

# IIT GUIDE TO INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE



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**In its unwavering commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion, IIT strives to create an environment free from discrimination and verbal violence. As part of this commitment, we acknowledge the fundamental importance of adopting inclusive language across all our activities and communication channels.**

This guide represents a concrete step in that direction: developed by the Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Impact Office in collaboration with the Communication and External Relations Directorate, it is part of the commitments outlined in our Gender Equality Plan and Strategic Plan and is inspired by international standards. It is also aligned with the Manifesto for Non-Hostile Communication, signed by IIT in 2022, which promotes the conscious and respectful use of words.

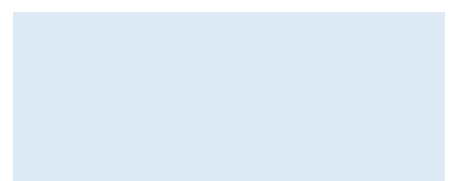
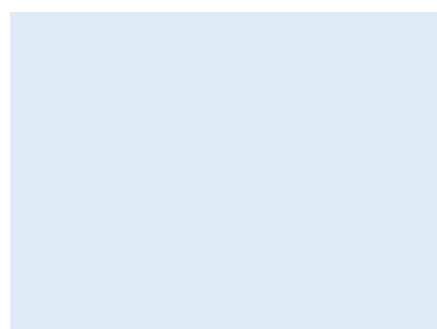
Using inclusive language means not only avoiding potentially offensive or exclusionary expressions, but also promoting clarity, precision, and fairness in everyday communication. It is not a constraint, but rather an essential tool for building a culture of respect, recognition, and appreciation for all people.

This guide addresses various aspects of inclusive language, including age, disability, ethnicity and culture, gender, socioeconomic status, and informal communication. Through definitions, practical recommendations and concrete examples, it aims to help navigate a variety of situations, useful for both professional and personal contexts (meetings, emails, social media, presentations, etc.).

Since English is our primary language of communication, this guide focuses on practices specific to English.

It is based on a comparative analysis from leading international institutions, including the European Union (European Commission, European Parliament, European Council), universities across the EU (University of Genova, University of Cologne), the US (Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University), the UK (University of Cambridge), and others such as the European Institute for Gender Equality and the University of Lausanne.

We are aware that inclusive language is a dynamic field that is constantly evolving. This guide is intended as a starting point, open to future revisions and additions, in line with our commitment to increasingly fair and conscious communication.



The sections are dedicated to specific topics, including:

- ▶ **Inclusive language**
- ▶ **Inclusive language in the workplace**
- ▶ **Ageism**
- ▶ **Disability**
- ▶ **Ethnicity and culture**
- ▶ **Gender**
- ▶ **Socioeconomic status and classism**

## Key concepts

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**Bias** is an inclination or predisposition either for or against something. In decision-making analysis, two main types are commonly studied: motivational and cognitive biases.

- **Cognitive biases** involve judgments that go against available evidence and are often linked to implicit reasoning.
- **Motivational biases**, on the other hand, arise from factors such as self-interest, social pressures, or organizational needs.

**Discrimination** occurs when individuals are treated less favorably than others in a comparable situation, solely because they belong or are perceived to belong to a particular group or category. This can be based on age, disability, ethnicity, origin, political beliefs, religion, sex or gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, or other factors. Discrimination may also occur on multiple grounds at the same time.

**Implicit bias** refers to internalized attitudes or stereotypes that unconsciously influence our perceptions, actions, and decisions. These unconscious biases can shape behavior in ways that lead to unequal treatment on characteristics such as ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, health status, and more.

**Inclusive language** is a language that acknowledges diversity, avoids unconscious biases and stereotypes, and shows respect to all individuals. It does so through thoughtful choices of words, phrases, and other linguistic elements.

**Prejudice** is a negative attitude toward a person or group formed before any actual interaction or experience. It often includes both:

- **Emotional component** such as nervousness, anger, contempt, or hatred,
- **Cognitive component** involving assumptions or stereotypes.

Prejudice typically manifests in behavior through acts of discrimination.

**Stereotype** is a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular group of people. It can be negative or positive.

