



Slide 1

A Language for Everyone Online Tutorial



Modul 4: Gender-Inclusive Language

Welcome to module 4 of the online tutorial “A language for everyone”.



Slide 2

Module Overview

A Language for Everyone



Implementation of gender-inclusive language within a university context



The four modules of this online tutorial deal with the application of gender-inclusive language within a university context. It will address: how to denote persons, refer to titles and positions, designate different parties within a group, address all genders in written and spoken communications, and how we can achieve all this without disadvantaging or excluding any person.

All of the contents included in this tutorial, as well as further information, can be downloaded as a PDF from the accompanying website to this module.

The focus of this module is on the usage of gender-inclusive language in English.



Slide 3-5

Module 4 Contents Gender-Inclusive Language



In the first part of the module we will provide you with information concerning the linguistic background of gender-inclusive language usage, as well as some of the advantages it can bring. We will also consider from a social sciences perspective why it is that we need a “language for everyone”.

In the second part, we will deal with the question of what a “language for everyone” can accomplish.

In the third part, we will present some of the options available for using gender-inclusive language within a university context. For this purpose, we will outline how you can adjust language for different scenarios and areas of communication within a university, so that it is more inclusive. These include: forms of address, website content and administrative paperwork, as well as job advertisements.

Let’s first take a look at some background information concerning gender-inclusive language.

In contrast to the German language, grammatical gender is no longer used in English. This means: all nouns carry the same definite article *the*, to which a gender-specific ending cannot be affixed. In this way, men and women with corresponding academic titles would both be addressed as “doctor”.

Nevertheless, there are cases in the English language where gender is made specific. The following examples will help us to illustrate some of these.



Slide 6

Gender-Inclusive Language

Why a Language for Everyone?



Example 1

What is the gender of this person?

A doctor must confirm her application.

Which gender does the person in the following example have?

“A doctor must confirm her application.”

Have a quick think about it or simply write down the gender you think the person has. And don't worry. No answer here is incorrect.

[Three second pause]



Slide 7

Gender-Inclusive Language

Why a Language for Everyone?



Example 1

What is the gender of this person?



*A doctor must confirm **her** application.*

Owing to the pronoun *her*, we can assume that it is a female doctor who must confirm her application.



Slide 8

Gender-Inclusive Language

Why a Language for Everyone?



Example 2

What is the gender of this person?

*A doctor must confirm **his** application.*

What about this next example? Which gender does the referred-to individual have here?

“A doctor must confirm his application.”

[Three second pause]



Slide 9

Gender-Inclusive Language

Why a Language for Everyone?



Example 2

What is the gender of this person?



*A doctor must confirm **his** application.*

Here the masculine pronoun *his* implies that a male doctor is being indicated.



Slide 10

Gender-Inclusive Language

Why a Language for Everyone?



Example 2

What is the gender of this person?



*A doctor must confirm **his** application.*

That being said, in this example it may well be that a female doctor as well as a male doctor is being referred to. This is because the pronoun *he* is also used when the gender of a person is not known.

Whereas female pronouns such as *she* and its different declinations refer exclusively to female doctors, *he* possesses a generalising function and can be used to refer to not only male doctors, but doctors of all genders.



Slide 11-12

Gender-Inclusive Language

Why a Language for Everyone?



Example 2

What is the gender of this person?



*A doctor must confirm **his** application.*

Are all other genders included?

The pronoun *he* and its declinations can be viewed as generic masculine, which is a general masculine designation used for referring to persons of all genders.

This means that individuals, irrespective of their gender, should feel “implicitly included” by means of a masculine pronoun which is referring not only to females, but also individuals who identify as transgender, intergender, or neither female nor male.

In our example, this means that not only men and women, but ALL genders are understood as being implicitly included by the masculine designation “doctor”.

But does such “implicit inclusion” by the use of masculine pronouns mean that other genders are given equal consideration?



