



A LEAD Network Resource

Gender-Inclusive Language Guide

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Introduction

Language is powerful. And constantly evolving.

Our choice of words, and the stories we tell, have the power to perpetuate or dismantle gender inequality.

As passionate allies united by the desire to create a more gender-inclusive industry, let's be intentional in our choice of language to drive the positive change we want to see. **Small adjustments can make a big difference** to how included our friends and colleagues feel!

#DoingNotTrying

About this Guide

LEAD Network has produced this guide to support our Members with their ongoing development of consciously inclusive language, by providing:



Educational Insights

Explanations of why certain words can impact how included or excluded someone feels.



Inclusive Coaching

Questions designed to prompt personal reflection.



Professional Development

Some suggestions and questions to help you with inclusive reframing.

CONSIDERATIONS

LEAD Network recognises there are constantly evolving linguistic preferences that will differ among our community, dependent on geographical, cultural and socio-political contexts.

This guide is not intended to be a comprehensive, definitive or 'finished' document. But rather, a helpful starting point (and work in progress) aimed at supporting our Members with reflection and ongoing development of gender-inclusive language. We will review and update the guide twice a year, in consultation with our Members.



Top Tips

1

Stay curious

Avoid the fear of getting it wrong and instead, channel curiosity to understand and learn. Our choice of words may unintentionally impact how included or excluded someone feels. Be curious about why people may have different preferences or objections, and what small adjustments you could make to help them feel more included.

2

Personalise to your context

Whilst this guide is intended to provide useful reflective prompts and suggestions, we recommend consulting with your DE&I / Communications / Brand teams for guidance on linguistic preferences that may be specific to your local context.

3

Be mindful of intent vs impact

Impact matters! If we unintentionally cause offence, briefly pause, and receive feedback with grace, rather than over-explaining. Mistakes WILL happen; that's how we learn. Remember: **F**irst **A**ttempt **I**n **L**earning

Sex vs Gender

Biological is sex assigned at birth. Gender on the other hand, is a spectrum of socially constructed identities, based on an internal sense of who we are as individuals. A person's gender may be the same as the biological sex they were assigned at birth, but importantly, it might be different.





Gender is not binary.




Whilst interconnected, sex shouldn't be used interchangeably with gender.


Common Words & Phrases	How these words may impact how included or excluded someone feels	Ask yourself...	Gender-inclusive alternatives
<p>'Men and women'</p> <p>'Both genders'</p> <p>'Either gender'</p>	<p>Either/or infers that gender is binary.</p> <p>Using binary language excludes non-binary people & some trans people.</p> <p>Binary language limits a culture of inclusion.</p>	<p>Who am I ignoring by using this language?</p>	<p>All genders</p> <p>All of us</p>
<p>Female, male</p>	<p>These adjectives are typically associated with biological sex (focused on body parts) rather than a person's expression of their gender identity.</p>	<p>Am I describing a person's sex or gender?</p> <p>How could I more inclusively describe who I am referring to?</p>	<p>Women, men, and non-binary people</p>

Pronouns

-  Pronouns are words we use to refer to someone in the third person without using their name. An individual chooses their personal pronouns based on what best reflects their gender identity.
-  Avoid only referring to 'he or she', as gender exists on a broader spectrum. She, he and they, are the most commonly used inclusive terms in everyday conversations. For the full spectrum of gender identity pronouns, please see the table below.

Subject	Object	Possessive	Pronunciation	Example
She	Her	Hers	Shee, hur, hurs	It's her job, the job is hers
He	Him	His	Hee, him, hiz	It's his job, the job is his
They	Them	Theirs	They, them, thehrz	It's their job, the job is theirs
Xe	Xem	Xyrs	Zee, zem, zehrs	It's xem job, the job is xyrs
Ze	Hir	Hirs	Zee, hear, hears	It's hir job, the job is hirs
Ze	Zir	Zirs	Zee, zeer, zeers	It's zir job, the job is zirs
E	Em	Eirs	Ay, em, airs	It's em job, the job is airs

 'Ze' is used to different extents, depending on the country you're in. If it's not something you commonly hear, 'they' is an inclusive alternative.

 Pro-actively sharing your pronouns can be a great way of demonstrating allyship and inclusion. However, be mindful that the cultural context may make it unsafe for some people to openly express their gender identity.

Interested in learning more?

Check out this great illustrated piece in the Harvard Business Review called 'How to Talk About Pronouns at Work: a Visual Guide' by Paige Cohen and Lily Zheng.

<https://hbr.org/2021/09/how-to-talk-about-pronouns-at-work-a-visual-guide>

Addressing Individuals

Common Words & Phrases	How these words may impact how included or excluded someone feels	Ask yourself...	Gender-inclusive alternatives
<p>S/he Him / Her</p>	<p>These emphasise the binary and neglect non-binary people.</p> <p>A person's gender identity may not be as you assume it to be.</p>	<p>What do I know vs what am I assuming?</p> <p>Am I describing someone as 'he' or 'she' based purely on their name or physical appearance?</p> <p>Who might I be excluding?</p>	<p>Unless it is necessary to refer to a person's gender (or the person you are referring to has already expressed a preference) use 'they' or 'ze' for neutrality.</p>
<p>Dear Miss / Mrs Dear Sir / Madam</p>	<p>Addressing someone this way assumes they are a woman and excludes people who may be non-binary.</p> <p>Referring to a woman as Miss or Mrs, focuses on her marital status, as opposed to who she is as an individual! Unlike 'Mr', which is used as a neutral term for men, regardless of their relationship status.</p>	<p>What do I know and what am I assuming?</p> <p>Is this an appropriate greeting for a non-binary person?</p> <p>Do I need to even use a title?</p>	<p>Dear Ms [last name]</p> <p>If you know it is a woman</p> <p>Dear Mr / Ms / Mx [last name]</p> <p>Dear [firstname]</p> <p>To whom it may concern</p>



'Mx.' is a gender-neutral title increasingly used by non-binary people and those who prefer not to be addressed by gender e.g. 'Mx Schmidt'.



