Bocconi

INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

Università Bocconi
MILANO

Introduction

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*

We are privileged to work and study in a multicultural and multilingual environment where the fundamental principles of the Italian Constitution are translated into concrete action that fosters "the full development of the human person", "without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions."[1]

Bocconi University is a place where national, international and European guidelines[2] that promote non-discriminatory and inclusive communication can flourish and prosper, first and foremost at an institutional level.

In this sense, the University is key in promoting more inclusive language and using it in a way that recognizes and reflects diversity while limiting unconscious prejudices.

As an institute of higher education and a community, the University must not only impart academic knowledge, but also and most importantly put into practice the values of inclusion and respect we all believe in, ensuring they take root in everyday culture and habits.

Because it is only by leading by example in our own environment that we can actively contribute to building the open and inclusive society we all want to live in.

This is the basis of these guidelines on inclusive communication.
They are neither comprehensive nor definitive, but simply a useful aid to understanding how our choice of words, tone and behavior can influence the way other people see us, and how we can adapt our communication to be more aware of and empathetic with different identities, cultures and abilities.

It is important to keep in mind that the evolution of language and the use of inclusive linguistic forms are topics that are constantly evolving.

The guidelines and recommendations presented in this document regarding inclusive language are based on current knowledge and recognized linguistic practices up until the date of last release (June 2024). Language is dynamic and subject to social, cultural, and political changes and this guide may therefore also undergo revisions and updates over time.

The Guidelines are introduced with the scope of becoming a tool for promoting inclusive language in our daily life at the University, a tool that each of us can refer to in our activities. Therefore, we should become aware of these recommendations and try to introduce them from now on in both written communication (emails, documentation, web pages, etc.) and verbal communication (meetings, sessions, seminars, conferences, etc.).

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[1] Articles 2 and 3 of "The Constitution of the Italian Republic".

[2] 2018, European Parliament, Gender-Neutral Language in the European Parliament; United Nations, Guidelines for Gender-Inclusive Language

Guidelines

This guide includes concrete examples and offers practical advice for everyone at the University: faculty, staff and the student community.

Through guidelines, practical advice and concrete examples, it aims to encourage adopting language that is non-discriminatory and respects diversity, with the hope of helping build an increasingly welcoming and inclusive University for everyone.

These guidelines apply to both written and verbal communication, including public events as well as everyday academic interactions.
The document is structured around the main themes of inclusivity. Each theme is presented with simple examples that facilitate the application of the principles outlined.
A dedicated section is devoted to certain documents, announcements, regulations, resolutions, minutes, and certificates that utilize a language with separate rules dictated by bureaucratic needs.

Inclusive language springs from the realization that a person is not defined by one of their characteristics and that a characteristic is not what defines the entirety of a person.

Disabilities

A disability is a permanent or temporary condition that people can be born with or acquire.

A person with one or more disabilities is not defined by their disability. They are first and foremost people, so we recommend using person-first language that emphasizes the person rather than the disability.

Avoid pity and negative phrases that present people with disabilities as victims, such as "suffering from mental illnesses", "confined to a wheelchair" and "has a birth defect".

Refrain from the use of collective nouns as they unnecessarily create a distance.

Examples:

- ✓ Instead of a disabled person, you should use a person with disabilities/a disability
- ✓ Instead of wheelchair-bound, you should use wheelchair user
- ✓ Instead of normal people, you should use people without disabilities
- ✓ Instead of affected by Down's syndrome, you should use with Down's syn

Race and Ethnicity

Language usage with reference to Race and Ethnicity is continuously evolving, therefore it is necessary to make sure that we use appropriate terms. Although it is always depending on the context, the basic principle in this area is to use these terms carefully and avoid grouping people by racial (Black, brown, white) or ethnic origin (African, Arab, Asian), unless absolutely necessary.
Some common terms related to **ethnicities and minority groups** need further, yet not exhaustive, clarification:

- ✓ *People of Color* has been in use in the US, and in the UK, it is becoming more and more popular as a more positive term over the acronym *BAME* (Black, Asian and minority ethnic), which has not been used by the UK government since March 2021 as it excludes mixed, other and white ethnic minority groups. The exception is when the use of BAME becomes appropriate for statistical comparisons or research purposes (e.g. BAME populations are generally underrepresented in research studies)

