



# University of Groningen Inclusive Language Style Guide

Which pronouns  
should I use?



Can I say  
that?



How do I address  
someone?



What's the right  
term for that?



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## Contents

Inclusive language: what it is and why we want to use it	3
Identity-based language	4
Gender-aware language use	4
Terminology	4
Personal pronouns	5
Multiple pronouns or no pronouns	6
Singular 'they'	6
Alternatives to the singular 'they'	7
<b>Gender vs sex</b>	7
Noun forms	8
Academic use	8
APA (7 <sup>th</sup> edition)	8
MLA	8
Vancouver & Harvard	8
Chicago	8
Other academic points of note	9
Ability and disability	9
Key terms	9
Identity-first language vs person-first language	10
Avoiding slurs	11
Avoiding value judgement	11
Background, ethnicity, nationality, and migration	11
Terminology	11
Points for attention	12
The use of 'native'	12
Migrant, expat, or immigrant?	12
Asylum seeker or refugee?	13
Naturalization	13
Nationality versus ethnicity	13
U.S.-centric language	13
Academia and racism	13
Theme-based language use	14
HR and official language	14
Titles	14
Mrs, Miss, or Ms?	14

Gender-neutral options	14
Other terms of address	15
Gender options	15
Name options	15
Pronouns	16
Editing personal details	16
Dutch usage	16
Personal pronouns in Dutch	16
Noun forms in Dutch	17
Dutch vs English: false friends	17
Wit vs blank	17
Glossary	17
Resources	20
Contact	20

## Inclusive language: what it is and why we want to use it

Welcome to the University of Groningen Inclusive Language Style Guide. This resource is intended for all users at the UG to refer to in order to improve the inclusiveness of their communications.

The UG considers itself an open, academic community and is striving to promote an inclusive environment. Developments such as the Diversity & Inclusion Office, the international classroom, and inclusive education initiatives around the University have opened the dialogue of how we can work together to foster inclusion. At the same time, how we communicate with one another also influences our environment. Inclusive language seeks to address this: it offers tips to make sure that we are addressing one another and communicating our message respectfully, accurately, and without harm.

In doing so, not only can we make sure that our staff members, students, and guests feel welcome and accepted at the UG, but we can also keep up with other universities in the Netherlands and abroad, who are recognizing the importance of inclusive language within academia internationally.<sup>1</sup> This style guide contains an overview of useful terminology and examples relating to inclusive language. The first part of the style guide focuses on identity-based language, including gender-aware language use, language surrounding ability and disability, and language on background, ethnicity, nationality, and migration. The second part of the style guide focuses on theme-based language use, e.g. in HR. A short section on inclusive language in Dutch concludes the document, before a glossary and further resources are presented.

The style guide can be used like a dictionary or grammar tool: search for the language issue you are grappling with in the table of contents and use the style guide to help you. It is always best to ask or look something up rather than to assume!

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<sup>1</sup>E.g. <https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/about-um/diversity-inclusivity/di-education-and-social-safety/inclusive-language>; <https://www.ru.nl/radboudintolanguages/en/communication/inclusive-communication-skills/inclusive-language/>

## Identity-based language

### Gender-aware language use

This section provides some tips for using language around gender in an accurate and aware manner.

#### Terminology

The following table shows you how you can use gender-based terms in English:

Term	Definition	Correct use	Incorrect use
Transgender, trans (Used as an adjective, not a noun!)	Identifying with a gender other than the one assigned at birth	He is transgender  trans man, trans woman	He is a transgender, he is transgendered  transman, transwoman
Cisgender, cis (Used as an adjective, not a noun!)	Identifying with the gender assigned at birth	She is cisgender  cis woman, cis man	“biological woman”, “biological man”, “normal/ordinary/regular woman/man”
Transition (Used as a noun or verb)	The social and potential medical process of transitioning from presenting as one gender to another	He transitioned a few years ago  When he presented as female/as a woman  When he was read as female/as a woman  He was assigned female at birth	He changed genders/he transgendered  “Sex change”  Before he became a boy/when he was a girl  When “she” was a “girl”  He was born a girl
Non-binary, gender non-conforming	Gender identities other than the binary options of man/woman	“They are non-binary/gender non-conforming”	
Intersex	A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male	He or she or they is or are intersex; an intersex person	Hermaphrodite (outdated, now considered a slur)
Another gender, a different gender	To use when referring to someone of a different gender, without using only binary options		Opposite gender
Ms	To use when addressing a woman without referring to	Dear Mr/Ms/Mx	Miss or Mrs (refers to the woman’s marital status)