**All lists provided are organized in alphabetical order. This ordering does not imply any ranking or prioritization of the items listed.**



Language is a powerful tool for expressing ideas, and the choice of one word over another is always meaningful. These choices shape how messages are received and can significantly influence how individuals feel. Inclusive language goes beyond basic communication.

## Why use inclusive language?

Using inclusive language allows you to:

- ▶ Recognize diversity and avoid unconscious biases.
- ▶ Convey respect to all people through specific words, phrases, and linguistic features.
- ▶ Avoid linguistic features that could be discriminatory, demeaning, or favouring certain individuals over others.
- ▶ Reduce stereotypes and encourage societal transformation.
- ▶ Respect individual preferences in language use.
- ▶ Play a role in attaining equality.

## Types of inclusive language

There are various forms of inclusive language, each of which addresses specific areas of discrimination (based on gender, disability, ethnicity, age, etc.). Here are some examples.

### Gender-sensitive language

It means using language in a way that addresses all genders or identities in an equally visible and appreciative manner. It is not biased towards any gender. The aim is to avoid word choices or pronouns that could be seen as discriminatory, demeaning, or favouring one gender or social gender over another.



When a **businessman** attends a meeting, **he** has to be on time



When **businesspersons** attend a meeting, **they** have to be on time

### Person-first language

It emphasizes the person before the condition or disability. It keeps the individuals as the most essential element in the language we use, instead of considering that a specific condition is what defines the person. It was first used to talk about disabilities but now it can be used in different contexts.



A **handicapped** is a person that **suffers from a disability**.



A **person with a disability** is a person **who has a disability**.

### Identity-first language

By contrast, it is a way of addressing individuals that highlights a person's condition or disability, which they perceive as a fundamental aspect of their identity



Identity-first language: "I work with a **deaf person** and an **autistic person**".



Person-first language: "I work with a **person who is deaf** and a **person with autism**".

### The benefits of using inclusive language

- ▶ Promote respectful workplaces and break down outdated ideas about gender roles, disabilities, social status, etc.
- ▶ Strengthen communication, encourage participation, and ensure accuracy and clarity.
- ▶ Combat bias and discrimination through choice of words.
- ▶ Build a fairer society that acknowledges and respects diverse individual identities.
- ▶ Shape a more inclusive society: a language is a powerful tool that shapes our thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors.
- ▶ Align with global efforts.

**Proficiency in using inclusive language is a valuable skill that can be leveraged in the workplace as a professional competence and enriches everyday personal interactions.**

### Keep in mind these considerations for inclusive language use

- ▶ Ask the people concerned about how they would prefer to be addressed.
- ▶ Consider how language choices might affect people.
- ▶ Be mindful of context: inclusive language is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Considering the audience and the information is relevant.
- ▶ Be intentional about inclusivity from the start: integrate inclusive language into all stages of communication, from drafting to final delivery.
- ▶ Use respectful and representative language: avoiding terms with a history of exclusion and aiming for language that reflects the diversity of your audience.
- ▶ Continue learning and keep an open mind.



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Using inclusive language in the workplace means choosing words and expressions that respect and acknowledge the diversity of all colleagues and partners.

It is a shared responsibility that goes beyond behavior and is reflected in language used across formal, informal, and digital contexts. The words we choose are never neutral, they convey values, shape relationships, and can have a real impact on people's daily experiences at work. By being mindful of our language, we help create a more welcoming and respectful workplace for everyone.

## Understanding inclusive language use in the workplace

Respectful language and communication refers to the verbal, non-verbal and written communication we use to ensure everyone is included and respected. This includes how we speak, how we write, and how we interact with others.

Inclusive language is important in both formal settings, such as meetings, presentations, and written communications, and informal interactions, like casual conversations during breaks, shared meals, or in the elevator. Being mindful of language in every context helps foster a culture of respect, belonging, and collaboration across the entire workplace.

## The benefits of using inclusive language in the workplace

Being mindful of the language you use at work has many benefits. Words can either foster connection or cause harm, even unintentionally. Careless language can damage relationships between colleagues, create misunderstandings, and make daily interactions more difficult. On the other hand, using inclusive language helps build trust, improves communication, and creates a more positive and collaborative work environment. It also shapes how others perceive you and your professionalism.

