Inclusive language guide

IMEX

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LANGUAGE GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

» **Consider this an** incomplete and ever-evolving guide to inclusive language. We developed this guide to equip you with the knowledge to communicate respectfully in the workplace, at our shows and in the wider world. This is part of our ongoing work towards becoming allies to all underrepresented identity groups.

This guide outlines how to use inclusive language to avoid biases, slang or expressions that exclude certain groups based on age, race, ethnicity, disability, gender or sexual orientation. As a business based in the UK, with shows in Germany and America, the language we have chosen for this guide is appropriate in these countries.

What is allyship?

THIS DEFINITION, TAKEN FROM FORBES, EXPLAINS THE INTRICACIES OF ALLYSHIP. **ALLYSHIP IS:**

- **A LIFELONG PROCESS** of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalised individuals and/or groups of people
- **NOT SELF-DEFINED -** work and efforts must be recognised by those you are seeking to ally with
- **AN OPPORTUNITY TO** grow and learn about ourselves, whilst building confidence in others. Learning to use inclusive language can be summed up in just five points:
- **CONTEXT MATTERS -** Language that may be fine outside of work can be non-inclusive at work. Sometimes people can use terms about themselves or their friends that are not appropriate for others to use about someone in a work context.
- **KEEP AN OPEN MIND -** Be open to changing what you have always thought is 'normal', respectful and appropriate to say. You don't have to be perfect –

just be willing to learn.
- **IF IN DOUBT, ASK -** If you're not sure what terminology someone prefers, just ask them! Ask the person or contact organisations that make up and represent given diversity groups.
- **FOCUS ON THE PERSON -** Focus on the person first, rather than the demographic group they belong to. Only refer to an individual's age, cultural background, gender etc. if it is relevant. Even 'positive' stereotypes (e.g. 'Asian people are so good at maths!') are problematic, as they prioritise a cultural stereotype over the individual.
- **KEEP CALM AND RESPOND -** Sometimes our unconscious biases mean we can say things that exclude others – even when we do not intend to. Responding with 'it was just a joke' or 'don't take it so seriously' is not helpful. If you have accidentally caused offence, make an effort to understand how and why.

AGE

Instead of	Try...	Why?
THE ELDERLY	Mature individual	These general terms imply that people of certain ages are a standardised group.
THE OLD	Older people	At which point is someone old or young? How would you feel if someone defined you as old or young?
THE YOUNG	Young/younger people	
BOYS/GIRLS WHEN REFERRING TO ADULTS	Men/women	These words are used to refer to children, consider that your adult colleagues may prefer being called men/women.
	Colleagues	Some women may self-identify as girls, but as a group that is often underrepresented in leadership positions, others can find the term demeaning (see further reading for more information).

DISABILITY

Instead of   Try...   Why?

Instead of	Try...	Why?
THE DISABLED	Person with a disability	Always put the person before the disability, they may not want to be defined by it.
THE HANDICAPPED	People with disabilities Disabled people/person	The word handicapped has a number of problematic connotations: the word implies inherent inability, not being able to function, separation from society as a whole (see further reading). Some people with disabilities may identify with terms like 'disabled'. This is their decision and should be respected.
NORMAL HEALTHY ABLE-BODIED PERSON	People without a disability Non-disabled person	Avoid using terms that imply living with a disability is unhealthy or abnormal. Disability manifests in many ways including those that have no impact on health or ability.
DISABLED TOILETS LIFTS FOR THE DISABLED	Accessible toilets/lifts	Use positive language rather than descriptions that emphasise limitations.
WHEELCHAIR-BOUND, CONFINED TO A CHAIR CANCER OR DEMENTIA VICTIMS	Person who uses a wheelchair People living with cancer or dementia	Avoid negative terms that overextend the severity of a disability.
DEAF AND DUMB NUTS, PSYCHO, MAD RETARDED, SLOW	People who are deaf People with a mental illness Person with a learning disability	Avoid outdated and derogatory terms. Many people use these words in everyday language, not just when describing disability, but there's a growing awareness that these words are hurtful no matter what the context.

DISABILITY CONTINUED

Instead of	Try...	Why?
SCHIZOPHRENIC AUTISTIC CHILD	Person with schizophrenia A child diagnosed with autism	Avoid terms which equate the person with the ability or disability.
CHALLENGED, SPECIAL	Person with a learning disability	Avoid using euphemisms or substitute 'labels'
MENTAL PATIENT, INSANE, MAD, CRAZY	Person with mental illness	Mental illness is an illness, and using these terms can perpetuate discrimination. Bipolar, PTSD, OCD and ADD are real mental health diagnoses that people possess. Using these terms to describe everyday behaviours can dismiss a person's experiences with mental disorders (see further reading).

GENDER

Instead of	Try...	Why?
MAN, MANKIND	**Humans, Humankind**	Use gender neutral terms.
WORKMANSHIP	**Quality of work/skills**	They are more representative of the world we live in.
MAN THE DESK/PHONES	**Attend/answer the phones**	
MAN-MADE	**Artificial, manufactured, synthetic**	
ANYONE WHO WANTS HIS WORK EVALUATED	**Anyone who wants their work evaluated**	Use gender neutral pronouns and expressions that don't exclude certain groups.
WELCOME LADIES AND GENTLEMEN	**Welcome friends and colleagues** **Welcome everyone/folks**	
THE TRANSGENDER	**Trans people/Trans person Trans**	Use person-centred language.
IT	**Transgender identity and expression**	Never use 'it'. You are talking about a person, not a thing.
SHE, HER, HERS AND HE, HIM, HIS	**They, them, theirs. It is correct to use in the singular (e.g. Xena ate their food because they were hungry).**	Avoid assuming someone's gender based on their appearance or name, as some people may not identify as a man or a woman, but would instead prefer to choose their pronouns, commonly: he, she, they or ze (see below definition for more information). You should respect the way people wish to identify themselves. If you aren't sure which pronouns to use, just ask them! Using 'they' and other gender-neutral language is completely acceptable unless otherwise requested. This is also a way to show your support for gender non-conforming groups.

GENDER GLOSSARY

» • **BIOLOGICAL SEX** – a label assigned by a doctor at birth based on attributes such as anatomy, chromosomes, and hormones. An individual can be male, female, or intersex.

• **INTERSEX** – people who are born with any of several variations in sex characteristics that do not fit the typical definitions for male or female bodies.

• **GENDER** – a set of expectations from society about behaviours, characteristics, and thoughts. Gender can be considered binary or viewed as a spectrum.

• **GENDER IDENTITY** – an individual's internal sense of gender, i.e. being a man, a woman, neither of these, both. This can be man, woman, transgender, cisgender, non-binary, gender fluid or agender.

• **PREFERRED GENDER PRONOUNS** – pronouns that a person chooses to use for themselves. The most commonly used pronouns are she, her, hers, and he, him, his, however there are many gender-neutral options for those people who identify as non-binary, such as they, them, theirs.

• **ZE/HIR PRONOUN** – Often, people make assumptions about the gender of another person based on a person's appearance or name. Then, they apply those assumptions to the pronouns and forms of address used to refer to a person. Although the pronouns "ze/hir" tend to be thought of as gender neutral, a person who goes by "ze" could actually be a man, a woman, both, neither.

• **CISGENDER** – a person whose gender identity corresponds with their biological sex.

• **AGENDER, GENDERLESS, GENDER-FREE, NON-GENDERED, OR UNGENDERED** – terms describing someone who identifies as having no gender or being without a gender identity.

• **NON-BINARY, GENDER-QUEER** – umbrella terms used to describe gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine.

• **GENDER REASSIGNMENT SURGERY, GENDER-AFFIRMING SURGERY** – the surgical procedure(s) by which a transgender person's physical appearance and function of their existing sexual characteristics are altered to resemble that socially associated with their identified gender.

• **TRANS** – term used by some transgender individuals who are open about their status and/or believe that transition does not mean they become men or women. It can also be used as a generic term to refer to the trans community.

• **TRANSITION** – term referring to the process and/or the period of time during which gender reassignment occurs (whether with or without medical intervention).

SEXUALITY

Instead of   Try...   Why?

Instead of	Try...	Why?
SEXUAL PREFERENCE LIFESTYLE CHOICE	Sexual orientation	Avoid terms that suggest a degree of voluntary choice when this is not the case.
LESBIANS, GAYS, BISEXUALS	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer people	Use person-centred language. Use this language if someone has told you so, you shouldn't assume otherwise. In some instances, a person could be in a same sex relationship but not identify as gay or lesbian. *For example* some women would identify with the word gay rather than lesbian.
INVITE YOUR BOYFRIEND/ HUSBAND/ GIRLFRIEND/WIFE	Invite your spouse/partner	Use language that does not assume heterosexuality as the norm.
MOTHER AND FATHER	Parents, caregivers	Recognise diverse family formations.

SEXUALITY GLOSSARY

SAY WHAT?