	her marital status (as we do not refer to men’s marital statuses with the term Mr, and this information is often unnecessary to determine when addressing someone).		
Mx	To use when addressing a non-binary or gender non-conforming person, instead of Mr or Ms, if they prefer this address. Include in address options if the gender of the recipient is unknown.	Dear Mr/Ms/Mx (all options provided)	Dear Mr or Ms (only binary options provided)
Partner, spouse	To refer to someone’s partner or spouse in situations in which the gender of the partner is unknown	“All colleagues may invite their partners or spouses” “Do you have a partner?”	“All colleagues may invite their husbands or wives” “Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?”
Parents, parenting, guardians	To refer to someone who is raising a child, in a situation where the gender of the parent is unknown or irrelevant	“All parents and guardians”	“All mothers and fathers”, only using “Mothers and fathers”, or “mothering”
Esteemed colleagues, Honoured guests, Dear student, Dear colleague, Dear [insert name], Dear [insert job title], Dear [insert title of group or department], To whom it may concern	Alternative options instead of binary options		Sir/Madam

### Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns are what we use to address ourselves and each other. For example, I/me/mine, you/your, he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs.

Note: you may have heard people talk about ‘preferred’ pronouns. But we recommend leaving out the word ‘preferred’, as this seems to indicate that someone’s pronouns are optional. Instead, we can simply ask what pronouns somebody uses.

It is a common false assumption that only people who use the singular 'they' pronoun, or trans people, need to share their pronouns and that people who 'look' cisgender and who use he/him or she/her pronouns do not need to share theirs. But we cannot tell the pronouns a person uses based on what they look like. Sharing our pronouns and asking for others' pronouns normalizes the understanding and use of various pronouns.

### *Multiple pronouns or no pronouns*

Some people use multiple pronouns, e.g. he/they, while some people use none at all. Some others may be comfortable being addressed by all pronouns.

- If someone uses multiple pronouns, this means that they are happy to use either. It does not mean that you need to use both at the same time!

E.g. Thomas uses he/they pronouns. Last week I went out to eat with him. They really liked the food.

Note: if someone uses he/they or she/they pronouns, try to use them fairly interchangeably. This does not mean that you need to count or switch consecutively. But if you choose to only use he/him if a person looks masculine, for example, then they may get the impression that you are not seeing and acknowledging their identity.

- If someone uses no pronouns at all, you can simply use the person's name instead.

E.g. Thomas doesn't use any pronouns. Last week I went out to eat with Thomas. Thomas really liked the food.

Note: this is also a common practise in languages where there is no simple non-gendered alternative for personal pronouns.

- If someone uses any pronouns, you can choose how to address them. I.e. with she/her, he/him, or they/them.

### *Singular 'they'*

The singular 'they' is used frequently in English to refer to somebody whose gender we do not know or whose gender is unimportant to the context, or to address somebody who uses the pronouns they/them/theirs.

The singular 'they' is common in native English, and has been traced back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century to refer to someone whose gender is unknown or irrelevant. Yet its use as a non-binary pronoun is rather new. Non-native speakers often struggle with this term.

Here are some rules for its usage:

- Use for someone we do not know/whose gender is unknown

Example: 'Someone left their wallet on the bus. We should hand it in so that they get it back. The bus company might know them.'

- Use as a personal pronoun

Example: 'Kai is my friend. They have a dog. I sometimes walk their dog for them.'

- We use the plural verb form for the singular 'they'

Example: 'they are', not 'they is', even if we are talking about one person.

- We use the singular verb form with the singular noun even when talking about someone who uses they/them pronouns

Example: 'Kai is', 'this person is', not 'Kai are', 'this person are'.

- Reflexive form: both 'themselves' and 'themselves' are acceptable, but 'themselves' is more common even when referring to one person

Example: 'Kai is going on holiday by themselves', 'Kai renovated the kitchen themselves'

### *Alternatives to the singular 'they'*

Especially for non-native English speakers, use of the singular 'they' when talking about people whose gender is unknown or people whose gender is not relevant to the context can be confusing. There are a few alternative strategies to avoid usage of the singular 'they' in this context.

Please note: if the singular 'they' is being used as a non-binary pronoun, you should not use these alternatives.

Strategies:

- Rewording the sentence

Example: Every client got a care package delivered to them ☒ Each client received a care package

- Using the plural

Example: A private person usually keeps to themselves ☒ Private people usually keep to themselves

### **Gender vs sex**

Gender and sex are different constructs. Sex refers to the biological make-up of a person, i.e. based on their chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, and primary and secondary sex characteristics. Note that there are more than two different sex options as well: some people are born intersex<sup>2</sup>, while recent studies are showing that there are nuances between the two biological categories of 'male and female'<sup>3</sup>.

Gender is used to refer to the social constructs based on sex. E.g. from the category of 'female', we have built the construct of 'woman', which involves a certain identity, expected norms, stereotypes and roles, and gender expression. We have built the construct of 'man' from the category of 'male'.

- Male: the sex-based category of having certain primary and secondary sex characteristics
- Female: the sex-based category of having certain primary and secondary sex characteristics
- Man: the identity of being a man
- Woman: the identity of being a woman
- Boys: similar to the identity of being a man, but not yet an adult
- Girls: similar to the identity of being a woman, but not yet an adult

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<sup>2</sup> <https://interactadvocates.org/faq/>

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Davis, G., & Preves, S. (2017). Intersex and the Social Construction of Sex. *Contexts*, 16(1), 80–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504217696082>

Tips:

1. Avoid using 'male' and 'female' if you are referring to the social constructs/identities of man/woman/boy/girl, instead of to the biological sexual category
2. If you are talking about women, avoid using the term 'girls'. While common, it is patronising to refer to grown women as children; we do not usually do so for men.

### Noun forms

It is common to use male-gendered noun forms in English when speaking about a default, or non-gendered, situation. However, male noun forms can be considered exclusionary to members of other genders, and can perpetuate gendered stereotypes.

Examples of gendered noun forms and their alternatives:

<b>Noun</b>	<b>Alternative(s)</b>
Man	Human, person, individual
Mankind	Humankind, people, humanity, human beings
Freshman	First-year student
Man-made	Manufactured, synthetic, artificial
Chairman	Chairperson, chair
Postman	Postal worker
Policeman	Police officer
Steward/stewardess	Attendant (e.g. flight/theatre)
Actor/actress	Actor
Congressman	Legislator, congressional representative

### Academic use

This section outlines the rules for using personal pronouns and the singular 'they' according to different academic reference styles.

#### *APA (7<sup>th</sup> edition)*

The APA 7<sup>th</sup> edition rules are as follows:

- Always use a person's self-identified pronouns.
- Use the singular 'they' to refer to someone whose gender is unknown or irrelevant to the context.
- Do not use 'he or she' alone as generic third-person pronouns. Only use 'he or she' if you know that these pronouns are the ones used by the persons being referred to.
- Do not use combination forms such as 's/he' or '(s)he'.
- If you do not know someone's pronouns, use the singular 'they' or reword the sentence to avoid any pronouns.

#### *MLA*

Endorses the singular 'they': <https://style.mla.org/using-singular-they>

#### *Vancouver & Harvard*

As yet unknown as to whether the singular 'they' is accepted.

#### *Chicago*

As of the 17<sup>th</sup> edition, Chicago still recommends avoiding the singular 'they' as a generic reference, at least in formal writing, but the previous blanket prohibition has been lifted (Section 5.256). For



the first time, Chicago also offers guidance on using ‘they/them’ as an individual’s personal pronouns, stating that ‘any such preference should be generally respected’ (Section 5.256).

### *Other academic points of note*

Watch out for the following points.

- Try to avoid the default masculine

E.g. ‘If a philosopher considers this question, he will be required to...’

- In medical use

E.g. It is common to speak in terms of pregnant women and fathers, and certain body parts as belonging to a specific gender. This is a grey area in medical research and writing.

- Titles

Many female faculty and staff (including married women) prefer to be addressed as ‘Ms’, or, if the term applies, as ‘Professor’ or ‘Dr’, instead of as ‘Mrs’ (as their marital status is not relevant in this context). The Dutch Research Council (NWO), however, avoids using titles entirely, instead just stating the person’s full name.

- First/last names

Avoid using solely the first name for a woman where you would use the last name/full name if you were referring to a man. This is common in informal science writing and on the work floor.

- Content

There is often a discrepancy in how men and women are written about. E.g. mentioning a female academic’s appearance, parenting and family life, where this would not be done for a male academic. In addition, using bias, overgeneralization, or assumptions.

### Ability and disability

This section addresses language use surrounding ability and disability: terminology, identity-first vs person-first language use, and avoiding slurs and value judgements.

#### Key terms

The following table outlines some key terms and how to correctly use them.