Slide 13

Why a Language for Everyone? Generic Pronouns



Implicitly included = Conceptually included?



he

= ?



post-doctoral
graduates of all
genders

A look at recent studies dealing with this question can shine some light on if this is the case.

Numerous psychological and linguistic studies have shown that language influences our perception and is largely representative of social structures.

Researchers have examined who it is we think of when generic masculine pronouns are used.

Going back to our example sentence, we might propose the following question: do we think of male and female doctors, or post-doctoral graduates, when we use the pronoun *he*?



Even where women and other genders are supposedly implicitly included, where the generic masculine pronoun *he* has been applied their representation is conceptually less or completely absent. For example, Lambdin et al. (2003) state the following in their study on the mental representation of genders via masculine pronouns: “there is a tendency to assume a person is male unless there is specific information to the contrary” (479) ³.

³ cf. Lambdin, Jennifer R. & Greer, Kirsten M. & Jibotian, Kari S. & Wood, Kelly R. & Hamilton, Mykol C. (2003): “The Animal = Male Hypothesis: Children’s and Adults’ Beliefs About the Sex of Non–Sex-Specific Stuffed Animals.” In: Sex Roles, 48 (11).



Slide 16-18

Why a Language for Everyone? Linguistic Gender Equality



Gender-inclusive language
= A necessity for equal treatment of all genders in
language use



female



non-binary or
unspecified



male

This signifies that in order for ALL genders to feel addressed and conceptually represented, all genders should be depicted in the language being used. Only then can the issue of male-bias in language be mitigated and we can start to speak of equal treatment for all genders in language use.

A language for everyone, or the use of gender-inclusive language, is therefore an important requirement for reaching linguistic gender equality for all genders.

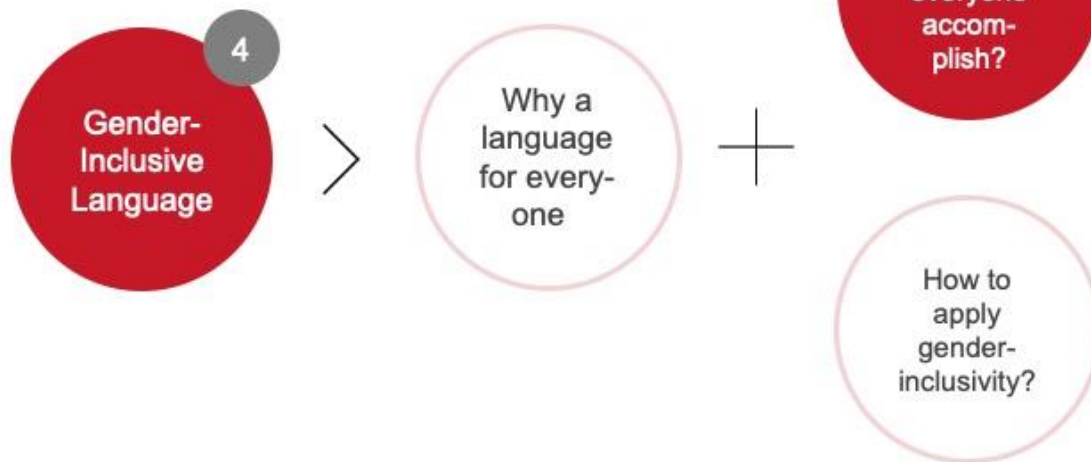
Above all, this requires that all persons, no matter their gender, are addressed and depicted in the language being used.

The objective of a gender-inclusive language is to represent women, men, and persons with other gender affiliations for whom, alongside the terms “female” and “male”, the terms “non-binary” or “unspecified” are available. For this purpose, the English language offers numerous possibilities for formulating expressions which fall in line with a gender-inclusive language.



Slide 19

Gender-Inclusive Language What Can a Language for Everyone Accomplish?



In the first part of this module, we have presented a brief linguistic backdrop to the usage of gender-inclusive language. In the second part, we will address some of the advantages which the usage of a gender-inclusive language can bring, as well as consider the question: what can a “language for everyone” achieve?

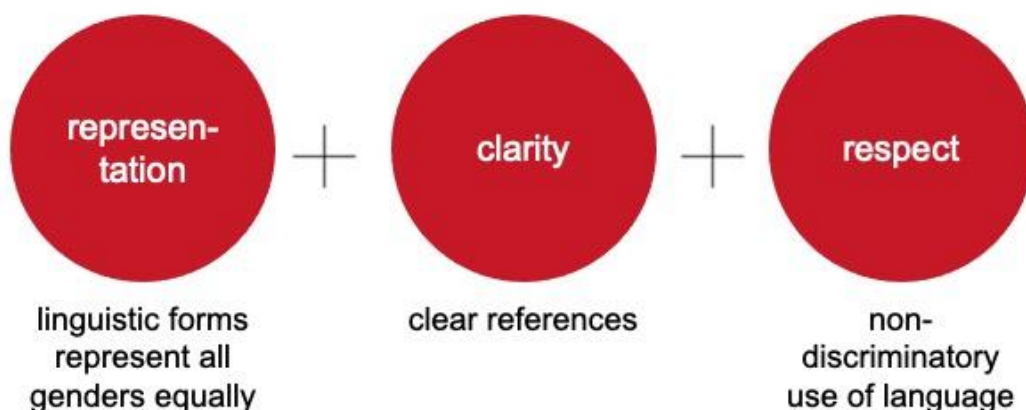


Slide 20-23

A Language for Everyone Advantages



Advantages of a gender-inclusive language



A language which is inclusive of all genders offers some essential advantages. Its use alone signifies:

- Representation
- Clarity
- and respect

We can achieve representation by locating and using linguistic forms which represent all genders equally, and via the use of which all genders feel equally acknowledged.

Clarity is attained by using language in such a way that it is always clear which persons are being referred to.

Respect is reflected in the use of non-discriminatory and gender-inclusive language which acknowledges the diversity of gender, resulting in the depiction of persons of all gender affiliations in a manner which is respectful and shows esteem.



Slide 24

A Language for Everyone Advantages



A gender-inclusive language promotes
equal opportunities and gender equality



linguistic
representation
of all genders

=



conceptual
inclusion of
all genders

We may say as an interim conclusion that language can help us to overcome certain prejudices of gender role expectations, as well as to promote togetherness between the genders, which is fair and free of discrimination.

The use of a “language for everyone” is therefore a central contribution to realising equal opportunities and to further equality. This can be considered a success only when all genders are depicted equally in language, and as a result of this, conceptually included too.

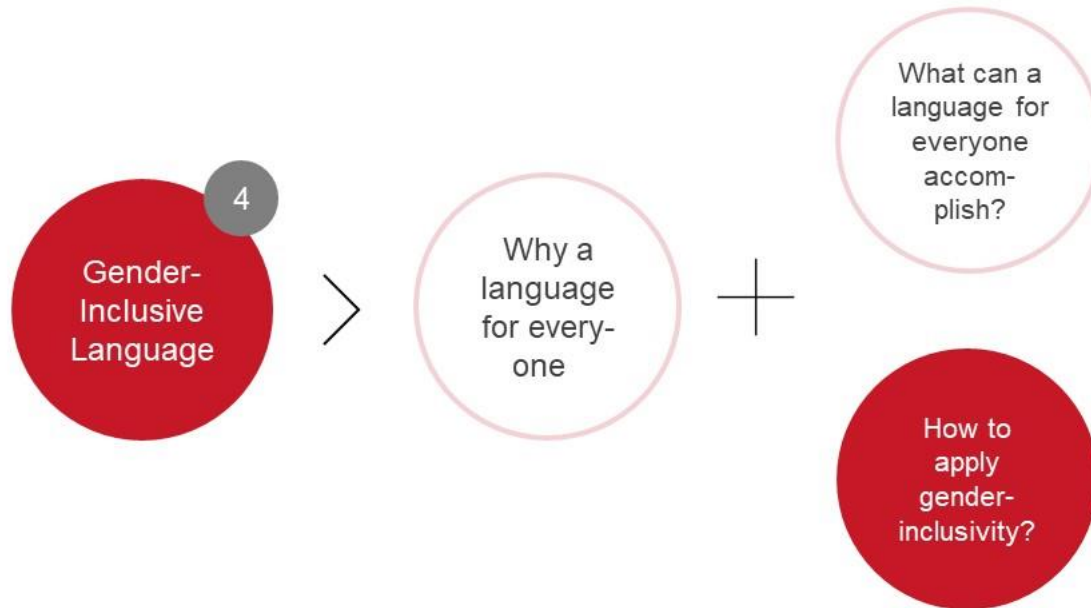
In the subsequent parts to this module, we will present some of the different options available for the implementation of gender-inclusive language in English within the context of a university.



Slide 25

Gender-Inclusive Language

How to apply Gender-Inclusivity



In parts 1 and 2 of this module, we have already considered why a gender-inclusive language is important.

In part 3, we will present various options for implementing gender-inclusive language and its application within the context of a university.



Slide 26

How to Apply Gender-Inclusivity Implementation



Implementation within a university context



For this purpose, we will consider how to apply gender-inclusive language for forms of address, in:

- website content
- administrative paperwork
- and for job advertisements.



Slide 27

Forms of Address

Written and Spoken
Correspondence



A gender-inclusive approach via **neutral wordage**



written corres-
pondence



courses and
seminars



one-to-one
conversations

To begin, let's consider the use of gender-inclusive language within the scope of one-to-one conversations and written documents.

As we have already seen in the first part of this module, seeking alternatives to generic masculine formulations facilitates a gender-inclusive approach to writing and speaking. This can be achieved in the case of written and spoken forms of address via the use of linguistically neutral wordage.

The following examples will demonstrate how this could look in practice.



Slide 28

Forms of Address

Written Correspondence



Neutral Wordage

When addressing in writing

Dear Sirs and Mesdames



*To whom it may
concern: ...*

Let's first consider written correspondence within a university context.

In written correspondence, such as emails, letters and circular letters, particular attention should be given to forms of address. These should be neutral in order to comply with guidelines on gender-inclusive language.

When addressing in writing multiple unknown persons, the use of a gender-inclusive and formal salutation is recommended in order to avoid the address "Dear Sirs and Mesdames", which addresses the binary female and male genders only.

One alternative to addressing emails and letters would be "To whom it may concern". This salutation includes all persons, regardless of their gender, yet may come across as too impersonal.



Slide 29

Gender-Inclusive Language

Why a Language for Everyone?



Example 2

What is the gender of this person?



*A doctor must confirm **his** application.*

Are all other genders included?

The ideal solution to this would be to find out the name, and if possible the preferred form of address, of the relevant contact person. Failing this, the next best option would be to address correspondence to the relevant department, for example, “Dear Equal Opportunities Office of Heidelberg University” or “Dear Fellowship Program Selection Committee”. When neither of these options is possible, then a less specific salutation such as “Dear Personnel of the Equal Opportunities Office”, or “Dear Hiring Manager”, would be good solutions which also avoid any reference to gender.



Slide 30

Forms of Address Courses and Seminars



Neutral Wordage In welcoming addresses

<i>Ladies and Gentlemen!</i>	>	<i>Dear audience!</i> <i>Hello everyone!</i>
------------------------------	---	---

Likewise, it is important to address all persons in spoken communication and is particularly important for courses and seminars. For this, persons with non-binary genders must be included in welcoming addresses.

Suitable formulations for a welcoming address would be “Dear audience” or “Hello everyone”, since these avoid the binary salutation “Ladies and gentlemen”.

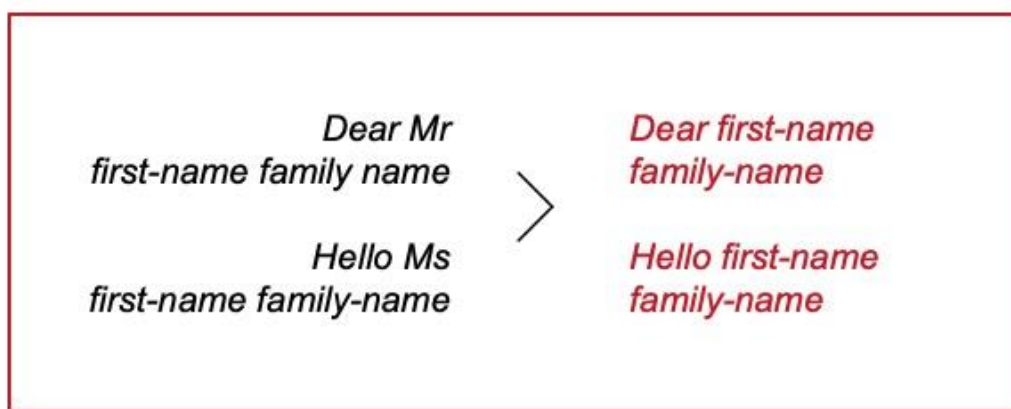


Slide 31

Forms of Address One-to-One Conversations



Neutral Wordage When addressing one person



We should also take care to opt for gender-inclusive formulations for situations where only one person is being addressed. These include one-on-one conversations, as well as more formal situations such as job interviews or written salutations in letters and emails.

Important in formal written and spoken correspondence is to address individual recipients neutrally whose gender is unknown. In such cases, avoid jumping to any conclusions regarding the gender of a person by refraining from the use of “Mr” or “Ms”. Instead, employ a form of address which includes the first and family name of the addressee: “Dear first-name family-name” or “Hello first-name family-name”.



Slide 32

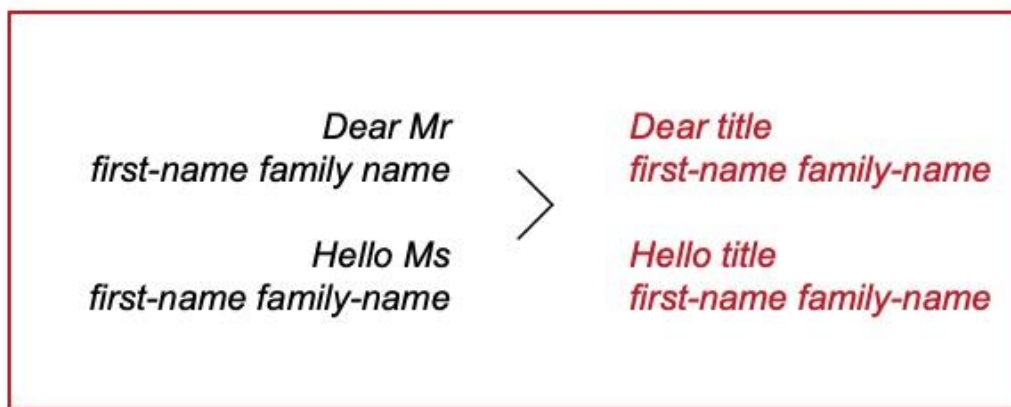
Forms of Address

One-to-One Conversations



Neutral Wordage

When addressing a person with an academic title



If the addressee carries an academic title, this should be specified in your salutation too. Although academic titles in English do not reveal gender by themselves, specifying gender can still be further avoided by using the following address for written communications: “Dear title first-name family-name”, or the following address for spoken communication: “Hello title first-name family-name”.



