solution, especially for oral or informal communication, is easy and avoids complicated sentence structures.

The best strategy to use depends on the type of text, oral, written, legal etc. More examples of strategies are to be found above in 2. Best practices and strategies.

### 2 Only mention the gender when it is relevant for communication

In some cases, it may be necessary to specify the gender, in these cases you could use both pronouns: **his/her**. But be careful, only use this technique if it is necessary!

Example: "When a staff member accepts an offer of employment, **he or she** must be able to assume that the offer is duly authorized. To qualify for payment of the mobility incentive, **she or he** must have five years' prior continuous service on a fixed-term or continuing appointment." (United Nations Gender Guidelines)

To specify the gender, you can also **use two words**, for example:

The soldiers, both **women and men** are welcome to attend the meeting.

### 3 Use gender neutral expressions

If you're addressing a specific group of people for a job description or similar, it is necessary to avoid gender bias. This is especially the case when it comes to addressing people whose gender you don't know. Take a look at the short list and table we have provided for you in section 3.

Forms of address and 4. Exclusive terms and job titles.





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