Term	Definition	Correct example	Incorrect example
Neurodiverse, neurodivergent	Having a neurological difference, such as but not limited to autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, Tourette’s syndrome.	Neurodiverse students may be eligible for extra time in completing exams.	
Neurotypical	Not possessing a neurological	Neurotypical staff members may not be aware of classroom	‘Ordinary’, ‘normal’

	difference; none of the above apply.	stimuli that affect their neurodiverse students negatively.	
Autistic	Being autistic; having ASD (autism spectrum disorder).	Autistic students can request special provisions. Here are the provisions for autistic students.  He is autistic.	He is 'an' autistic. He has autism.
Disabled	Having a physical or mental condition resulting in a person's abilities differing from that of able-bodied people.	Disabled staff members can use the accessible parking spaces.	"The disabled"
Able-bodied	Somebody who is not disabled.	She is not disabled, she is able-bodied.	'Normal', 'ordinary'
Wheelchair user	Someone who uses a wheelchair.	Wheelchair users can use the lift.	'Wheelchair bound'
Blind, partially sighted	Somebody who is partially sighted or without sight.		Visually impaired
Deaf, hard-of-hearing	Somebody who is deaf or partially without hearing.		
Congenital disability	A person who is disabled since birth		'Birth defect'
Accessibility	When talking about access for disabled and neurodiverse people, we can talk of the 'accessibility' of a space or how 'accessible' a space is. This holds for both physical and online spaces.		

### Identity-first language vs person-first language

Identity-first language puts a person's disability identity before the person — for example, 'disabled person'. Identity-first language therefore uses the identity as an adjective to describe the person. Many disabled people and neurodiverse people — especially younger people — prefer to use identity-first language because they see their disability or neurodiversity as a key part of their identity. In the autism community, for instance, many self-advocates and their allies prefer terminology such as 'autistic', 'autistic person', or 'autistic individual' because they understand autism as an inherent part of an individual's identity — the same way one would refer to Muslim, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer, Asian, or Jewish people.

Identity-first language is the opposite of person-first language. Person-first language centres the person before their identity, e.g. ‘person with a disability’, ‘person with autism’, ‘person who is gay’. This terminology may be preferred by some people — especially older people, as it was established as the preference before identity-first language became preferred.

As described by an autistic person themselves:

When we say ‘person with autism’, we say that it is unfortunate and an accident that a person is autistic. We affirm that the person has value and worth, and that autism is entirely separate from what gives him or her value and worth. In fact, we are saying that autism is detrimental to value and worth as a person, which is why we separate the condition with the word ‘with’ or ‘has’.

Yet, when we say ‘autistic person’, we recognize, affirm, and validate an individual’s identity as an autistic person ... Ultimately, we are accepting that the individual is different from non-autistic people—and that that’s not a tragedy, and we are showing that we are not afraid or ashamed to recognize that difference.<sup>4</sup>

### Avoiding slurs

It is very important to be aware of terms that have since become outdated and which are now considered to be slurs, even if they were not in the past. Some examples in English include the R-word<sup>5</sup>, ‘cripple(d)’, and ‘handicap(ped)’. If it is absolutely necessary to refer to these words, like in this document, one can use quotation marks.

### Avoiding value judgement

Similarly, it is important to be aware of the value judgement expressed when talking about disability and neurodiversity. Often, much language around disability and neurodiversity can be seen as pitying, condescending, and patronizing – it suggests that the person would be ‘better’ if they were not disabled or neurodiverse. Examples (to avoid) therefore include:

- Wheelchair usage: we can describe somebody as using a wheelchair, or being a wheelchair user, instead of placing a value judgement such as ‘wheelchair bound’.
- ‘Suffering’ is a no-go. Instead of describing somebody as ‘suffering’ from a disability or a neurodiverse condition, we can simply describe them as a disabled or neurodiverse person: by using their identity as an adjective (see Identity-first language).
- Words like ‘impaired’ (often used in the Dutch context) or ‘hindered’ are similar: they suggest that something is *wrong* with the person.
- ‘Inspiration porn’ refers to the phenomenon of disabled people being perceived and described as being ‘inspiring’ or ‘inspirational’ for their achievements. While this may be well-meant, it suggests that disabled people are exceptional for reaching the same achievements as able-bodied people, and that they are therefore expected to not be as successful or productive in their lives.

## Background, ethnicity, nationality, and migration

### Terminology

Preferred term	To avoid
Person with a migration background	‘Autochtoon’ and ‘allochtoon’, ‘ethnic’

<sup>4</sup> <https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/identity-first-language/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.specialolympics.org/stories/impact/why-the-r-word-is-the-r-slur>

Black people, Asian people	'Blacks', 'Asians', 'black' written with a lowercase b
People of colour	'Coloured people' (this is now a slur)
BIPOC (Black people, indigenous people, and people of colour)	'non-white' (positions white as the default)
Western, non-Western	Developed and undeveloped, First World and Third World, 'civilized'
Global South (includes Africa, Asia, South America, the Caribbean, and parts of Oceania)	Undeveloped, Third World
Biracial, multiracial	'Mixed race'

## Points for attention

### *The use of 'native'*

The term 'native' is controversial. It is often used in three situations: to describe indigenous populations (1), to refer to where somebody was born or their migration background (2), and to talk about languages (3).

