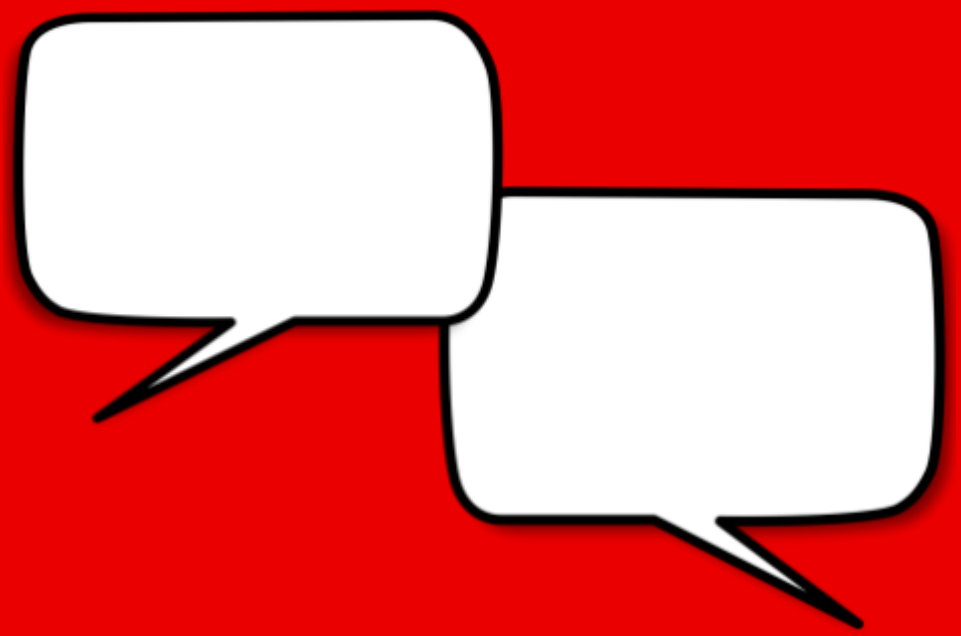
university of groningen



Inclusive Language Style Guide

Developed by the UG Diversity & Inclusion Office

Questions or comments? Email diversity@rug.nl

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Introduction

Inclusive language: what it is and why we want to use it

Welcome to the University of Groningen Inclusive Language Style Guide. This resource is intended to support students and staff of the University of Groningen in consciously using inclusive language in their communication

The UG considers itself an open, academic community and is striving to promote an inclusive environment. Developments such as the Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer and the Diversity & Inclusion Office, *The Inclusive Teacher*, and other inclusive education initiatives around the University have opened the dialogue of how we can work together to foster inclusion. How we communicate with one another also influences our environment. The use of inclusive language ensures that we address each other respectfully and convey our message in an appropriate manner.

In doing so, not only can we make sure that our staff members, students, and guests feel welcome and accepted at the University of Groningen, but we can also keep up with other universities in the Netherlands and abroad, who are recognizing the importance of inclusive language within academia internationally.[1]

How to use this guide

This style guide contains an overview of useful terminology and examples relating to inclusive language. It is structured as follows:

- The guide starts with **general guidelines** for using language inclusively.
- The next part of the style guide focuses on **identity-based language**, including gender-aware language use, language surrounding ability and disability, and language on background, ethnicity, race, nationality, and migration.
- The second part of the style guide focuses on **theme-based language use**, meaning how to use it in emails, official language, and human resources.
- A short section on **inclusive language in Dutch** is presented. There is also a comparable style guide on inclusive language in Dutch.
- Finally, a **glossary and list of further resources** conclude the document.

The style guide is a resource. Start at the top and follow the structure, or dive into the topics that interest you. You'll find suggestions and guidelines for using language more consciously and inclusively. Not sure about something? Looking it up or asking someone is always a good idea!

[1] E.g. https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/about-um/diversity-inclusivity/di-education-and-social-safety/inclusive-language; https://www.ru.nl/radboudintolanguages/en/communication/inclusive-communication-skills/inclusive-language/

General guidelines

Before diving into specific terminology and language use, this document first offers some general guidelines to help everyone communicate in a more inclusive way:

- **Language is subject to change.** It evolves alongside changes in society. New words are introduced, while others disappear. This process often happens gradually: sometimes different words have the same meaning, with one falling into disuse while the other becomes more widely used.
- **Remember the purpose of inclusive language use**: to make sure that everyone feels welcome, accepted, and respected. This can be challenging as students and staff have diverse experiences and needs. But in the end, it is worth it to ensure that everyone feels at home at the UG.
- **Don't be afraid to ask**. Different people have different preferences in terms of terminology and language use. This can depend on many factors, such as (cultural) background or age. Therefore, it is always best to ask people what they prefer, when this is possible and appropriate. Also, feel free to reach out to the UG's Diversity & Inclusion Office via diversity@rug.nl if you have any questions.
- **Be aware of your personal biases**. Often, the words we use reflect our assumptions about the world around us. Consider how your upbringing and biases might affect the language you use. For example: when you see someone as 'different', what does that say about how you view them? Do you see them as lesser, or as equal—despite the differences?
- **Everyone makes mistakes**. We all say things at times that may not come across the way we intended. When someone tells you that certain words or phrases feel hurtful, take a moment to listen, reflect, and use it as an opportunity to grow. Most people's natural reaction in this situation is to become defensive. That is normal. If you realize that you are feeling defensive, take a moment to reflect on why that might be, and if you can learn from the situation. If you are able to do so appropriately, apologize for the hurt you have caused.
- **Encourage inclusive course content**. Lecturers are encouraged to create and utilize course content and methodologies that are inclusive. Teaching Academy Groningen has resources and training to support teachers in this. If you are a student that experiences exclusionary course content, or have ideas for improving course content to be more inclusive, you are encouraged to speak to your teacher or reach out to the Diversity & Inclusion Office via diversity@rug.nl.
- **If you are treated disrespectfully, or see someone treated disrespectfully, please speak up.** There are several ways to address this at the University of Groningen. For example, you can reach out to the confidential advisers or the social safety coordinators, whose contact details can be found on the social safety website. They can assist you and guide you through the process.

