

Inclusive Language Guidelines



General Guidelines

The use of language is of utmost importance as it shapes our communication, perceptions, and interactions with others. Language not only reflects our thoughts and beliefs but also has the power to influence and shape societal attitudes and behaviours. It plays a significant role in signalling and promoting inclusivity, respect, and understanding among diverse individuals and communities. Adopting a more inclusive approach to language can help create an environment that values diversity, promotes equality, and fosters positive relationships. Below are some suggestions on how to adopt a more inclusive approach to language in written and verbal internal and external communications. See Section B for Examples Of Non-Inclusive Language With Alternative Options.

1. **Avoid assumptions and stereotypes:** Use language that avoids making assumptions or reinforcing stereotypes about individuals or groups based on their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, or any other characteristic. Treat people as individuals rather than making generalisations.
2. **Person-first language:** Use person-first language to emphasise the person rather than defining them by their condition or disability. For example, say "a person with a disability" instead of "a disabled person." This helps to focus on the individual's humanity rather than reducing them to a single characteristic.
3. **Respect gender identity:** Respect and acknowledge individuals' gender identities by using their preferred pronouns. Avoid assuming someone's gender based on appearance or making assumptions. When in doubt, politely ask someone for their pronouns.
4. **Be mindful of cultural diversity:** Recognise and appreciate the diverse cultural backgrounds and traditions of individuals. Use language that respects and

acknowledges different cultural practices, customs, and beliefs. Avoid cultural stereotypes or making derogatory remarks.

5. **Inclusive terminology:** Use inclusive language that embraces and includes all individuals. Avoid using terms that may be offensive, exclusionary, or perpetuate biases. For instance, use gender-neutral terms, when possible, instead of using gender-specific terms (e.g., "firefighter" instead of "fireman").
6. **Active listening and empathy:** Practice active listening and empathy to understand others' perspectives and experiences. Active listening is the practice of preparing to listen, observing what verbal and non-verbal messages are being sent, and then providing appropriate feedback in order to show attentiveness to the message being presented. Pay attention to how your words and language may impact others and be open to learning and growing in your understanding of inclusive language.
7. **Educate yourself:** Take the time to educate yourself on inclusive language and current best practices. Stay informed about evolving language norms and preferred terminology. Engage in conversations, read diverse perspectives, and seek feedback from others to continually improve your language usage. Examples of sources of information include:
 - [The Conscious Style Guide](#)
 - [Conscious Language Toolkits for Editors and Writers](#)
 - The American Psychological Association (APA) [guidelines on bias-free language](#)

Remember, adopting a more inclusive approach to language is an ongoing process that requires self-reflection, awareness, and a commitment to respectful and inclusive communication. By using inclusive language, we can contribute to a more inclusive and accepting society where everyone feels valued and respected.



Automated Tools

There are several tools available that can help you check for inclusive language in your writing. Here are a few examples:

1. **Microsoft Word:** Microsoft Word has a built-in feature called "Editor" that provides suggestions for inclusive language. It can highlight potentially biased terms and propose more inclusive alternatives.
2. **Microsoft Outlook:** has options under its Proofing menu to check for many aspects of inclusiveness.
3. **Grammarly:** Grammarly is a popular writing assistant that offers a specific setting for inclusive language. It can detect and suggest alternatives for potentially biased or exclusive language in your writing.
4. **Hemingway Editor:** While Hemingway Editor is primarily known for its readability analysis, it can also help you identify instances of gendered language. It highlights words or phrases that may be considered exclusive and suggests revisions.
5. **The Gender Decoder:** The Gender Decoder is an online tool specifically designed to analyse job descriptions for gendered language. It helps you identify potentially biased language that may discourage certain genders from applying.
6. **Textio:** Textio is an AI-powered writing platform that provides real-time feedback on inclusivity and gender balance in job postings and other written content. It suggests inclusive language alternatives and helps you attract a more diverse pool of candidates.
7. **The Conscious Style Guide:** The Conscious Style Guide is a comprehensive online resource that offers guidance on inclusive language usage. While it is not an automated tool, it provides extensive information and examples to help you develop inclusive writing skills.