1. In the first instance, the preference is to use the term 'indigenous'. E.g. instead of Native Americans, indigenous Americans.
2. In the second instance, we can replace the word 'native' with a descriptor. E.g. 'native Dutch people' can be replaced with 'Dutch people born in the Netherlands', or 'Dutch people with no migration background', if this is what is meant. Here, the use of 'native' is not wrong per se, but can have negative or questionable connotations. For instance, is a person who was born in the Netherlands but whose parents are first-generation immigrants considered to be a native Dutch person? Why are we referring to this information?
3. The term 'native' is still frequently used to describe a person's mother tongue. E.g. 'native English speaker'.

### *Migrant, expat, or immigrant?*

It is important to know the differences between and connotations of these terms.

- Migrant: a person who moves from one place to another, especially in order to find work or better living conditions.
- Immigrant: a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country.
- Emigrant: a person who leaves their own country in order to settle permanently in another.
- Expat(riate): a person who lives outside the country they were born in.<sup>6</sup>

In everyday language, these terms are often used interchangeably to refer to people who live in a country different from the one they were born in. However, the connotations that they express can be controversial. For instance, 'immigrant' is often used by right-wing political parties and media in a negative manner to describe those fleeing bad living conditions in search for a better life, while 'expat' is preferred by wealthy, often white and Western, people who move primarily for work or leisure purposes.

While neither term is wrong to use, it is recommended to use these terms with caution. Why do we choose a certain term for one group of people but not for another? This is often based on our own biases and prejudices.

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<sup>6</sup> All definitions taken from the dictionary (Oxford Languages).

### *Asylum seeker or refugee?*

Similar to the above question, it is important to know the differences between these terms.

- Asylum seeker: a person looking for protection because they fear persecution, or they have experienced violence or human rights violations.
- Refugee: a person who asked for protection and was given refugee status. They may have been resettled in another country or be waiting for resettlement.<sup>7</sup>

### *Naturalization*

In the Netherlands, if a refugee or migrant has held a valid residence permit for a certain time period and has passed the civic integration exams, they may request naturalization. This means that they will become a Dutch citizen.

Once a person has become a Dutch citizen, regardless of their migration background, it is insensitive (and incorrect) to refer to them as a refugee or migrant. From that moment forth, they are a Dutch citizen just like any other, albeit with a migration background.

### *Nationality versus ethnicity*

The previous topics highlight the need for awareness when using terms surrounding nationality and ethnicity. E.g. if we say ‘Everybody here is Dutch’, do we mean that they have a Dutch passport? Were born in the Netherlands? Currently live in the Netherlands? Have a Dutch family background? Or simply speak Dutch? Especially in academia, when we are working with many international staff and students, a person’s language abilities, place of residence, citizenship status, and migration background may be complex. Returning to the example ‘Everybody here is Dutch’, is better to be specific about what we mean, e.g.:

- Everybody here speaks Dutch
- Everybody here lives in the Netherlands
- Everybody here is a Dutch citizen
- Everybody here was born in the Netherlands
- Everybody here has a Dutch family background

### *U.S.-centric language*

In spoken language, we often throw around the terms ‘America’ and ‘American’ when talking about North America (specifically, the U.S.). However, this implies that America as a whole only consists of the U.S., or that North America is the ‘default’ or only significant part of America, which dismisses Central America and South America as being equally valid (in fact, bigger) parts of America. It is therefore preferable to specifically refer to the United States, or North America, instead of simply ‘America’.

### *Academia and racism*

Countering racism in the academic world is still an important issue and should be at the top of our agenda. In terms of language use, examples of inclusive language awareness include caution when referring to outdated or historical texts, literature, and racial categorizations, as well as awareness when using terminology in the medical and STEM fields<sup>8</sup>. A number of examples are included below;

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.redcross.org.au/act/help-refugees/refugee-facts/#:~:text=An%20asylum%20seeker%20is%20a,or%20be%20waiting%20for%20resettlement.>

<sup>8</sup> Woodley, Lou, Pratt, Katie, Bakker, Arne, Bertipaglia, Chiara, Dow, Ellen, El Zein, Rayya, Johns, Brianna, Kuwana, Ellen, Lower, El, Roca, Alberto, & Santistevan, Camille. (2021). CSCCE Glossary: Inclusive language in community building. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5718783>

why not research inclusive language use in your own discipline too?