Contact

This is a living document that continuously evolves with language and insights on inclusion. If you have any questions or additions, or if you spot anywhere at the University where inclusive language could be applied better, please contact us via diversity@rug.nl. We would be happy to hear and learn from you.

Identity-based language

This section of the document is split into the following topics:

- Gender-aware language use
- Ability and disability
- Background, ethnicity, nationality, and migration

Gender-aware language use

This section provides some tips for using language around gender in an inclusive manner.

Terminology

The following table shows you how you can use gender-based terms in English. However, it is important to remember that every individual has their own preferences. Therefore, it is always best to ask people how they would like to be referred to.

Term	Definition	Examples of how to use these terms in inclusive ways	Example of wording that may exclude people
Transgender, trans (Used as an adjective, not a noun!)	Identifying with a gender other than the one assigned at birth	He is transgender trans man, trans woman	He is a transgender, he is transgendered transman, transwoman
Cisgender, cis (Used as an adjective, not a noun!)	Identifying with the gender assigned at birth	She is cisgender cis woman, cis man	biological woman, biological man, normal/ordinary/ regular woman/man
Transition (Used as a noun or verb)	The social and potential medical process of transitioning from presenting as one gender to another	He transitioned a few years ago When she presented as a man When he was seen as a woman She was assigned male at birth	He changed genders/he transgendered Sex change Before he became a boy'/'when he was a girl When 'he' was a 'girl' He was born a girl
Non-binary, gender non-conforming	Gender identities other than the binary options of man/woman	They are non-binary/gender non-conforming	Referring to people by the wrong pronouns

Term	Definition	Examples of how to use these terms in inclusive ways	Example of wording that may exclude people
Intersex	A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male	He or she or they is or are intersex; an intersex person	Hermaphrodite (outdated, now considered a slur)
Partner, spouse	To refer to someone's partner or spouse in situations in which the gender of the partner is unknown	All colleagues may invite their partners or spouses Do you have a partner?	All colleagues may invite their husbands or wives Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?
Parents, parenting, guardians	To refer to someone who is raising a child, in a situation where the gender of the parent is unknown or irrelevant	All parents and guardians	All mothers and fathers, only using 'mothers and fathers', or 'mothering'

Points for attention

Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns are what we use to address ourselves and each other. For example, I/me/mine, you/your, he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs.

Note: you may have heard people talk about 'preferred' pronouns. But we recommend leaving out the word 'preferred', as this seems to indicate that someone's pronouns are optional, as something they choose instead of an integral expression of who they are. Instead, we can simply ask what pronouns somebody uses.

It is a common false assumption that only people who use the singular 'they' pronoun, or trans people, need to share their pronouns and that people who 'look' cisgender and who use he/him or she/her pronouns do not need to share theirs. But we cannot tell the pronouns a person uses based on what they look like. Sharing our pronouns and asking for others' pronouns normalizes the understanding and use of various pronouns.

- As a teacher, you can indicate your pronouns in Brightspace under account settings. You can also ask your students to enter their pronouns.

- During the first lesson, you can introduce yourself by stating your name and pronouns and give students the option to share theirs:

  > *"My name is ABC, and I use she/her pronouns. Let's go around the table. Can you introduce yourself and, if you'd like, share which pronouns you use?"*

Multiple pronouns or no pronouns

Some people use multiple pronouns, e.g. he/they, while some people use none at all. Some others may be comfortable being addressed by all pronouns.

- If someone uses multiple pronouns, this means that they are happy to use either. It does not mean that you need to use both at the same time!

  E.g. Thomas uses he/they pronouns. Last week I went out to eat with him. They really liked the food.

  Note: if someone uses he/they or she/they pronouns, try to use them fairly interchangeably. This does not mean that you need to count or switch consecutively. But if you choose to only use he/him if a person looks masculine, for example, then they may get the impression that you are not seeing and acknowledging their identity.

- If someone uses no pronouns at all, you can simply use the person's name instead.

  E.g. Thomas doesn't use any pronouns. Last week I went out to eat with Thomas. Thomas really liked the food.

  Note: this is also a common practice in languages where there is no simple gender-neutral alternative for personal pronouns.

- If someone uses any pronouns, you can choose how to address them. I.e. with she/her, he/him, or they/them.

Singular 'they'

The singular 'they' is used frequently in English to refer to somebody whose gender we do not know or whose gender is unimportant to the context, or to address somebody who uses the pronouns they/them/theirs.

The singular 'they' is common in native English, and has been traced back to the 14th century to refer to someone whose gender is unknown or irrelevant. Yet its use as a non-binary pronoun is rather new. Non-native speakers often struggle with this term.

Here are some rules for its usage:

- Use for someone we do not know/whose gender is unknown

Example: ‘Someone left their wallet on the bus. We should hand it in so that they get it back. The bus company might know them.’

- Use as a personal pronoun

  Example: ‘Kai is my friend. They have a dog. I sometimes walk their dog for them.’

- We use the plural verb form for the singular ‘they’

  Example: ‘they are’, not ‘they is’, even if we are talking about one person.

- We use the singular verb form with the singular noun even when talking about someone who uses they/them pronouns

  Example: ‘Kai is’, ‘this person is’, not ‘Kai are’, ‘this person are’.

- Reflexive form: both ‘themselves’ and ‘themself’ are acceptable, but ‘themselves’ is more common even when referring to one person

  Example: ‘Kai is going on holiday by themselves’, ‘Kai renovated the kitchen themself’

Alternatives to the singular ‘they’

For many people who are unfamiliar with this form, use of the singular ‘they’ when talking about people whose gender is unknown or people whose gender is not relevant to the context can be confusing. There are a few alternative strategies to avoid usage of the singular ‘they’ in this context.

Please note: if the singular ‘they’ is being used as a non-binary pronoun, you should not use these alternatives.