Slide 33

Forms of Address

One-to-One Conversations



Recommendations

When addressing a person whose gender is known to you

Dear Mr first-name family-name

If, however, the gender of the addressee is known to you, then this can be made explicit in the form of address. For example, “Mr” can be used for a male person, unless another preference has been otherwise expressed by the person in question.



Slide 34

Forms of Address

One-to-One Conversations



Recommendations

When addressing a person whose gender is known to you

Dear Mr first-name family-name

Hello Ms first-name family-name

As an additional note, in written and spoken correspondence with female persons, always use the form of address “Ms” (plural: Mesdames), as “Mrs” and “Miss” indicate relationship status, which should not be implicated in a form of address.

We recommend that you indicate in your email signature which gender-specific form of address you prefer for future correspondence. Here you can indicate your preference for being addressed with the pronoun *he*, *she*, or another pronoun.



Slide 35

Website Content and Administrative Paperwork



website
content



administrative
paperwork

A gender-inclusive approach via
neutral wordage

Next, we will take a look at the use of gender-inclusive language in website content and administrative paperwork.

As we have already seen, seeking alternatives to generic masculine pronouns facilitates a gender-inclusive approach to writing. It is also important to include other non-binary genders besides male and female, and to think beyond the use of the masculine *he* and the feminine *she*.

The following examples will demonstrate how this can be realised in practice.



Slide 36-38

Website Content and Administrative Paperwork



Singular they In written texts

<p><i>A doctor must confirm his application.</i></p>	>	<p><i>A doctor must confirm their application.</i></p> <p><i>Everybody must confirm their application.</i></p> <p><i>Doctors must confirm their application.</i></p>
--	---	--

One way to include persons of all genders is to use the singular *they*. Here, the plural pronoun *they* and its declensions can be also used to refer to a person in the singular.

For example, you can write “A doctor must confirm their application” to address all genders.

They can also be used with singular indefinite pronouns, such as in the following example: “Everybody must confirm their application”.

To avoid inconsistencies between singular and the plural, it can sometimes help to switch to the plural. For example: “Doctors must confirm their application.”

Persons with non-binary genders should also be addressed with the pronoun *they*. This means that persons who do not define their gender as male or female, but as “non-binary” or “unspecified”, are as a general rule of thumb addressed with this pronoun. Care should be taken to not use the pronouns *he* or *she* when referring to non-binary persons.

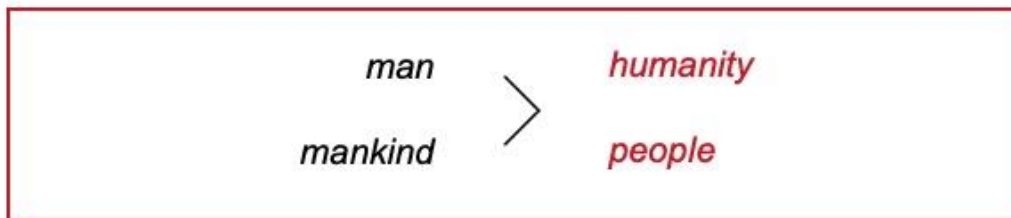


Slide 39

Website Content and Administrative Paperwork



Neutral wordage In written texts



The expression *man* in English also reveals a tendency towards the masculine. Its meaning is equated with “male” and is perceived as correspondingly masculine. Gender-inclusive formulations, such as *humanity* or *people*, can be used in place of expressions such as *man* or *mankind*.



Slide 40

Job Advertisements



job
advertisements

A gender-inclusive approach via
neutral wordage

The last text type we would like to look at in this module is that of job advertisements. Since it is also important to formulate occupational titles neutrally, it should be a priority that persons with non-binary gender affiliations are correspondingly addressed in advertisements for job applicants.