Discipline	Examples	Alternatives
Literary studies	Use of offensive language, e.g. the N-word, in old texts.	Using “quotation marks” around the offensive language, or replacing it with a filler such as “the N-word”. Not speaking the word out loud during class.
Medicine and social sciences	Offensive language referring to the historical categorization of races	Only discussing these terms within their original context, clarifying that we do not use these words nowadays.
STEM	Master-slave dichotomy to indicate unidirectional control of one device over another  Blacklist/whitelist, “black is bad” effect	Primary-secondary, primary-replica, active-standby, writer-reader, coordinator-worker, parent-helper  Allowlist/blocklist

## Theme-based language use

### HR and official language

#### Titles

Organizations usually register a person’s title, which is then used in all forms, official letters, emails, and so on. In academia, the most common registered titles are Prof., Dr, Mr, and Ms.

#### *Mrs, Miss, or Ms?*

Mrs and Miss refer to a woman’s marital status, which is almost always irrelevant in a work context. It is therefore recommended to use the term Ms for female addressees.

#### *Gender-neutral options*

Academic titles like Prof. and Dr are usefully non-gendered, and can therefore be used for male, female, and non-binary addressees. However, Mr and Ms are not. There are some strategies for greater inclusion:

- Mx: In the United Kingdom, the title Mx is becoming more common as an alternative to Mr and Ms. Mx can be used by those who do not want to be addressed by gendered titles. However, this title is not widely recognized outside the UK.
- No title: It is also possible to leave out the necessity of a title altogether. On many forms, for instance, the ticking a title box is mandatory, without any legal bearing. Although it is legally necessary to register a person’s title in some instances, it is worth making tick-boxes like this optional in instances where the registration of a title is not a legal requirement. Alternatively, the person may tick that they prefer to be addressed with no title.

## Other terms of address

Aside from titles, common terms of address in academic and organizational settings include examples like Sir and Madam, and Ladies and Gentlemen. Think of official letters or speeches.

Below are some alternative options for such terms of address:

- Dear (esteemed) guest(s)
- Dear colleague(s)
- Dear participant(s)
- Dear alumni
- Dear student(s)
- Dear staff member(s)
- Dear team member(s)
- Dear (valued) client(s)
- Dear [insert department name]
- Dear XXX team
- Dear [insert recipient's name]

## Gender options

There are a few points to consider when registering a person's gender:

- Is it necessary? Is it compulsory or optional? If it is not legally necessary, any registration should be optional.
- Are you asking about gender or sex? Gender = a person's identity, sex = understood to mean a person's biological make-up. (Interestingly, the idea of sex as a biological binary system is also up for debate.<sup>9</sup>)
- If you are registering sex: is intersex listed as an option? Is it clear that you are referring to the sex assigned at birth? Are other options than male/female provided? E.g. the US and the Netherlands are now (considering) adding an X option.<sup>10</sup>
- If you are registering gender: is there a non-binary option listed? Is it clear that people can choose the gender they identify with?
- When asking about sex or gender, is it possible to answer 'Prefer not to disclose' or 'Other'?

## Name options

A person's legal name may not be the name that they use in daily life. In the Netherlands, a person's *roepnaam* (nickname/chosen name) is often requested, i.e. the name that they would like to use in daily life.

In transgender discourse, we often refer to someone's 'dead name'. This refers to the name that the trans person no longer identifies with or uses. It may be that a person's dead name is still their legal name, but using it for the person in daily life is insensitive and may cause them hurt.

Some points to consider when requesting a person's name include:

- Do you need to know their legal name or the name they use in daily life? Is this clear to the respondent?

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.sapiens.org/biology/biological-science-rejects-the-sex-binary-and-thats-good-for-humanity/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://nos.nl/artikel/2410576-zonder-psycholoog-een-x-in-je-paspoort-ryan-ging-ervoor-naar-de-rechter>

- If you need a person's legal name: who will be able to view this? E.g. if a new colleague is appointed, they may not want their supervisor or colleagues to know their legal name – and certainly may not want it to be displayed on the Intranet or website.
- Make sure that all communications (aside from legal documents) use a person's chosen name instead of their legal name.