Strategies:

- Rewording the sentence

  Example: Every client got a care package delivered to them > Each client received a care package

- Using the plural

  Example: A private person usually keeps to themselves > Private people usually keep to themselves.

Gender vs sex

Gender and sex are different constructs.

Gender is used to refer to the social constructs - the norms and values that exist around being a man or a woman. E.g. from the category of ‘female’, we have built the construct of ‘woman’, which involves a certain identity, expected norms,

stereotypes and roles, and gender expression. We have built the construct of ‘man’ from the category of ‘male’. Gender includes what is traditionally seen as "masculine" and "feminine," but also everything in between. A person's gender does not necessarily have to match their sex.

Sex refers to the biological make-up of a person, i.e. based on their chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, and primary and secondary sex characteristics. Note that there are more than two different sex options as well: some people are born intersex[2], while recent studies are showing that there are nuances between the two biological categories of ‘male and female’[3].

- Male (noun): the sex-based category of having certain primary and secondary sex characteristics
- Female (noun): the sex-based category of having certain primary and secondary sex characteristics
- Man (noun): the identity of being a man
- Woman (noun): the identity of being a woman
- Boys (noun): similar to the identity of being a man, but not yet an adult
- Girls (noun): similar to the identity of being a woman, but not yet an adult

See Human Resources: gender options for ways to ask about someone’s gender on a form.

Tips:

1. Avoid using ‘male’ and ‘female’ if you are referring to the social constructs/identities of man/woman/boy/girl, instead of to the biological sexual category.
2. If you are talking about women, avoid using the term ‘girls’. While common, it is patronising to refer to grown women as children; we do not usually do so for men.

The complexity of gender

Gender identity is how a person interprets their own gender. Someone can be born male, during puberty develop the characteristics of a male body, but feel like and identify with being a woman. Gender identities include woman, man, non-binary and genderqueer, or a combination of these.

Gender expression is how you demonstrate your gender (based on traditional gender roles) through the ways you act, dress, behave and interact. Gender expression can be feminine, androgynous or masculine.

Biological sex refers to the objectively measurable organs, hormones and chromosomes. Biological sex can be female, intersex or male.

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[2] https://interactadvocates.org/faq/ and https://www.sapiens.org/biology/biological-science-rejects-the-sex-binary-and-thats-good-for-humanity/

[3] E.g. Davis, G., & Preves, S. (2017). Intersex and the Social Construction of Sex. *Contexts*, *16*(1), 80–80. https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504217696082

Sexual orientation is who you are physically and emotionally attracted to, based on their sex/gender in relation to your own. Sexual orientation may be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual (which by some definitions means attracted to two or more genders), pansexual (attraction regardless of gender), or asexual.

Noun forms

Historically, male-gendered noun forms in English were used when speaking about a default, or gender-neutral, situation, but this is no longer acceptable. Male noun forms can be considered exclusionary to members of other genders, and can perpetuate gendered stereotypes, thus gender inclusive language has developed to avoid sexist language. Examples of gendered noun forms and their alternatives:

Noun	**Gender inclusive alternative(s)**
Man	Human, person, individual
Mankind	Humankind, people, humanity, human beings
Freshman	First-year student
Man-made	Manufactured, synthetic, artificial
Chairman	Chairperson, chair
Postman	Postal worker
Policeman	Police officer
Steward/stewardess	Attendant (e.g. flight/theatre)
Actor/actress	Actor
Congressman	Legislator, congressional representative

Academic use

This section outlines the rules for using personal pronouns and the singular ‘they’ according to different academic reference styles.

APA (7th edition)

The APA 7th edition rules are as follows:

- Always use a person’s self-identified pronouns.
- Use the singular ‘they’ to refer to someone whose gender is unknown or irrelevant to the context.
- Do not use ‘he or she’ alone as generic third-person pronouns. Only use ‘he or she’ if you know that these pronouns are the ones used by the persons being referred to.

- Do not use combination forms such as ‘s/he’ or ‘(s)he’.
- If you do not know someone’s pronouns, use the singular ‘they’ or reword the sentence to avoid any pronouns.

MLA

The MLA Handbook, 9th editions, offers this guidance on inclusive writing:

- Consider non-gender pronouns/terms if gender is not central to the idea expressed. For example, instead of ‘Men and women in the job market’ ... try ‘Jobseekers often find....’
- Endorses the singular ‘they’: https://style.mla.org/using-singular-they

Vancouver & Harvard

As yet unknown as to whether the singular ‘they’ is accepted.

Chicago

As of the 17th edition, Chicago still recommends avoiding the singular ‘they’ as a generic reference, at least in formal writing, but the previous blanket prohibition has been listed (Section 5.256). For the first time, Chicago also offers guidance on using ‘they/them’ as an individual’s personal pronouns, stating that ‘any such preference should be generally respected’ (Section 5.256).

Other academic points of note

In the academic context, it is important to pay attention to the following points:

- Titles

  "If the term applies, use 'professor' or 'dr.' instead of 'miss', 'mister', or 'mrs.'/'ms.' or 'mr.' If both men and women are referred to, use that either the one form or the other is used for both - avoid referring to the men as ‘Professor’ or ‘Dr’ while the female doctor is referred to as ‘Ms.’

  The Dutch Research Council (NWO), however, avoids using titles entirely, instead just stating the person’s full name.

- First/last names

  Avoid using solely the first name for a woman, where you would use the last name/full name if you were referring to a man. This is common in informal science writing and on the work floor.

- Content

  There is often a discrepancy in how men and women are described, such as mentioning the appearance, parenthood, and family life of a female academic, while this would not be done for a male academic. Additionally, women are more often described using stereotypes, generalizations, or assumptions than men.

For example, during job interviews, women are more likely than men to be asked how they will balance a demanding job with family life.

- Do not use the default masculine

  E.g. ‘If a philosopher considers this question, he will be required to….’ Alternative: ‘Thinking about this question, a philosopher will….’

- In medical use

  E.g. it is common to refer to certain body parts as belonging to a specific gender. There is a need for greater consideration of transgender people in medical care.