In the following, we will illustrate some of what has already been said in this module by way of some examples:



Slide 41

Job Advertisements



Parentheses

Following occupational titles



A very simple option that is easy to implement is the standard practice of following an occupational title with parentheses containing the letters “m” for male, “f” for female, and “x” for “unspecified” or “non-binary”. In this way, all gender affiliations are represented.

As English nouns do not differentiate by gender, the occupational title itself, which comes before the parentheses, is gender neutral.



Slide 42

Job Advertisements



Neutral Wordage In occupational titles



That being said, some occupational titles can carry feminine endings and alternatives should be sought for these. This concerns occupational titles in English which, contrary to the general rule, possess a masculine and a feminine form.

To avoid such a gender distinction, a female person should be referred to as an “author” in the same way as a male person. An additional feminine marking, such as in “authoress”, could imply that feminine terms do not carry the same status as masculine ones. For this reason, always use neutral occupational titles in job advertisements.



Slide 43

Job Advertisements



Neutral Wordage In occupational titles

<i>chairman</i>	>	<i>chair</i> <i>chairperson</i>
<i>spokesman</i>	>	<i>spokesperson</i> <i>representative</i>
<i>freshman</i>	>	<i>first-year student</i>

Within the same context, you should also refrain from using compound occupational titles which feature masculine nouns, such as *man*. For this purpose, there are numerous neutral options available.

For example, use “chair” or “chairperson” instead of “chairman”. “Spokesman” can be replaced with “spokesperson” or “representative”, and “first-year student” may be used in place of the American English designation “freshman”.

A certain degree of creativity may be required, as has hopefully been demonstrated by some of the alternatives to masculine occupational titles proposed here. This may seem a little tricky at first, but with a little practice, it will become easier to rephrase some occupational titles for more gender-inclusive ones.



Slide 44

Job Advertisements



Singular **they** In accompanying texts

*A doctor must confirm
his application.*



*A doctor must confirm
their application.*

Similar to other text types, it is likewise important in job advertisements and their accompanying texts to use the singular *they* to address all genders, and to refrain from using the pronoun *he* for general use, which we have already illustrated with the phrase “A doctor must confirm their application”.



Slide 45-47

Conclusion Further Guidance



How you can contribute to a gender-inclusive language



In this module we have looked at how gender-inclusive communication can be achieved in the English language by examining the following three recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Make sure that all genders are represented in the language being used by considering the following points:

- In addition to male and female, is the third gender category also represented?
- Have occupational titles been formulated in a neutral way?
- In job advertisements, does (m/f/x) in parentheses always follow the job title?

Recommendation 2: Avoid generic masculine pronouns and terms with "man". Instead:

- Use the singular *they* to include all genders.
- Use inclusive designations, such as *humanity* instead of *mankind*, to avoid male bias. Do not be discouraged by rewordings that at first glance seem complicated.

Recommendation 3: At the beginning of a conversation, you can ask the person you are speaking with how they would prefer to be addressed. This will prevent uncomfortable situations arising from making premature conclusions about a person's gender and possibly offending them. Opt for forms of address in written texts that are inclusive of people of all genders. Use male or female forms of address for persons whose gender is known to you. Address a female person with "Ms", unless another preference has been otherwise expressed by the person.



Slide 48

Legal Disclosure



Modul 4: Gender-Inclusive Language

Organizer

Gleichstellungsbüro Universität Heidelberg
gleichstellungsbuero@uni-heidelberg.de
www.uni-heidelberg.de/gleichstellungsbeauftragte

Editors

Rosie Boys, Caren Brendel, Dr Agnes Speck

Design

Dr Ute Heeger

April 2021

All rights reserved. It is not authorised to reprint,
reproduce or republish any of the content shown here.

Photo Credits

Zentrales Sprachlabor, uh-5464.jpg, Universität
Heidelberg – Kommunikation und Marketing

We are delighted that more and more people are engaging with the topic of gender-inclusive language and we hope that we have been able to provide you with the necessary tools with which you can reflect on your own language usage.