## Pronouns

Personal pronouns, like she/her/hers, he/him/his, and they/them/theirs, are what we use to address others (for more explanation, see the [Personal pronouns](#) section). Instead of assuming which pronouns a person uses, it is better to give them the space to share their own pronouns. At the University, this could look like:

- Adding a pronoun section onto MePas (UG staff profile pages)
- Recording students' pronouns so that they are addressed correctly in communications
- Adding a pronoun section to staff details in Shared Services
- Adding a pronoun section to the UG email signature template
- Writing pronouns on UG badges for conferences and seminars
- Recommending that lecturers mention their own pronouns, and ask for students' pronouns, at the start of a course unit

Note: when asking people to share their pronouns, the best practice is providing a field where people can write their own pronouns, instead of having tick-boxes. If you do provide tick-boxes, however, consider allowing respondents to tick multiple options and to offer an 'Other' option where people can share their pronouns if they are not listed.

It is a common false assumption that only people who use the singular 'they' pronoun, or trans people, need to share their pronouns and that people who 'look' cisgender and who use he/him or she/her pronouns do not need to share theirs. But we cannot tell the pronouns a person uses based on what they look like. Sharing our pronouns and asking for others' pronouns normalizes the understanding and use of various pronouns.

## Editing personal details

As people may choose to change their name or pronouns over the course of their life, it is important that they are also able to do so at work or in their studies. At the University, students and staff should have the possibility to change their details accessibly and without question.

## Dutch usage

### Personal pronouns in Dutch

In Dutch, there are 3 typically used non-gendered pronoun options. In 2016, Transgender Netwerk Nederland organized an online poll for the most popular non-gendered pronouns. 'Hen/hun' was chosen as the winner. However, all of the 3 options below are used in the Netherlands.

- Die/diens  
E.g. Die stuurde me een brief. Ik vond diens woorden zo mooi.
- Hen/hun  
E.g. Hen gaat morgen op vakantie. Fenne neemt hun koffer mee.
- Die/hun



E.g. Die heb ik gister gezien. Hun zusje was ook erbij.

## Noun forms in Dutch

Noun forms are usually split between masculine and feminine variants in Dutch. E.g.:

- -ster ending: begeleider/begeleidster
- -in ending: vriend/vriendin
- -esse ending: secretaris/secretaresse

There are generally two strategies to avoid these binary options:

1. In vacancies, for instance, it is becoming more common now to use the masculine endings as default, with brackets indicating the applicability to female and non-binary applicants.

E.g.: Vacature begeleider (m/v/x).

2. Using the adjective form.

E.g.: Vacature begeleidend staflid.

## Dutch vs English: false friends

Communicating in English in a Dutch context means that a lot of direct translations and/or mistranslations occur. Usually this does not cause any problem. However, there are two sensitive areas where 'false friends' between Dutch and English occur:

- Default masculine: In Dutch, you'd use the masculine form when talking to/about a group of people or when talking about an unnamed/unidentified person. However, this does not work in English. We would use the singular 'they' in English instead.
- Identity-based language: some terms do not translate directly from Dutch to English.

E.g.: 'gehandicapt' = disabled, NOT 'handicapped'. 'Handicapped' in English is outdated and considered offensive nowadays. The same goes for 'homo' (gay, part of the LGBTQ+ community) and 'transsexual' (transgender).

E.g. use of the word 'race': while it is commonly used in English to talk about skin colour and ethnicity, 'ras' is considered a more extreme/polarizing word in Dutch. Often, 'huidskleur' or 'achtergrond' is used instead.

## Wit vs blank

Until recently, the term 'blank' was used to describe white people in Dutch ('blanke mensen'). However, the term 'wit' ('witte mensen') is preferred nowadays.<sup>11</sup> This is because 'blank' indicates that white is the default, or neutral, skin tone, and also because the term has strong colonial connotations.

## Glossary

**Able-bodied**                      Someone who is not disabled.

**Ableism**                              Discrimination and prejudice against disabled people.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2213596-blank-of-wit-eeen-taalstrijd-met-eeen-politieke-ondertoon>