Ability and disability

This section addresses language use surrounding ability and disability: terminology, identity-first vs person-first language use, and avoiding slurs and value judgements.

Terminology

The following table outlines some key terms and how to use them inclusively. However, it is important to remember that every individual has their own preferences. Therefore, it is always best to ask people how they would like to be referred to.

Term	Definition	Examples of how to use these terms in inclusive ways	Example of wording that may exclude people
Functional impairment / Performance disability Examples include auditory or visual impairments, physical disabilities, or chronic illnesses (such as diabetes, asthma, Crohn's disease, Long COVID, and chronic fatigue syndrome), or psychological disabilities (such as chronic depression, anxiety) or neurodivergence (such as ADHD, autism, dyslexia, or dyscalculia)	In the context of the UG, this is a health-related issue that may lead to study challenges for individuals, as current academic structures and ways of working may pose barriers.	Students with a functional impairment	See below terms
Neurodivergent	Having a neurological difference, including but not limited to autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, giftedness, Tourette's syndrome.	Neurodivergent students may be eligible for extra time in completing exams.	'Neurotypical' and 'neuroatypical' may be considered offensive by some, especially when used by people who are not neurodivergent. Similarly, it is offensive to refer to a non-neurodivergent person as 'ordinary' or 'normal.'
Neurodiverse	The term neurodiverse refers to the variation of neurotypes within a group,	Our student population is neurodiverse.	See "neurodivergent"

Term	Definition	Examples of how to use these terms in inclusive ways	Example of wording that may exclude people
	while an individual with a neurotype that deviates from the norm is better referred to as neurodivergent		
Autistic	The umbrella term for behavioral traits that indicate a vulnerability in the following areas: social interaction, communication, flexibility in thinking, movement and actions, sensory processing, and the filtering and integration of information	Autistic students can request special accommodations. Here are the provisions for autistic students. He is autistic. An autistic person A person with autism He has autism.	He is on the spectrum. He is 'an' autistic.
Disabled	Experiencing the inability to participate fully in home, community, and professional life due to barriers in society Having a physical or mental condition resulting in a person's abilities differing from that of able-bodied people	Disabled staff members can use the accessible parking spaces. Staff with a disability	The disabled Handicapped Special needs
Able-bodied	Somebody who is not disabled.	She is not disabled, she is able-bodied.	'Normal', 'ordinary'
Wheelchair user	Someone who uses a wheelchair.	Wheelchair users can use the lift.	Wheelchair bound (Not everyone who uses a wheelchair is wheelchair-bound; some people are able to walk short distances.)
Blind, partially sighted, person with visual impairment, low vision	Somebody who is partially sighted or without sight.	He is partially sighted.	Some may consider the term "impaired" offensive, but others identify with this term

Term	Definition	Examples of how to use these terms in inclusive ways	Example of wording that may exclude people
Deaf, hard-of-hearing, person with auditory/hearing impairment	Somebody who is deaf or partially without hearing; Someone who is a member of the Deaf community. A large part of the deaf community sees itself as a minority group, with its own language and culture. They do not view being deaf as a deficiency or disability, and refer to themselves as Deaf with a capital D.	They are deaf. They are a member of the Deaf community. He has a hearing impairment. I am hard of hearing.	Some may consider the term “impaired” offensive, but others identify with this term.
Congenital disability	A person who is disabled since birth	She has a congenital disability.	‘Birth defect’
Accessibility	Accessibility for people with disabilities means removing barriers so that everyone, regardless of their disability, has equal access to information, physical spaces, and services.	The new buildings have been created with accessibility in mind.	N/A
Accessible entrance / toilet / parking space	An entrance, toilet, or parking space that is suitable for the use of people with disabilities, often due to wheel-chair accessibility	There are accessible parking spaces available outside the front entrance.	Disabled toilet, handicapped bathroom

Points for attention

Person-first language vs identity-first language

One common question that comes up when talking about ability and disability is whether to use identity-first language (for example, ‘disabled person’) or person-first language (‘person with a disability’). There is no one ‘right’ way to use these terms, and people have different preferences. The following section describes the differences between identity-first and person-first language, but the most important thing is to respect the preferences of the person you are referring to. When possible, ask people how they like to be described. When this is not possible (for example, when giving a presentation or referring to multiple people), it is recommended that you use a mix of identity-first and person-first language.

People with disabilities have differing opinions on the preference for person-first or identity-first language. In person-first language, the person is placed before their identity, for example, ‘person with a disability’ or ‘person with autism.’Some people prefer this terminology because it emphasizes that they are, first and foremost, a person.

Others prefer identity-first language, which places the disability identity before the person—for example, ‘disabled person.’ Identity-first language uses the identity as an adjective to describe the person. This group believes it aligns better with how people typically refer to characteristics, such as ‘young people’ or ‘tall person.’ After all, people do not say "person with youngness" or "person with tallness" to emphasize humanity. According to this perspective, requiring disability to be framed differently than other characteristics suggests that disability is viewed as less neutral. In the autism community, for instance, some individuals prefer terms like ‘autistic’, ‘autistic person,’ or ‘autistic individual.’

Avoid unnecessary references

When it is not relevant to do so, avoid unnecessary references to the physical, mental or psychological capacity of a person or group. This avoids the (unconscious) discrimination, marginalization and stigmatization of people with disabilities based on their physical, intellectual,and/or psychological condition.

Use adjectives, not nouns

If it does matter to indicate that someone has a disability, use the term as an adjective, not as a noun. So do not write ‘blind,’ ‘visually impaired,’ or ‘disabled,’ but rather ‘people with disabilities (auditory, visual, physical or intellectual)’ or a ‘blind or visually impaired person’.

Social or medical model of disability

There are two models of how society views disability: the social model and the medical model.