- **LGBTQ+** – a common shorter version of a variety of longer acronyms that describe sexuality and gender identity-based communities. The letters stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and the + indicates other categories such as Questioning, Asexual, Intersex, Pansexual, thus indicating the variety of sexuality and gender-based identities that have been or are being defined.
- **DGSS** – people or individuals "of diverse genders, sexes and sexualities". A less-commonly used alternative to LGBTQ+, developed to represent the full spectrum of sex, sexuality and gender identity instead of reducing it to a "+".
- **QUESTIONING** – a process of exploration by people who may be unsure, still exploring, and concerned about applying a social label to themselves for various reasons.
- **ASEXUAL** – a lack of sexual attraction. Asexual people can be romantically attracted to other people, for example, a biromantic asexual is someone who is not sexually attracted to anyone, but is romantically attracted to males and females.
- **QUEER** – umbrella term for sexual orientation and gender identity groups who are not heterosexual or cisgender. Originally meaning 'strange' it has been historically a derogative term to describe people with same-sex desires or relationships but has been reclaimed by the younger members of the LGBTQ+ community.
- **RECLAIMING LANGUAGE** – Be mindful of appropriate and respectful in-group versus out-group naming, i.e. avoid using terms that are only used by individuals that self-identify as part of a specific community.
- **SEXUAL ORIENTATION** – A person's sexual identity in relation to the gender to which they are attracted; the fact of being heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.

RACE, ETHNICITY, NATIONALITY

Instead of	Try...	Why?
ASIANS	Asian people	Use adjectives rather than nouns when it is necessary to refer to someone's ethnicity.
CHINESE PEOPLE ARE REALLY GOOD AT MATHS	Just don't say it	Avoid stereotyping, e.g., making positive or negative generalisations about members of a particular racial, ethnic or national group.
COLOURED	...Asking yourself why you need to refer to someone's ethnicity in the first place – Is it necessary to the discussion? People of colour Biracial or mixed race If you are talking about a specific ethnicity, you should say so. For example, black people.	Use this language if someone has told you so, you shouldn't assume otherwise. In the UK the term coloured is, at best, seen as old fashioned. But it's also regarded as a highly offensive racial slur which recalls a time when casual racism was a part of everyday life. In the US it is among the most offensive words for describing a black person. People of colour is an accepted term when talking about ethnic minorities generally, but it shouldn't be used when you're talking about a specific ethnicity. BAME is an outdated and problematic term, namely that it treats ethnic minorities as being in the same non-white group, without acknowledging individual issues.
MINORITY GROUPS	Underrepresented backgrounds, underrepresented groups, marginalised identity groups or specify a specific ethnic group. E.g. The Asian community	'Minority' is sometimes used as a blanket term for people from underrepresented groups, but underrepresented doesn't always equal a minority. For instance, black, Asian and other visible minority ethnic groups in the UK are actually a global majority.

RACE, ETHNICITY, NATIONALITY
GLOSSARY

- **RECLAIMING LANGUAGE** – Be mindful of appropriate and respectful in-group versus out-group naming, i.e. avoid using terms that are only used by individuals that self-identify as part of a specific community.

- **RACE** – race is a socially constructed term without biological merit that has historically been used to categorise different groups of people based on perceived physical differences.

- **ETHNICITY** – an ethnic group; a social group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, language, or the like. It is common in our language and media for 'ethnic' to be synonymous with not-white or not-western, for example 'ethnic clothes' or 'ethnic restaurants'. However, it is important to remember that everyone has an ethnicity and 'white British' is an ethnic group.

- **BAME OR BME** – BME stands for black and minority ethnic. BAME stands for black, Asian and minority ethnic. Both have their limitations, they can be perceived as convenient labels that are placed on minority ethnic groups of people, rather than how they have chosen to identify themselves. These terms have a tendency to be perceived as referring to non-white people, which fails to consider white minority ethnic groups (for example, Jewish, Arab, Gypsy/Roma/Traveller, Irish, other European). BAME is often used in workplaces, government institutions and universities, but can be problematic as described above.

- **PEOPLE/PERSON OF COLOUR** – From research this was the most widely accepted term when discussing ethnicity, but many people see it as too similar to 'coloured'. Again, you should question why you need to mention a person's ethnicity in the first place, and if you're really stuck, just ask the person which ethnicity they identify with. The most important thing is that people are discussing ethnicity, race and advancing equality. The more it is talked about the more comfortable people will become in those discussions.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

LANGUAGE GUIDE

Resources

- **AGE UK –** Age UK is the leading charity for older people

- **ALLSORTS YOUTH PROJECT –** LGBT+ charity

- **UK GOVERNMENT –** Inclusive language: words to use and avoid when writing about disability

- **UK GOVERNMENT –** Writing about ethnicity

Further reading

- **ALLYSHIP** - The Key To Unlocking The Power Of Diversity

- **BIRACIAL BRITAIN:** why mixed-race people must be able to decide their own identity

- Can men call women 'girls'?

- Stop Saying You're "So OCD"

- Tips for Allies of Transgender People

- **INQUEERY:** What Does the Word "Transgender" Mean?

- That's What Ze Said

- David's Out for a Good Time podcast

- Why using the term 'coloured' is offensive

- Why It's Time To Ditch The Term 'BAME'

- The Journey From 'Colored' To 'Minorities' To 'People Of Color'