Addressing Groups

Common Words & Phrases	How these words may impact how included or excluded someone feels	Ask yourself...	Gender-inclusive alternatives
Hi Guys	These phrases can be triggering for people who identify as transgender or non-binary.	Am I using a masculine default?	Hi everyone
Ladies and gentleman		Who am I actually referring to?	Hi all Hi folks
		Am I at risk of misgendering someone in my audience?	Distinguished guests
		What's a better, more inclusive way for me to address this group?	Colleagues, friends Hello everyone



The phrase 'Hi Guys' also normalises a focus on men as the default - **let's change this!**



Gendered Experiences

Common Words & Phrases	How these words may impact how included or excluded someone feels	Ask yourself...	Gender-inclusive alternatives
Pregnant women	<p>Not all people navigating these experiences identify as women.</p> <p>Using 'women' as the default 'catch-all' expression excludes people of other genders who may be experiencing these important life events.</p>	<p>Am I at risk of excluding men, trans men, or non-binary people?</p> <p>Could I remove gender from the phrase and replace it with 'people' instead?</p>	Pregnant people
Working mothers			Working parents
Breastfeeding women			People who breastfeed
Female menstruation			People who menstruate
Menopausal women			People experiencing menopause

Reframing Commonly Used Words

Common Words & Phrases	How these words may impact how included or excluded someone feels	Ask yourself...	Gender-inclusive alternatives
Chairman	<p>These androcentric words are often used with the intention of describing the human experience but unintentionally, they position men as the default. This subtly perpetuates gendered stereotypes rather than being inclusive of all genders.</p>	<p>Who am I referring to?</p> <p>What do I mean?</p> <p>Am I using the prefix 'man' or 'master' when I'm actually referring to all people / the human experience?</p> <p>How could I role model a more gender-inclusive alternative?</p>	Chair
Spokesman			Spokesperson
Man the stand			Staff the stand
Mankind			Humankind, Humanity
Man up			Don't use the term and don't try to find an alternative!
Manpower, Manhours			People power Staff hours Workforce
Mastermind			Creator



Which other androcentric words have you noticed creeping into everyday conversations?

Reframing Common Expressions

Common Words & Phrases	How these words may impact how included or excluded someone feels	Ask yourself...	Gender-inclusive alternatives
'Colleagues taking maternity / paternity leave'	<p>Binary terms ignore the parental experiences of non-binary people.</p> <p>'Maternity / paternity' excludes colleagues welcoming children through non-biological means e.g. fostering, adoption and guardianship.</p> <p>These terms perpetuate stereotypes that raising children only concerns heterosexual couples.</p>	Who might I be excluding by using this language?	<p>'Colleagues taking parental leave'</p> <p>'Colleagues taking family leave'</p>
'What does your husband/ wife do?'	Unless someone has disclosed the gender of their partner/spouse, assumptions of a heterosexual marriage can be uncomfortable for non-binary and LGBTQ+ people	<p>What I am assuming?</p> <p>Who might I be excluding?</p>	'What does your partner do?'
'Women and diverse groups' 'Diverse groups' 'Minority groups'	<p>Women <i>are</i> diverse! By separating the two, the implication is that 'women' are white.</p> <p>'Diverse groups' buckets people into 'a group' instead of recognising that diversity exists at the individual level.</p> <p>Avoid the term minority group.</p>	<p>Who am I talking about specifically?</p> <p>Is intersectionality important to the point I am making?</p> <p>Who is marginalised?</p> <p>Who, specifically, is underrepresented - where/how?</p>	<p>'People with unique intersectional identities'</p> <p>'Marginalised groups'*</p> <p><i>*If using the term 'marginalised' or 'underrepresented', always try and be as specific as possible e.g. 'Black women under-represented at the leadership level'</i></p>
'Leaders empowering women'	True empowerment is not something a person gives to a group, rather, they create the conditions for empowerment to happen.	Am I describing empowerment in the context of the environment or as the ability of one person to control another?	<p>'Leaders driving an empowering culture'</p> <p>'Leaders cultivating empowering environments for women'</p>

Putting Into Practice



Whilst this guide has been designed to offer helpful reflection and some suggestions for gender-inclusive terminology, LEAD Network recognises that language preferences will be specific to local contexts.

Remember: context is everything!

The following questions are intended to support you with personal reflection and onward developmental conversations.

Which examples from this guide have you noticed in everyday conversations? How often have you used these phrases?

What are the preferred words and phrases in your local context?

How gender-inclusive is the language used in formal business exchanges?

What are the opportunities for your company to role model gender-inclusive language and address stereotypes?

Which words and phrases make you feel uncomfortable, and why?

How comfortable do you feel opening a conversation with colleagues on the topic of gender-inclusive language?

What alternative words might you suggest, to improve this guide?

Questions, reflections, or suggestions?

In the spirit of 'for the members, by the members' LEAD Network would love to discover how gender-inclusive language is evolving in your local context.

Email: education@theleadnetwork.net | **Visit:** lead-eu.net

Credits

This guide was developed by the LEAD Network core team.
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Help us with our Summer 2024 guide

In the spirit of 'by the members, for the members' LEAD Network invites you to share thoughts, reflections and suggestions to help inform version 2 of this guide, due out in Summer 2024.

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