The traditional language of disability has utilized a medical model. Under the medical model, impairments or differences should be ‘fixed’ or changed by medical treatments – it looks at what is “wrong” with the person rather than what the person needs. In recent years, people in the disability rights movements have advocated for a social model of disability. In this model, we understand that disability is caused by the way society is organized, rather than a person’s ‘limitations’ – it looks at how to remove barriers that restrict disabled people. In the medical model, disabilities are an aberration compared to ‘normal’ traits.

In the social model, disabilities are restrictions imposed by society. When writing or speaking about disability, it is recommended to utilize the social model. According to the social model a person does not ‘have’ a disability – disability is something a

person experiences. The disability experienced is often caused by the approach taken by society/individuals which fails to take account of people with impairments and their associated support needs.

Avoiding slurs

It is very important to be aware of terms that have since become outdated and which are now considered to be slurs, even if they were not in the past. Some examples in English include the R-word[4], 'cripple(d)', and 'handicap(ped)'. If it is absolutely necessary to refer to these words, like in this document, one can use quotation marks.

Avoiding value judgement

Similarly, it is important to be aware of the value judgement expressed when talking about disability and neurodiversity. Often, much language around disability and neurodiversity can be seen as pitying, condescending, and patronizing – it suggests that the person would be 'better' if they were not disabled or neurodivergent. Examples (to avoid) therefore include:

- Wheelchair usage: we can describe somebody as using a wheelchair, or being a wheelchair user, instead of placing a value judgement such as 'wheelchair bound'.
- Instead of describing somebody as 'suffering from', 'hindered by,' or 'struggling with' a disability or a neurodivergent condition, we can simply describe them as a disabled or neurodivergent person: by using their identity as an adjective (see Identity-first language).
- Do not use the terms 'victim' and 'patient' to refer to a person or group of people with disabilities. Also avoid statements such as 'don't react so spastic' or 'blind spots'.
- The word 'impaired' can be offensive to some people, but others may use this term to describe themselves (i.e. 'visually impaired'). It is best to use this term with caution, and note that it may be interpreted differently in different (cultural) contexts.
- 'Inspiration porn' refers to the phenomenon of disabled people being perceived and described as being 'inspiring' or 'inspirational' for their achievements. While this may be well-meant, it suggests that disabled people are exceptional for reaching the same achievements as able-bodied people, and that they are therefore expected to not be as successful or productive in their lives. A more heinous use is when the achievements of disabled people is used to motivate the privileged group, e.g. 'This Paralympic athlete swims without arms and legs, so what is your excuse?' or 'These students of colour were resilient in the face of racist remarks. White students can learn from them to be more resilient.'

[4] https://www.specialolympics.org/stories/impact/why-the-r-word-is-the-r-slur

Academic use

This section outlines the rules for using person-first and identity-first language according to different academic reference styles.

APA (7th edition)

The APA 7th edition rules are as follows:[5]

> Authors who write about identity are encouraged to use terms and descriptions that both honor and explain person-first and identity-first perspectives. Language should be selected with the understanding that the individual's preference supersedes matters of style. If you are uncertain about how a person identifies, it is recommended that you ask their preference.
>
> Both person-first and identity-first approaches to language are designed to respect disabled persons; both are fine choices overall. It is permissible to use either approach or to mix person-first and identity-first language unless or until you know that a group clearly prefers one approach, in which case, you should use the preferred approach.

MLA

The MLA Handbook, 9th editions, offers this guidance on inclusive writing:

> Respect for the terms preferred by a community should be shown in writing. Some groups self-identify with person-first language (i.e., a person with alcoholism), other groups prefer to claim a specific identity first (i.e., Deaf person).

[5] https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines

Background, ethnicity, race, nationality, and migration

This section provides some tips for using language around background, ethnicity, race, nationality, and migration.

Terminology

The following table outlines some key terms and how to use them inclusively. However, it is important to remember that every individual has their own preferences. Therefore, it is always best to ask people how they would like to be referred to.

Term	Definition	Examples of how to use these terms in inclusive ways	Example of wording that may exclude people
Black people	An identity category with varying meanings depending on the context usually a political and skin colour-based category. (For more information)	The social gathering is intended to build support among Black students.	Blacks, black written with a lowercase b
Asian people	A person typically of Asian descent	Asian people have been living in the Netherlands for centuries.	Asians Oriental
People of color	An umbrella term used to describe a person or group of people who identify as and is/are not considered to be white. (For more information)	The conference is focused on the achievement of academics of colour	Colored people (this is now a slur)
BIPOC	Black people, indigenous people, and people of colour. Used as an umbrella term for the community who do not identify as and are not considered to be white.	The impacts of historic injustice have continually pushed BIPOC communities further from opportunity, creating barriers to their success, safety, and well-being.	Non-white (positions white as the default)
Racialized people	Similar to BIPOC but recognizes that race is not an inherent quality but rather a social process.	Racialized people experience living in the Netherlands differently.	Non-white (positions white as the default)

Term	Definition	Examples of how to use these terms in inclusive ways	Example of wording that may exclude people
	Someone affected by racism or discrimination based on their (perceived) race		
Biracial, multiracial	People who are of two or more races	She is biracial Alternative: People with a mixed ethnic background.	'Mixed people, 'mulatto'
Person with a migration background	In the Netherlands, this has been defined as a person who has: a) migrated into their present country of residence; and / or b) previously had a different nationality from their present country of residence; and / or c) at least one of their parents previously entered their present country of residence as a migrant.	People with a migration background often encounter unique barriers to education.	'Ethnic'

Points for attention

Race and Ethnicity

Although **'race'** was historically used to categorize people based on physical characteristics, it has no scientific basis. It refers to a social construct based on skin color and physical features. Today, the term is mainly used in legal and social contexts, such as anti-discrimination legislation. In the Netherlands, 'race' is largely avoided, while in the US, race remains a common term in population surveys and legislation.

Ethnicity refers to shared cultural and historical characteristics, such as language, religion, and ancestry. People with these common traits form an ethnic group. Although the term is generally neutral, it is often used to label something as 'other' or 'foreign', such as in 'ethnic food' or 'ethnic music'.

