

# Inclusive language

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## Introduction

Whether it is online or in-person, communication at work should always be respectful and inclusive. Using an inclusive language matters for several reasons: it promotes **belonging and psychological safety** in the organisation, it can help **build trust and reinforce collaboration** within diverse and distributed teams, it **supports diversity and inclusion policies and values**, and it can help **avoiding reinforcing stereotypes or bias**.

The following guidelines present the general principles of inclusive language and offer specific recommendations as well as practical tips for virtual and written communication. **Keep in mind that these are not “one size fits all” recommendations:** depending on your organisational culture, inclusive language can take different forms. This is especially true when considering work environments where people speak different languages.

# Inclusive language

## General principles

- Avoid assumptions and don't assume gender, background, family structure... when meeting and interacting with someone. This implies challenging your bias, whether they are unconscious or not!
- Use a language that is widely understood and avoid jargon or idioms that exclude those not familiar with them
- Be open to learning new things: language is constantly evolving
- What you mean is one part of the interaction; how people receive and understand it is another, and their perception matter as much as your original intent

## Specific recommendations

### Gender and pronouns

- Make a habit of sharing your pronouns when introducing yourself – this helps normalising pronouns sharing and avoiding assumption of gender identity
- Ask for people's pronouns when first meeting them
- Use gender-neutral job titles: "chairperson" instead of "chairman", "salesperson" instead of "salesman"
- Avoid gendered language when unnecessary, and use "they" as a singular pronoun

### Sexual orientation

- Avoid gendered assumptions about partners and family: use "partner" instead of "wife" or "husband" unless specified
- Be mindful of inclusive celebrations and language around personal events (family leave, pride events)

### Disability and neurodiversity

- Have a "person-first" perspective: say "person with a disability" rather than "disabled person", unless someone states a preference
- Avoid phrases like "This is crazy!": it can carry some stigma for people facing mental health problems. Instead, prefer "I can't believe it."

# Practical tips for virtual and written communication

- Have a “person-first” perspective: say “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person”, unless someone states a preference
- Avoid phrases like “This is crazy!”: it can carry some stigma for people facing mental health problems. Instead, prefer “I can’t believe it.”



## Further reading

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- Government of Canada, Inclusive writing – Guidelines and resources  
<https://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/writing-tips-plus/inclusive-writing-guidelines-resources>
- American Psychological Association, Inclusive Language Guide  
<https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines>