Gender-inclusive language

This recommendation represents an orientation for gender-inclusive and non-discriminatory use of the English language in addition to the already existing guidelines for the German language (published 06/2023).

1. Introduction

Language has a major impact on shaping cultural and societal perspectives. Gender-inclusive language therefore can be used to not only advance gender equality and combat gender bias, but also to communicate our anti-discriminatory culture at TU Darmstadt. It is a linguistic approach that consciously avoids favouring particular genders or identities. Its usage showcases diversity and aids in reducing gender-based stereotypes. Implementing gender-inclusive language can involve rephrasing sentences without pronouns, employing the passive voice, or opting for the plural form.

The use of gender-inclusive language in the university context will be illustrated through the following descriptions and examples.

2. Nouns and professional titles

In contrast to German, many expressions in English are not gendered, as the English language does not know a distinction in terms of gender for nouns (e.g., English: student; doctor; scientist; German: Student:in; Doktor:in; Wissenschaftler:in). Therefore, it is important to consider where gender should be made visible (e.g., female doctors when only women are meant) and where gender-inclusive wording is more appropriate.

Below you can find a list with some gendered expressions in English and common alternatives to avoid them.

Gendered	Gender-inclusive
Man	Person, individual, human being
Manpower	Employees, human power, workforce
Unmanned	Not (permanently) staffed, without staff
Man-made	Machine-made, manufactured, artificial, synthetic,
Mankind	Humanity, human beings, people
Chairman	Chairperson, chair
Cleaning lady	Cleaner
Girlfriend/boyfriend, husband/wife	Partner, spouse

3. Pronouns

Gender-inclusive pronouns should be used to promote inclusivity and respect for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity. By using these pronouns, we create a more welcoming environment, acknowledging and validating the diverse ways people identify themselves. This practice contributes to breaking down traditional gender stereotypes and biases, fostering a more equitable and understanding society. Below are a few instances demonstrating the replacement of the generic masculine form with gender-inclusive phrasing.

3.1. Employ both feminine and masculine language variants

Example

- **Original sentence**: "Each student should choose <u>his</u> own courses."
- **Alternative**: "Each student should choose <u>his or her</u> own courses."

3.2. Use of gender-inclusive pronouns

Example

- **Original sentence**: "Each student should choose <u>his</u> own courses."
- **Gender-inclusive**: "All students should choose <u>their</u> own courses."

Using "his or her" instead of "their" is not advisable as it reinforces the stereotype of gender as a binary. "They" and its associated forms ("their", "them", "themselves") can be used not only in the plural form but also in the singular form when the gender of the individual is unknown or when someone prefers not to specify their gender.

4. Addressing people

Written conversation, especially professional emails, showcase how gender-bias can underlie innocuous circumstances. For example, both "Miss" and "Mrs" refer to the marital status of a woman, while "Mr" refers to male persons without this assumption. Using "Ms" sheds the assumed marital status, but still refers to the gender of the addressee. Especially when you do not know your counterpart well enough, it is advisable to use their full name when addressing them in writing.
For example:

- "Dear Martha Müller" instead of "Dear Ms Müller"

With the following expressions, you can address people in a gender-inclusive way in writing.

- Unknown individual or group, formal: "To whom it may concern" (instead of formal "Dear Sir or Madam")
- Unknown individual or group, less formal: "Dear Reader", "Dear Colleague" (instead of formal "Dear Sir or Madam");
- Unknown group: "Dear Audience", "Dear Guests" or "Hello everyone" (instead of less formal "Ladies and Gentlemen").

5. Key resources for further reading

- [Freie Universität Berlin (n.d.). Gendergerechtes Englisch](#)
- [Freie Universität Berlin (n.d.). Nondiscriminatory Language](#)
- [IU International University of Applied Sciences (2022). Gender inclusive language guidelines – Guidelines to gender-sensitive and inclusive language for employees, students and teachers at the IU International University of Applied Sciences](#)
- [Leibniz University Hannover (2023). Gender Sensitive Language](#)
- [The writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (n.d.). Gender-Inclusive Language](#)
- [UN WOMEN (n.d.). Gender-inclusive language guidelines (English) – Promoting gender equality through the use of language](#)
- [United nations (n.d.). Gender-inclusive language](#)
- [Unites Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (UN ESCWA) - Nouhad Hayek (n.d.). GENDER-SENSITIVE LANGUAGE Guidelines](#)
- [Universität Heidelberg (n.d.). A Language for Everyone – Online Tutorial](#)