Ethnicity and race are sometimes confused. Ethnicity concerns cultural and historical connection, while race refers to physical characteristics. Often, 'ethnicity' is used as an alternative to avoid biological references, but the two terms are not interchangeable. Both terms should be used with caution.

Black people, white people & people of color

'Black' is an identity category with different meanings in various contexts. In the Netherlands, it is primarily used to refer to people of African or Afro-Caribbean descent. In Great Britain, however, it is also used to unite various non-white groups who all experience racism, regardless of their ethnic or geographical background. In the United States, it is mainly used to refer to African-American people. Because of the different meanings of the word, the term should be used with caution.

'White' is an identity category mostly used for people of predominantly European descent, and also an indication of skin color.

'People of color' is an overarching social designation referring to individuals for whom skin color is a determining factor in their experiences and identity formation. Since the Black Lives Matter protests of June 2020, "people of color" has become increasingly common, especially among young people. Social media has globalized discussions about racism and equal opportunities, which also influences language usage. The most important point remains to ask how someone wishes to be identified, and to mention skin color or origin only if it is relevant.

The use of 'native'

The term 'native' is controversial. It is often used in three situations: to describe indigenous populations (1), to refer to where somebody was born or their migration background (2), and to talk about languages (3).

1. In the first instance, the preference is to use the term 'indigenous'. E.g. instead of Native Americans, indigenous Americans.
2. In the second instance, we can replace the word 'native' with a descriptor. E.g. 'native Dutch people' can be replaced with 'Dutch people born in the Netherlands', or 'Dutch people with no migration background', if this is what is meant. Here, the use of 'native' is not wrong per se, but can have negative or questionable connotations. For instance, is a person who was born in the Netherlands but whose parents are first-generation immigrants considered to be a native Dutch person? Why are we referring to this information?
3. The term 'native' is still frequently used to describe a person's mother tongue. E.g. 'native English speaker'. However, it is advised to use this term with caution, as people can be fluent in a language without it being their first language. 'Dominant language' can be used instead of 'native language', and 'fluent speaker' instead of native speaker.

Migrant, expat, international, or immigrant?

It is important to know the differences between and connotations of these terms.

- Migrant: an umbrella term that describes a person who leaves their usual place of residence, temporarily or permanently, for various reasons, both

within a country and internationally. The term includes various legal categories, such as labor migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, smuggled migrants, and international students

- Immigrant: from the perspective of the country of arrival: a person who moves to a country that is not their country of nationality or usual place of residence, so that the destination country effectively becomes their new usual place of residence
- Emigrant: from the perspective of the country of departure: moving from one's country of nationality or usual place of residence to another country, so that the destination country effectively becomes the new usual place of residence.
- Expat(riate): a person who lives outside their country of birth for a limited time, often linked to a fixed-term employment contract.[6]
- International: used regularly in the Dutch context as a noun describing a person/people who live(s) outside the country they were born in, but is not used regularly as such in English-speaking countries.

In everyday language, these terms are often used interchangeably to refer to people who live in a country different from the one they were born in. However, the connotations that they express can be controversial. For instance, 'immigrant' is often used by right-wing political parties and media in a negative manner to describe those fleeing bad living conditions in search for a better life, while 'expat' is preferred by wealthy, often white and Western, people who move primarily for work or leisure purposes.

While neither term is wrong to use, it is recommended to use these terms with caution. Why do we choose a certain term for one group of people but not for another? This is often based on our own biases and prejudices.

Asylum seeker or refugee?

Similar to the above question, it is important to know the differences between these terms.

- Asylum seeker: a person looking for protection because they fear persecution, or they have experienced violence or human rights violations.
- Refugee: a person who asked for protection and was given refugee status. They may have been resettled in another country or be waiting for resettlement.[7]

Naturalization

In the Netherlands, if a refugee or migrant has held a valid residence permit for a certain time period and has passed the civic integration exams, they may request naturalization. This means that they will become a Dutch citizen.

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[6] All definitions taken from the dictionary (Oxford Languages).

[7] https://www.redcross.org.au/act/help-refugees/refugee-facts/#:~:text=An%20asylum%20seeker%20is%20a,or%20be%20waiting%20for%20resettlement.

Once a person has become a Dutch citizen, regardless of their migration background, it is insensitive (and incorrect) to refer to them as a refugee or migrant. From that moment forth, they are a Dutch citizen just like any other, albeit with a migration background.

Nationality versus ethnicity

The previous topics highlight the need for awareness when using terms surrounding nationality and ethnicity. E.g. if we say 'Everybody here is Dutch', do we mean that they have a Dutch passport? Were born in the Netherlands? Currently live in the Netherlands? Have a Dutch family background? Or simply speak Dutch? Especially in academia, when we are working with many international staff and students, a person's language abilities, place of residence, citizenship status, and migration background may be complex. Returning to the example 'Everybody here is Dutch', is better to be specific about what we mean, e.g.:

- Everybody here speaks Dutch
- Everybody here lives in the Netherlands
- Everybody here is a Dutch citizen
- Everybody here was born in the Netherlands
- Everybody here has a Dutch family background

U.S.-centric language

In spoken language, we often throw around the terms 'America' and 'American' when talking about the U.S. However, this implies that America as a whole only consists of the U.S., or that North America is the 'default' or only significant part of America, which dismisses Central America and South America as being equally valid (in fact, bigger) parts of America. It is therefore preferable to specifically refer to the United States, or North America (if you mean, Mexico, the US and Canada), instead of simply 'America'.

Academia and racism

Countering racism in the academic world is still an important issue and should be at the top of our agenda. In terms of language use, examples of inclusive language awareness include caution when referring to outdated or historical texts, literature, and racial categorizations, as well as awareness when using terminology in the medical and STEM fields[8]. A number of examples are included below; why not research inclusive language use in your own discipline too?

Discipline	**Examples**	**Alternatives**
Literary studies	Use of offensive language, e.g. the N-word, in old texts	Using 'quotation marks' around the offensive language, or replacing it with a filler such as 'the N-word'.

[8] Woodley, Lou, Pratt, Katie, Bakker, Arne, Bertipaglia, Chiara, Dow, Ellen, El Zein, Rayya, Johns, Brianna, Kuwana, Ellen, Lower, El, Roca, Alberto, & Santistevan, Camille. (2021). CSCCE Glossary: Inclusive language in community building. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5718783

Discipline	Examples	Alternatives
		Not speaking the word out loud during class
Political science and international studies	Terms like 'Western/Non-Western,' 'developing countries/developed countries,' and 'First/Third World' create hierarchies that center Europe and North America, while other countries are seen as 'other' or 'lesser' 'Majority World' (Africa, Asia, South and Central America, the Caribbean) and 'Minority World' (Europe, North America) are controversial. They highlight colonial power dynamics but can also be misused for fear-mongering	Clearly specify which countries or regions are meant (e.g., 'countries in Africa' or 'countries with a high GDP'). The terms 'North' and 'South' are commonly used and imply less hierarchy than other labels
Medicine and social sciences	Offensive language referring to the historical categorization of races	Only discussing these terms within their original context, clarifying that we do not use these words nowadays
STEM	Master-slave dichotomy to indicate unidirectional control of one device over another Blacklist/whitelist, ‘black is bad’ effect	Primary-secondary, primary-replica, active-standby, writer-reader, coordinator-worker, parent-helper Allowlist/blocklist

Language in a professional context

This section of the document focuses on inclusive language use in:

- Correspondence and official language
- Human resources

Correspondence and official language

Titles

Organizations usually register a person's title, which is then used in all forms, official letters, emails, and so on. In academia, the most common registered titles are Prof., Dr, Mr, and Ms.

Mrs, Miss, or Ms?

Mrs and Miss refer to a woman's marital status. We do not refer to men's marital statuses with the term Mr. A woman's marital status is irrelevant in a work context. It is therefore recommended to use the term Ms for female addressees.

Gender-neutral options

Academic titles like Prof. and Dr are usefully non-gendered, and can therefore be used for male, female, and non-binary addressees. However, Mr and Ms are not. There are some strategies for greater inclusion:

- Mx: Can be used when addressing a non-binary or gender non-conforming person, instead of Mr or Ms, if they prefer this address. Include in address options if the gender of the recipient is unknown. This is not yet widely used, but appreciated by those to whom it refers.

- No title: It is also possible to leave out the necessity of a title altogether. On many forms, for instance, ticking a title box is mandatory, without any legal bearing. Although it is legally necessary to register a person's title in some instances, it is worth making tick-boxes like this optional in instances where the registration of a title is not a legal requirement. Alternatively, the person may tick that they prefer to be addressed with no title.

Other terms of address

Aside from titles, common terms of address in academic and organizational settings include examples like Sir and Madam, and Ladies and Gentlemen. Think of official letters or speeches.

Below are some alternative options for such terms of address:

- Dear (esteemed) guest(s)
- Dear colleague(s)
- Dear participant(s)
- Dear alumni
- Dear student(s)
- Dear staff member(s)

- Dear team member(s)
- Dear (valued) client(s)
- Dear [insert department name]
- Dear XXX team
- Dear [insert recipient's name]
- To whom it may concern

Human resources

Gender options

There are a few points to consider when registering a person's gender:

- Is it necessary? Is it compulsory or optional? If it is not legally necessary, any registration should be optional.
- Are you asking about gender or sex? Make sure this is clear for the person providing this information. Gender = a person's identity, sex = understood to mean a person's biological make-up. (We generally have no way of knowing about a person's biological sex, so it is best to keep asking about gender.)
- If you are registering sex: is intersex listed as an option? Is it clear that you are referring to the sex assigned at birth? Are other options than male/female provided? E.g. the US and the Netherlands are now (considering) adding an X option.[9]
- If you are registering gender: is there a non-binary option listed? Is it clear that people can choose the gender they identify with?
- When asking about sex or gender, is it possible to answer 'Prefer not to disclose' or 'Other'?

Name options

A person's legal name may not be the name that they use in daily life. In the Netherlands, a person's *roepnaam* (nickname/chosen name) is often requested, i.e. the name that they would like to use in daily life.

In transgender discourse, we often refer to someone's 'dead name'. This refers to the name that the trans person no longer identifies with or uses. It may be that a person's dead name is still their legal name, but using it for the person in daily life is insensitive and may cause them hurt.

Some points to consider when requesting a person's name include:

- Do you need to know their legal name or the name they use in daily life? If both are necessary, is a distinction made? Is it clear to the respondent which is being asked and for what purpose.
- If you need a person's legal name: who will be able to view this? E.g. if a new colleague is appointed, they may not want their supervisor or colleagues to know their legal name – and certainly may not want it to be displayed on the Intranet or website.

[9] https://nos.nl/artikel/2410576-zonder-psycholoog-een-x-in-je-paspoort-ryan-ging-ervoor-naar-de-rechter

- Make sure that all communications (aside from legal documents) use a person's chosen name instead of their legal name.

Pronouns

Personal pronouns, like she/her/hers, he/him/his, and they/them/theirs, are what we use to address others (for more explanation, see the Personal pronouns section). Instead of assuming which pronouns a person uses, it is better to give them the space to share their own pronouns. At the University, this could look like:

- Adding a pronoun section onto MePas (UG staff profile pages)
- Recording students' pronouns so that they are addressed correctly in communications
- Adding a pronoun section to staff details in Shared Services
- Adding a pronoun section to the UG email signature template. like:

  Prof.dr. Francien Smid
  she/her | zij/haar
- Writing pronouns on UG badges for conferences and seminars

Note: when asking people to share their pronouns, the best practice is providing a field where people can write their own pronouns, instead of having tick-boxes. If you do provide tick-boxes, however, consider allowing respondents to tick multiple options and to offer an 'Other' option where people can share their pronouns if they are not listed.

It is a common false assumption that only people who use the singular 'they' pronoun, or trans people, need to share their pronouns and that people who 'look' cisgender and who use he/him or she/her pronouns do not need to share theirs. But we cannot tell the pronouns a person uses based on what they look like. Sharing our pronouns and asking for others' pronouns normalizes the understanding and use of various pronouns.

Editing personal details

As people may choose to change their name or pronouns over the course of their life, it is important that they are also able to do so at work or in their studies. At the University, students and staff should have the possibility to change their details accessibly and without question.

Dutch versus English: false friends

Communicating in English in a Dutch context means that a lot of direct translations and/or mistranslations occur. Usually this does not cause any problem. However, there are two sensitive areas where ‘false friends’ between Dutch and English occur:

- Default masculine: In Dutch, you’d use the masculine form when talking to/about a group of people or when talking about an unnamed/unidentified person. However, this does not work in English. We would use the singular ‘they’ in English instead.

- Identity-based language: some terms do not translate directly from Dutch to English.

  E.g.: ‘gehandicapt’ = disabled, NOT ‘handicapped’. ‘Handicapped’ in English is outdated and considered offensive nowadays. The same goes for ‘homo’ (gay, part of the LGBTQ+ community) and ‘transsexual’ (transgender).

  E.g. use of the word ‘race’: while it is commonly used in English to talk about skin colour and ethnicity, ‘ras’ is considered a more extreme/polarizing word in Dutch. Often, ‘huidskleur’ or ‘achtergrond’ is used instead.

Glossary

Able-bodied	Someone who is not disabled.
Accessibility	The physical and digital accessibility of a space, most commonly used in the context of access for disabled and neurodivergent people.
Asian	A person typically of Asian descent.
Asylum seeker	A person looking for protection because they fear persecution, or they have experienced violence or human rights violations.
Bisexual	A romantic or sexual attraction to more than one gender.
Binary	Within two options. Used to refer to the male and female genders: the gender binary.
BIPOC	Black, indigenous, or person of colour. Used as an umbrella term for the community who do not identify as and are not considered to be white.
Black	An identity category with varying meanings depending on the context usually a political and skin colour-based category.
Cisgender, cis	Identifying with the sex assigned at birth.
Colorism	Discrimination based on a person's skin colour; favouring lighter coloured skin.
Disabled	Having a physical or mental condition resulting in a person's abilities differing from that of able-bodied people. Experiencing the inability to participate fully in home, community, and professional life due to barriers in society.
Emigrant	From the perspective of the country of departure: moving from one's country of nationality or usual place of residence to another country, so that the destination country effectively becomes the new usual place of residence.
Ethnicity	A group of people who share a common history and culture.

Expat	A person who lives outside the country they were born in.
Functional	In the context of the UG, this is a health-related issue that may lead to study challenges for individuals, as current academic structures and ways of working may pose barriers.
Gender	The social construct of gender; a person's sense of being a certain gender.
Gender-affirming surgery	The outward or visible appearance of a person's gender.
Gender-fluid	A gender identity that varies over time.
Gender non-conforming	Not conforming with the gender norms that are expected.
Immigrant	From the perspective of the country of arrival: a person who moves to a country that is not their country of nationality or usual place of residence, so that the destination country effectively becomes their new usual place of residence.
International	A person who live(s) outside the country they were born in.
Intersectionality	The ways in which different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation.
Intersex	Someone with sex characteristics that do not fit binary classifications of sex.
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual. The + represents people who are part of the community but whose identity is not captured by the acronym LGBTQIA.
Migrant	An umbrella term that describes a person who leaves their usual place of residence, temporarily or permanently, for various reasons, both within a country and internationally. The term includes various legal

	categories, such as labor migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, smuggled migrants, and international students.
Multiracial	A person who is of two or more races**.**
Neurodivergent	Having a neurological difference, such as but not limited to autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, Tourette's syndrome.
Neurodiverse	The term neurodiverse refers to the variation of neurotypes within a group, while an individual with a neurotype that deviates from the norm is better referred to as neurodivergent.
Neurotypical	Belonging to the majority in terms of neurotype.Not possessing a neurological difference.
Non-binary	Not identifying with the binary gender categories of 'man' or 'woman'.
Outing	Revealing a person's gender identity or sexual orientation without their consent.
Pansexual	Being attracted to a person regardless of their gender identity.
Passing	In the context of gender: when a transgender person is seen as a cisgender person in the gender which the transgender person identifies with.
Performance dis abi lity	See 'functional impairment'
Permit holder	In the Dutch context: someone who has a permit to reside in the Netherlands.
Person/people of	An umbrella term used to describe a person or group of people who identify as and is/are not considered to be white.

Person with a migration background	In the Netherlands, this has been defined as a person who has: a) migrated into their present country of residence; and / or b) previously had a different nationality from their present country of residence; and / or c) at least one of their parents previously entered their present country of residence as a migrant.
Queer	Someone with a sexual orientation and/or gender identity other than straight and cisgender. A reclamation of what used to be a slur, often used as a political statement.
Race	A social construct based on skin color and physical features.
Racialized	Someone affected by racism or discrimination based on their (perceived) race
Refugee	A person who asked for protection and was given refugee status. They may have been resettled in another country or be waiting for resettlement.
Sex assigned at birth	The sex a baby is assigned when they are born, based on their primary sex characteristics.
Transgender, trans	Identifying with a gender other than the one assigned at birth.
Transition	The social and possibly medical process that trans people undertake when they begin to align their gender expression with their gender identity.
Wheelchair user	Someone who uses a wheelchair.
White	An identity category mostly used for people of predominantly European descent, and also an indication of skin color.

Resources

- APA: Inclusive Language Guidelines
- Augsburg University: Avoiding Ableist Language
- Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement Glossary: Inclusive language in community building
- Code Diversiteit & Inclusie
- Maastricht University: Gender Inclusive Language Guide
- MLA Style Guide: Guidance on Inclusive Language
- Racial Equity Tools Glossary
- Taalunie: taal en gender
- Transgender Netwerk Nederland: Wegwijzer voor journalisten en redacties
- University of Arizona: Antiracist language guide
- Words matter