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The Importance of Inclusive Language

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Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Define the term “inclusive language.”
- Explain the importance of inclusive language to a sense of belonging in the workplace.
- Apply actionable strategies to promote inclusion at your institution.

Disclaimer: Not Intended as Legal Advice

- The purpose of this presentation is to provide general information. Federal, state, and local laws may change at any time.
- Nothing in this presentation is intended as legal advice and should not be construed as legal advice or a substitute for legal advice.

Freedom of Expression

Inclusive language is NOT...

- An assault on the First Amendment.
(e.g., free speech, freedom of expression or academic freedom)
- A desire to enforce speech codes or political correctness.
- An attempt to police hate speech.



BUT....

- An acknowledgement that “Words Can Wound” but with a few exceptions, our nation’s laws give us the freedom to select our own words.*
- A goal in which we support “thoughtful dialogue.”
- A recognition that language is fluid, evolves and has different meanings to different people.
- An opportunity to create welcoming and safe work, conference and educational spaces.

**Exceptions: Speech with limited or no protection: obscenity, fraud, child pornography, speech integral to illegal conduct, speech that incites imminent lawless action, speech that violates intellectual property law, true threats, defamation.*

Source: Friedman J. When Diversity and Inclusion Clash with Free Speech—and Why they Don’t Have To. Higher Ed Connects. Feb. 15, 2020. higheredconnects.com/diversity-and-free-speech. Accessed Oct. 15, 2021; Freedom of Speech Exceptions: Categories of Speech NOT Protected. LawShelf. lawshelf.com/shortvideoscontentview/freedom-of-speech-exceptions-categories-of-speech-not-protected. Accessed May 16, 2022.

“If we don’t intentionally include, we unintentionally exclude. The power of diversity thrives in a culture of inclusion.”

Corey L. Jamison and Frederick A. Miller

The Linkage Leader: 7 Actions for Creating an Inclusive Organization



INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Inclusive Language Creates Belonging

1. It enables deeper thinking about accessible spaces because teams aren't afraid to talk about diversity.
2. Being aware and open to shifting language means the whole organization can evolve in an agile fashion.
3. Using inclusive language challenges both conscious and unconscious biases. Language is powerful, so adjusting words and phrases shifts mindsets too.
4. Inclusive language supports disclosure and declaration by creating a safe space, making people feel valued.
5. Positive language facilitates a collective no-blame culture as everyone makes mistakes, and that's ok!

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___% of transgender and non-binary people report hiding or delaying medical transition due to non-affirming workplaces.

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THERE'S NO SHAME IN
ADMITTING THAT YOU
WERE PREVIOUSLY
SPEAKING FROM A LESS
INFORMED PLACE.

-KELLY HAYES

@HIKIAPP

General Guidelines

- ✓ Use plain language in your writing rather than expressions or jargon. When speaking, avoid acronyms.
- ✓ Listen to others when they share words or phrases they find harmful.
- ✓ Set aside any assumptions about the background and preferences of others; use neutral words related to gender, sexual orientation and other distinguishing qualities.
- ✓ Consider the historical context and implications of words and phrases. It can be surprising to learn that the origins of seemingly neutral idioms are based on oppression or cultural insensitivity.
- ✓ Inclusive language is evolving and changing.

Inclusive Language Examples

Rather than....	Use instead....
Ladies and Gentlemen	Everyone, Folks, Colleagues, You'All, Honored Guests
Freshmen	First Year
Crazy/Insane	Hectic, Chaotic, Too Much, Overwhelming, Unbelievable, Annoying
Blind Spots	Areas of Improvement, Gaps in Understanding
Mother/Father	Parent, Guardian, Caregiver, Adult
Normal	Typical
Manpower	Staff, Workers, Personnel
Stand up/Raise Your Hand if...	Indicate in whatever way is best for you.....

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Of the Gen Z folks in the workplace, ___% say forms that ask about a person's gender should include options other than "man" or "woman."

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PRONOUNS

A Helpful Resource

Pronouns are words that substitute for nouns. Gender pronouns are used in place of a person's name. This list is not exhaustive but is a good place to start!

Binary and Gender Neutral Pronouns

	Nominative (Subject)	Objective (Object)	Possessive Adjective	Possessive Pronoun	Reflexive
She	She	Her	Her	Hers	Herself
He	He	Him	His	His	Himself
They	They	Them	Their	Theirs	Themselves
Ze	Ze	Hir	Hir	Hirs	Hirself
Ey	Ey	Em	Eir	Eirs	Eirself

Asking About Pronouns

- When in a group—during introductions, model sharing pronouns and invite everyone to share, too.
- One-on-one, try asking: “The pronouns I use for myself are _____. What are your pronouns?” or “Which pronouns do you use for yourself?”
- It can feel awkward at first, but it is not half as awkward as getting it wrong or making a hurtful assumption.
- Never guess someone’s pronoun(s).

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In 2014, the social media platform, Facebook, allowed folks to customize their gender identity with how many different options?

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Correspondence

- **Asking for Honorifics**—An **honorific** is a word or a title attached to a person's name in order to express respect.
 - Common honorifics include Mr., Ms. and Dr.
 - One gender neutral honorific is Mx.
 - Others include Ind., M., Misc., Mre., Msr., Myr., Pr.
- **Letters of Recommendation**—If asked to write a reference, ask them which pronoun(s) they want you to use in the letter, if any. The answer may be contextual for the letter's audience.

What to do when you HEAR non-inclusive language

Consider taking these three steps when you hear language that is not inclusive. Remember, be intentional and do not overreact or shame others. Mistakes happen and can be teaching moments.

Inquire

INQUIRE: Seek to understand where the individual is coming from.

"I noticed you used
the phrase...What does that mean to you?"

Inform

INFORM: Help educate the individual on the historical context or negative connotations associated with the word(s) or phrase(s) they used.

"I see, thank you for explaining. To me that word/phrase means..."

Empathize

EMPATHIZE: Focus on how it made *you* feel, not anyone else.

"It made me feel uncomfortable because..."

Making Change

Changing Our Behaviors

What to do if you SAY a non-inclusive word or phrase

Forgive

FORGIVE: Acknowledge what you said and forgive yourself. Apologize to an individual(s), if appropriate.

Start Over

START OVER: Recognize that you used a word or phrase that you are trying to remove from your vocabulary. Consider saying, "Let me start that sentence or thought over."

Understand

UNDERSTAND: Reflect on why you said it. Was it the first thing that came to mind or were you in an environment where it was being used?

Share

SHARE: Tell someone what you said. Consider identifying an accountability buddy to help you remove non-inclusive language from your vocabulary.

Practice

PRACTICE: Make a list of words or phrases you want to remove from your vocabulary and alternative words or phrases you can use instead. Actively practice changing your language.



Resources

Practice with Pronouns

- <https://www.practicewithpronouns.com>

Gunning Fog Index

- helps to identify the level of the language used in publications, websites, etc.
- <http://gunning-fog-index.com/>

Gender Unicorn

- <https://transstudent.org/gender/>

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