Hochschule
Bonn-Rhein-Sieg
University of Applied Sciences

Sprachenzentrum
Language Centre

SPZ

Guidelines gender-inclusive language at the Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences

Recommendations for written communication
(As of 06.02.2024)

Introduction

In the last few years, gender-inclusive language has been a constant topic of discussion. Being part of the public sector, the H-BRS is bound by law (§4 LGG Landesgleichstellungsgesetz) to use language which is non-discriminatory of all genders. These guidelines aim to increase awareness of the H-BRS guiding principle of respect for diversity and how this can be reflected in the use of gender-inclusive language.

These guidelines are binding for all written communication by the administration and the central service facilities (including official notifications, job adverts, presentations, brochures, printed materials, in-house communication, leaflets, letters and forms). For all other university employees, these guidelines should be seen as recommendations.

Gender-inclusive language promotes gender equality and in English, it is relatively easy to achieve, compared to languages which gender nouns, such as German. In many cases, gender-specific vocabulary is now considered outdated. In English, we already use gender-neutral terms such as actor (instead of actor/actress) and chair/chairperson (instead of chairman/chairwoman). Most examples of gender-specific words in English ending in "-man"can be replaced with gender-neutral nouns (see: https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/gender-inclusive-language/).

Tips on how to be gender-inclusive[1]

1. Change nouns and pronouns from singular to plural:
   A student who misses a session, should send his/her homework via email.
   => Students who miss a session should send their homework via email.

2. Use "they" as a singular pronoun:
   This frequently happens when we are speaking, for example:
   There is a student outside your office, should I ask ~~him/her~~ them to come in?

3. Add your own pronouns to your email-signature and perhaps even to your screen-name on WebEx.

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[1] Adapted from: https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/gender-inclusive-language/ and https://www.bristol.ac.uk/style-guides/writing/inclusive/sex-gender/

4. Always use a gender-neutral address in any university emails and documents which are not sent to a specific person, e.g. "Dear Student / Colleague"; "To whom it may concern".

5. Avoid gender titles such as Mr, Mrs, Ms, Miss and simply use people's names.

When you have finished your text, go through the following checklist:

1. If you have mentioned someone's sex or gender, was it necessary to do so?
2. Do you provide the same kinds of information and descriptions when writing about people of different genders?
3. Have you used "he/she," "him/her," "his/her," or "himself/herself" to refer to people who may not only be either men or women?
4. Have you used "man" or "men" or words containing these suffixes (e.g. fireman, workmen) to refer to people who may not be men?
5. Do you use any occupational (or other) stereotypes? Have you written fireman instead of the gender-neutral firefighter for example?

Perhaps the best test for gender-inclusive language is to imagine a diverse group of people reading your paper. Would each reader feel respected? Envisioning your audience is a critical skill in every writing context, and revising with a focus on gendered language is a perfect opportunity to practice.[2]
Generally speaking, it is always good to imagine a diverse audience reading your text and imagine how each of them would react.

Sources used:

London School of Economics and Political Science (2024) Gender Inclusive Language Guidelines. Available at: https://www.lse.ac.uk/media-and-communications/about/Gender-Inclusive-Language-Guidelines (Accessed 05.02.2024)

University of Bristol (2024) Inclusive Writing: Sex and Gender. Available at: https://www.bristol.ac.uk/style-guides/writing/inclusive/sex-gender/ (Accessed 05.02.2024)

University of Bristol (2024) Use of pronouns. Available at: https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/currentstudents/Use%20of%20Pronouns.pdf (Accessed 05.02.2024)

The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (2024) Gender-Inclusive Language. Available at: https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/gender-inclusive-language/ (Accessed 05.02.2024)

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[2] Adapted from: https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/gender-inclusive-language/