<b>Accessibility</b>	The physical and digital accessibility of a space, most commonly used in the context of access for disabled and neurodiverse people.
<b>Ace/aro</b>	Abbreviations of asexual and aromantic, often used in combination to refer to the ace/aro community.
<b>Agender</b>	A gender identity that is neither man nor woman, or is genderless.
<b>Allies</b>	Commonly used to refer to people that support the cause or purpose of a discriminated or underrepresented group.
<b>Antiracist</b>	Actively standing against racism; not simply not being racist, but actively acting against racism.
<b>Appropriation</b>	Use for one's own benefit. E.g. cultural appropriation: use of a cultural aspect that is usually discriminated against, for one's own benefit.
<b>Asexual</b>	Experiencing little or no sexual attraction to others.
<b>Asylum seeker</b>	A person looking for protection because they fear persecution, or they have experienced violence or human rights violations.
<b>Aromantic</b>	Experiencing little or no romantic attraction to others.
<b>Bisexual</b>	A romantic or sexual attraction to more than one gender.
<b>Binary</b>	Within two options. Used to refer to the male and female genders: the gender binary.
<b>BIPOC</b>	Black, indigenous, or person of colour. Used as an umbrella term for the community who do not identify as and are not considered to be white.
<b>Black</b>	A racialized classification of people, usually a political and skin colour-based category.
<b>Cisgender, cis</b>	Identifying with the sex assigned at birth.
<b>Colourism</b>	Discrimination based on a person's skin colour; favouring lighter coloured skin.
<b>Disabled</b>	Having a physical or mental condition resulting in a person's abilities differing from that of able-bodied people.
<b>Emigrant</b>	A person who leaves their own country in order to settle permanently in another.
<b>Expat</b>	A person who lives outside the country they were born in.
<b>Gender</b>	The social construct of gender; a person's sense of being a certain gender.
<b>Gender-affirming surgery</b>	A surgical procedure to alter a trans person's appearance, so that they feel more comfortable with their gender expression.
<b>Gender expression</b>	The outward or visible appearance of a person's gender.
<b>Gender-fluid</b>	A gender identity that varies over time.
<b>Gender non-conforming</b>	Not conforming with the gender norms that are expected.

<b>Global South</b>	The grouping of countries or continents along socioeconomic lines; comprising Africa, Asia, South America, the Caribbean, and parts of Oceania.
<b>Immigrant</b>	A person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country.
<b>Intersectionality</b>	The ways in which different aspects of a person's identity can expose them to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation.
<b>Intersex</b>	Someone with sex characteristics that do not fit binary classifications of sex.
<b>LGBTQIA+</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual. The + represents people who are part of the community but whose identity is not captured by the acronym LGBTQIA.
<b>Migrant</b>	A person who moves from one place to another, especially in order to find work or better living conditions.
<b>Neurodiverse</b>	Or neurodivergent. Having a neurological difference, such as but not limited to autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, Tourette's syndrome.
<b>Neurotypical</b>	Not possessing a neurological difference; none of the above apply.
<b>Non-binary</b>	Not identifying with the binary gender categories of 'man' or 'woman'.
<b>Outing</b>	Revealing a person's gender identity or sexual orientation without their consent.
<b>Pansexual</b>	Being attracted to a person regardless of their gender identity.
<b>Passing</b>	Being recognized and acknowledged as the gender you identify with.
<b>Permit holder</b>	In the Dutch context: someone who has a permit to reside in the Netherlands.
<b>Person/people of colour</b>	An umbrella term used to describe a person or group of people who identify as and is/are not considered to be white.
<b>QTBIPOC</b>	Queer and/or trans Black people, indigenous people, or people of colour
<b>Queer</b>	Someone with a sexual orientation and/or gender identity other than straight and cisgender. A reclamation of what used to be a slur, often used as a political statement.
<b>Refugee</b>	A person who asked for protection and was given refugee status. They may have been resettled in another country or be waiting for resettlement.
<b>Sex assigned at birth</b>	The sex a baby is assigned when they are born, based on their primary sex characteristics.
<b>Transgender, trans</b>	Identifying with a gender other than the one assigned at birth.
<b>Transition</b>	The social and possibly medical process that trans people undertake when they begin to align their gender expression with their gender identity.
<b>Western</b>	A grouping of countries and continents based on socioeconomic and political grounds, comprising Australasia, Europe, and Northern America.

**Wheelchair user**            Someone who uses a wheelchair.

**White**                        A racialized classification of people and a skin colour specifier; Caucasian.

## Resources

- [APA: Inclusive Language Guidelines](#)
- [Augsburg University: Avoiding Ableist Language](#)
- [Center for Scientific Collaboration and Community Engagement Glossary: Inclusive language in community building](#)
- [Code Diversiteit & Inclusie](#)
- [Maastricht University: Gender Inclusive Language Guide](#)
- [Racial Equity Tools Glossary](#)
- [Taalunie: taal en gender](#)
- [Transgender Netwerk Nederland: Wegwijzer voor journalisten en redacties](#)
- [University of Arizona: Antiracist language guide](#)

## Contact

This is a working document. If you have any questions or additions, or if you spot anywhere at the University where inclusive language could be applied better, please contact us via [diversity@rug.nl](mailto:diversity@rug.nl). We would be happy to hear and learn from you.