- ✓ *Black person/people/community* are acceptable terms, and *Black* should be capitalized. However, never use *Black* as a singular noun, and avoid using it alone as a plural noun (e.g. black becomes Black staff, Black students)

- ✓ *Non-white* may be acceptable only if referring to a very broad group of people and only in the context of opposite, otherwise it is more accurate to specify the race or ethnicity of a person or group (e.g. I am the only non-white person in the group)

- ✓ *Caucasian* should be replaced with *white*. Do not use as a singular noun and avoid using alone as a plural noun (e.g. white people, white teachers, white students, etc.)

- ✓ It is possible to use *Chinese, Indian, African, Arab*, etc. to describe ethic groups.

- ✓ The word *minority* can be used in combination with quantitative data, but otherwise the use of *community* or simply *people* is preferable (e.g. minority ethnic groups)

When referring to an **individual**, instead, we need to remember that they may have their own preferences as to how they describe themselves or how they wish to be described.

- ✓ Instead of describing a person's identity as *POC (People of Color), BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and other People of Color), BAME, etc.*, ensure that the way you describe them reflects them, therefore always clarify how an individual wish to describe their identity

- ✓ If you refer to a person's ethnicity or nationality, be as specific as possible (e.g. a group of Asian visitors should be replaced with visitors from Japan and South Korea)

To summarize, we need to make sure to use appropriate terms that are as specific as possible when referring to minority ethnic groups and/or to representatives individually. If in doubt, it is suggested to politely ask about preferences, bearing in mind that identity divergences may exist within ethnic groups.

Gender

We need to be aware of how gender-sensitive language can be used to include all the people we want to communicate with.

Avoid nouns that appear to assume that one gender rather than another will perform a particular role.

Examples:
- ✓ Each working citizen must know his rights should be replaced with All workers must know their rights.
- ✓ A good judge takes his job very seriously should be replaced with A good judge takes the job very seriously.
- ✓ A teacher must communicate clearly with her students should be replaced with

Teachers must communicate clearly with their students.
- ✓ The average student is worried about his grade should be replaced with The average student is worried about grades.

Avoid the use of gendered words. Some habitual terms can easily be made more inclusive, such as gendered nouns.

Examples:
- ✓ Chairman, spokesman, mankind should be replaced with Chair, spokesperson/press officer, humankind
- ✓ Fire is man's greatest invention should be replaced with Fire is humanity's greatest invention
- ✓ Man-made fabrics should be replaced with Synthetic fabrics
- ✓ Ladies and gentlemen should be replaced with Everyone or colleagues

Avoid always mentioning the same gender first in the word order, or addressing men and women differently (e.g. a man by family name, a woman by first name).
Avoid reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes, or portraying harmful stereotypes around gender, age, ethnic groups, etc. in your communication.

Example:
- ✓ Professors with their wives should be replaced with Professors with their partners

Try not to patronize, victimize, minimize or ignore women's contributions. Gender-sensitive language treats different genders equally and positively. It is aware of stereotypical perceptions of gender roles and is used actively to undo them.

Example:
- ✓ Lithuania is playing well today and likely to win the match. Lithuania's women's team will also be playing tomorrow should be replaced with Lithuania's men's team are playing well today and are likely to win the match. Lithuania's women's team will also be playing tomorrow.

LGBTQIA+ and Gender Identity

As a general principle of LGBTQIA+ inclusive communication, do not assume anyone's sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics.
As a rule, you should always emphasize the person rather than fragmented characteristics, such as their sexual orientation, gender identity or racial or ethnic origin, and respect self-identification.

Examples:
- ✓ Gays and lesbians are now allowed to marry in many EU countries should be replaced with Same-sex couples are now allowed to marry or have registered partnerships in many EU countries.
- ✓ A gay, two lesbians should be replaced with A gay person, a lesbian couple
- ✓ Transgenders/transsexuals can be replaced with trans people/person as the adjective "trans" is all-encompassing

Pronouns

In our daily communication (be it during meetings or in writing), pronouns play a crucial role in referring to individuals.

When we write about someone, it is important to inquire about the pronouns they currently use and to be aware that these preferences may evolve over time.

In inclusive English, the pronouns "they/their/theirs" can be used as a gender-neutral singular pronoun. It is used to refer to a person when their gender is unknown, irrelevant, or when they prefer not to be identified with a specific gender. By using "they" as a singular pronoun, it acknowledges and respects gender diversity.

Therefore, if not instructed to use gender-specific pronouns like 'she/her/hers' or 'he/his/him', avoid using them and assuming that people identify with the gender we would expect them to belong. Use "they" as a single pronoun, or reformulate the sentence so that no pronoun is needed at all.

Examples:
- ✓ Alex is a talented researcher. She published several articles should be replaced with Alex is a talented researcher, who authored many publications. They published several articles.
- ✓ I met someone at the conference today. He is very knowledgeable about the topic should be replaced with I met someone at the conference today. They are very knowledgeable about the topic.
- ✓ The Chapter Leader is responsible for organizing events. He/she is also in charge of the Chapter's budget should be replaced with The Chapter Leader is responsible for organizing events. They are also in charge of the Chapter's budget.

While they as a singular pronoun may be confusing to some readers, using "they" as a gender-neutral pronoun is becoming more widely accepted and recognized as an inclusive language practice.

Some members of our community may choose to add their preferred pronouns to their email signatures (next to or below their name) to avoid any confusion when corresponding.

For more formal writing including legal or bureaucratic communication, however, it is best to be as clear as possible and use gender-specific pronouns.

Titles

If possible, use a person's full name instead of a title.

When referring to women, avoid the titles Miss or Mrs., which unnecessarily reveal a woman's marital status, unless they prefer to self-identify as such. Use Ms. instead.

Refer to people who identify outside the gender binary of male and female by the pronouns that they identify with. In the absence of such information, Mx. should be used as the default.

Example:

- ✓ Miss/Mrs. Smith should be replaced with Ms. Smith / Bessie Smith

Events

In promoting events, it is important to list the speakers in order of appearance or in alphabetical order, including both male and female speakers, using their appropriate titles based on their gender.

Forms

Forms, both paper and online, represent a specific type of document.

Gender information should be collected only when strictly necessary with 4 options offered:

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

If useful for data collection purposes, next to the "Other" option, a free-text field can be added to allow the form filler to specify further.
If, for legal reasons, it is necessary to request a person's sex, currently only the choices of male and female should be indicated. This option is tied to an objective need (such as quotas reserved for a gender or statistical requirements).

If the form includes a contact option, it is useful to ask for the preferred form of address, among:

- She, her, hers, herself
- He, him, his, himself
- They, them, theirs, themself or themselves

Alternatively, the titles can be used:

- Ms.
- Mr.
- Mx.

Short Glossary

Gender expression: These are the ways in which everyone expresses their gender identity in a given culture and era (physical characteristics, behavior or roles).

Gender identity: This is the sense of belonging to a gender. If gender coincides with biological sex, it is called cisgender, otherwise transgender. When a person is not comfortable with the male/female binary, feels both or none, they may choose to define themselves with the term non-binary.

Sexual orientation: Indicates attraction to a person of the opposite sex or gender, same sex or gender or both.

Race: Is frequently used to categorize individuals based on shared physical characteristics that are considered common among people of a shared ancestry, such as skin color or hair texture.

Ethnicity: Refers to shared cultural expressions within a group of people, such as religion, traditions, and customs.

Nationality: Pertains to a person's citizenship acquired through descent or naturalization.

Gender Neutral Nouns

Gendered	Gender Neutral nouns
Man	Person, individual
Mankind	People, human beings, humanity
Freshman	First-year student
Man-made	Machine-made, synthetic, artificial
The common man	The average person
Chairman	Chair, chairperson, coordinator, head
Mailman	Mail carrier, letter carrier, postal worker
Policeman	Police officer
Businessman	Business person/executive (plural: business people)
Steward, stewardess	Flight attendant
Congressman	Legislator, congressional representative Congressperson
Sir (in "Dear Sir," etc.)	Dear Editor, Dear Members of the Search Committee, To Whom it May Concern
Mather/father	Parent or guardian
Husband/wife	Partner

The Inclusive Communication Guidelines were written with the contribution of:
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