Automated tools can be helpful, but they are not foolproof. It is essential to develop your own understanding of inclusive language and consider the context and impact of your words.



Examples of Non-Inclusive Language with Alternative Options

1. Age

Refer to age only when it is relevant, such as for courses or funding that are only available for a certain age group. Age should not be used to describe individuals or groups where it is not relevant, and ageist terms such as 'elderly' or 'youngsters' should be avoided. Use objective terms, such as 'child' for ages 4-12 and 'young people' or 'young adults' for those aged 13-18. Instead of using terms like 'mature workforce' or 'young and vibrant team', it is appropriate to say 'experienced workforce' or 'effective and vibrant team'.

Avoid	Consider
The elderly	Older people, seniors
Kids	Child (age 4-12) Teenagers (13-19), Young adults, youths (age 15-24) Students (where applicable and appropriate)

2. Disability

Refer to age only when it is relevant, such as for courses or funding that are only available for a certain age group. Age should not be used to describe individuals or groups where it is not relevant, and ageist terms such as 'elderly' or 'youngsters' should be avoided. Use objective terms, such as 'child' for ages 4-12 and 'young people' or 'young adults' for those aged 13-18. Instead of using terms like 'mature workforce' or 'young and vibrant team', it is appropriate to say 'experienced workforce' or 'effective and vibrant team'.

Avoid	Consider
The disabled, handicapped people	People/persons with a disability
The blind	People with visual impairments, blind people, partially sighted people
The deaf	People with hearing impairments, deaf people
Diabetic, suffers with diabetes	Person with diabetes

3. Neurodiversity and Mental Health

Each person's brain is unique, resulting in natural differences in communication skills, problem-solving, and creative insights. About 10-15% of the population is neurodivergent, which includes conditions such as autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ADHD. Around 14% of Singaporeans have experienced a mood or anxiety disorder at some point of their lives. It is important to understand and appreciate these normal differences and avoid using negative or medicalised language when referring to neurodiversity and mental health.

Avoid	Consider
Autistic	Person with autism
Dyslexic	Person with dyslexia
Struggles with/suffers from depression	Experiences depression
Mental disorder/illness	Mental health conditions

4. Race, Ethnicity, Nationality and Religion

A person's race, ethnicity, nationality, and religion should only be referred to if they are relevant to the information being communicated: for example, if a scholarship is only offered to Singaporeans. Avoid making assumptions or generalisations about any racial, ethnic, national or religious group.

5. Socioeconomic Language

A person's social or economic background or status should only be referred to if they are relevant to the information being communicated: for example, if financial assistance is based on household income.

Avoid	Consider
Needy	Person in need
Poor, low-income (as a label)	Financially disadvantaged
Wealthy, rich (as a label)	Financially privileged, economically advantaged

6. Gender identity and sexual orientation

Use gender-neutral language: Avoid using gendered language that assumes a person's gender. For example, use "they" instead of "he" or "she" when referring to a person of unknown gender.

Avoid	Consider
Ladies and gentlemen	Distinguished guests, colleagues and friends
Girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, husband, other/better half	Friend, partner, spouse
Mankind	Humankind
Manpower	(Human) Resources
Policeman	Police officer
Chairman/Chairwoman	Chair, Chairperson
Steward/Stewardess	Flight attendant, Cabin crew
Male nurse	Nurse
Sexual preference	Sexual orientation
Heterosexuals, homosexuals, transsexuals	People who are heterosexual, homosexual, transsexual
Lesbians, gays, bisexual	Lesbian people, gay people, bisexual people
Freshmen	First-year students, first-years, freshers

By following these guidelines, SMU can create a more inclusive environment that respects the diverse identities and experiences of its community members.