The words you choose reflect your personality. Language is not neutral; it carries your values, your assumptions, and can show that you acknowledge and respect the varied identities, backgrounds, and experiences of your colleagues. Conversely, using outdated, stereotypical, or exclusionary language can suggest a lack of awareness or sensitivity, even if unintentionally, and can undermine trust or credibility.

By making the effort to use inclusive language, you set a positive example and encourage others to do the same, creating a virtuous circle that makes the workplace more welcoming, respectful, and enjoyable for everyone. It can positively impact both working relationships and the overall atmosphere of the workplace.



### Avoid this

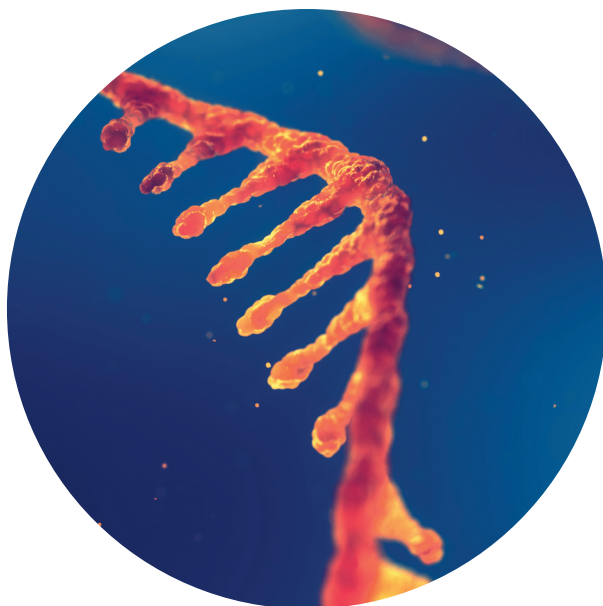


### Instead try






### Why?

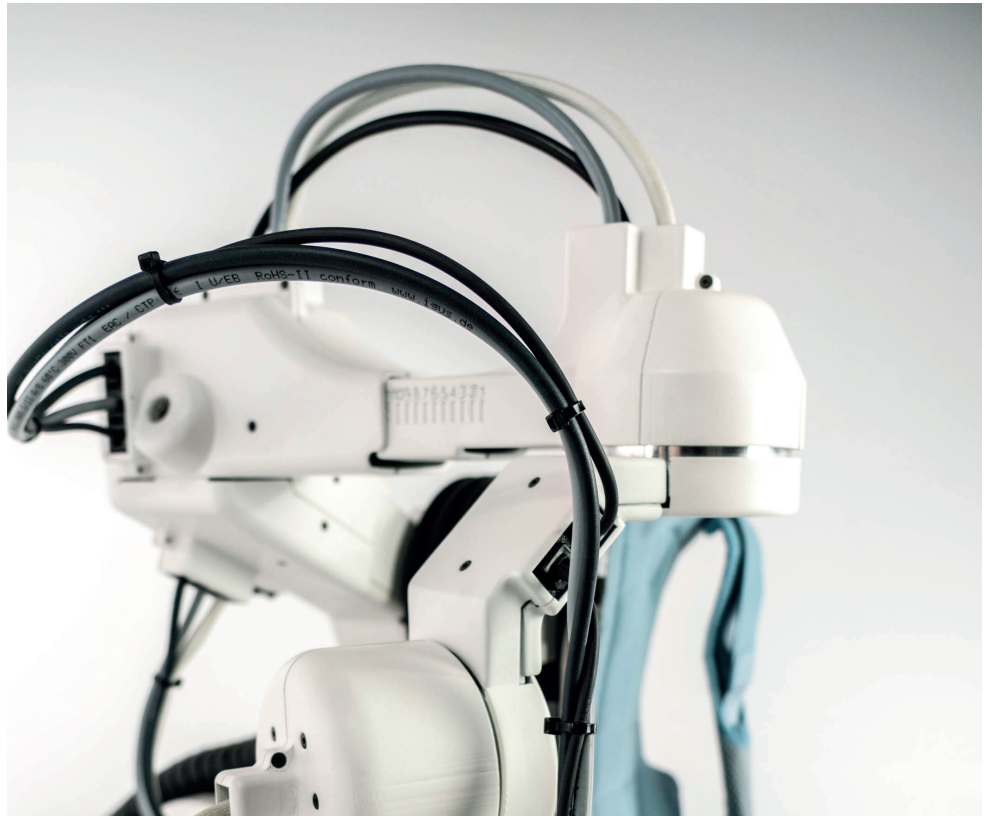
|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Ladies and gentlemen"</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Dear colleagues"</li> <li>• "Everyone"</li> <li>• "All" / "Thank you all for being here"</li> <li>• "Team"</li> <li>• "ITans"</li> </ul> | <p>Avoid unnecessary gendering.</p> <p>Inclusive greetings help everyone feel welcomed.</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assuming pronouns or use a former name</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask and use the person's chosen pronouns ("they," "she," "he")</li> </ul>   | <p>Using the correct names and pronouns affirms a person's identity and fosters respect.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "A disabled colleague"</li> <li>• "A handicapped person"</li> </ul>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "A colleague with a disability"</li> </ul>  | <p>Puts the person first and avoids reducing someone to a characteristic.</p>                |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always use stereotypical Italian or Anglo-European names and images.</li> </ul>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use names and imagery that reflect cultural and gender diversity in presentations and documents.</li> </ul>                               | <p>Reflects the diversity of the workplace and shows that everyone belongs.</p>              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Do you have plans this weekend with your husband/wife/boyfriend/girlfriend?"</li> </ul>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Do you have plans for this weekend with your partner?"</li> </ul>  | <p>Neutral questions avoid assuming someone's relationship status or orientation.</p>        |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "She is very good for a young woman"</li> <li>• "He's surprisingly organised for a man"</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Maria presented a very interesting point on that topic"</li> <li>• "Luca's insights were very helpful"</li> </ul>                        | <p>Focus on professional merit, not gender or age stereotypes.</p>                           |



# INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN THE WORKPLACE



| <br><b>Avoid this</b>                          | <br><b>Instead try</b>        | <br><b>Why?</b>   |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Are you celebrating Christmas/Easter?" (when it may not apply to everyone)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Will you celebrate any special holidays this month?"</li> </ul>       | <p>Allows space for cultural or religious diversity.</p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "The girl"</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "The woman" or specify the person by name or role</li> </ul>           | <p>"Girl" implies youth and lack of experience and is usually reserved for children, which infantilizes adult women.</p> <p>Consistent language promotes equality, as we refer to young men as "men," so women should be referred to as "women."</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Guys" (to refer to mixed-gender groups)</li> </ul>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Everyone "Everybody" "All" "Folks" "Team" "Crew" or "Squad"</li> </ul> | <p>Though "guys" is sometimes used neutrally, it traditionally refers to men and can exclude women and non-binary people.</p> <p>Using inclusive alternatives respects all gender identities and fosters a sense of belonging.</p>                   |



## Tips and key considerations for the workplace

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Use gender-neutral terms: "Team," "Colleagues," "Everyone" – helps prevent misunderstandings and fosters respect and belonging.



Respect names and pronouns: always use the name and pronouns your colleague chooses – this promotes psychological safety and trust.



Put the person first: say "A person with a disability," not "a disabled person" – consider how your words might affect people.



Be mindful of cultural differences: avoid assumptions about background, language, or nationality – inclusive language builds stronger professional relationships.



Use inclusive examples: choose images, names, and references that reflect diverse backgrounds – this supports a positive, respectful workplace culture.



Avoid stereotypes: don't generalise based on age, gender, nationality, or role – inclusive language fosters belonging.



Speak clearly: use simple, accessible language and avoid idioms or jokes that may not translate across cultures or languages.



Use inclusive language in all settings: not only in formal meetings or emails, but also during casual moments – in cafeterias, elevators, hallways, and break rooms.



Stay open to feedback and learning: inclusive language is an evolving practice – continue learning, keep an open mind, and adjust when needed.



Remember: inclusive language helps create a positive, respectful workplace where everyone can contribute fully.



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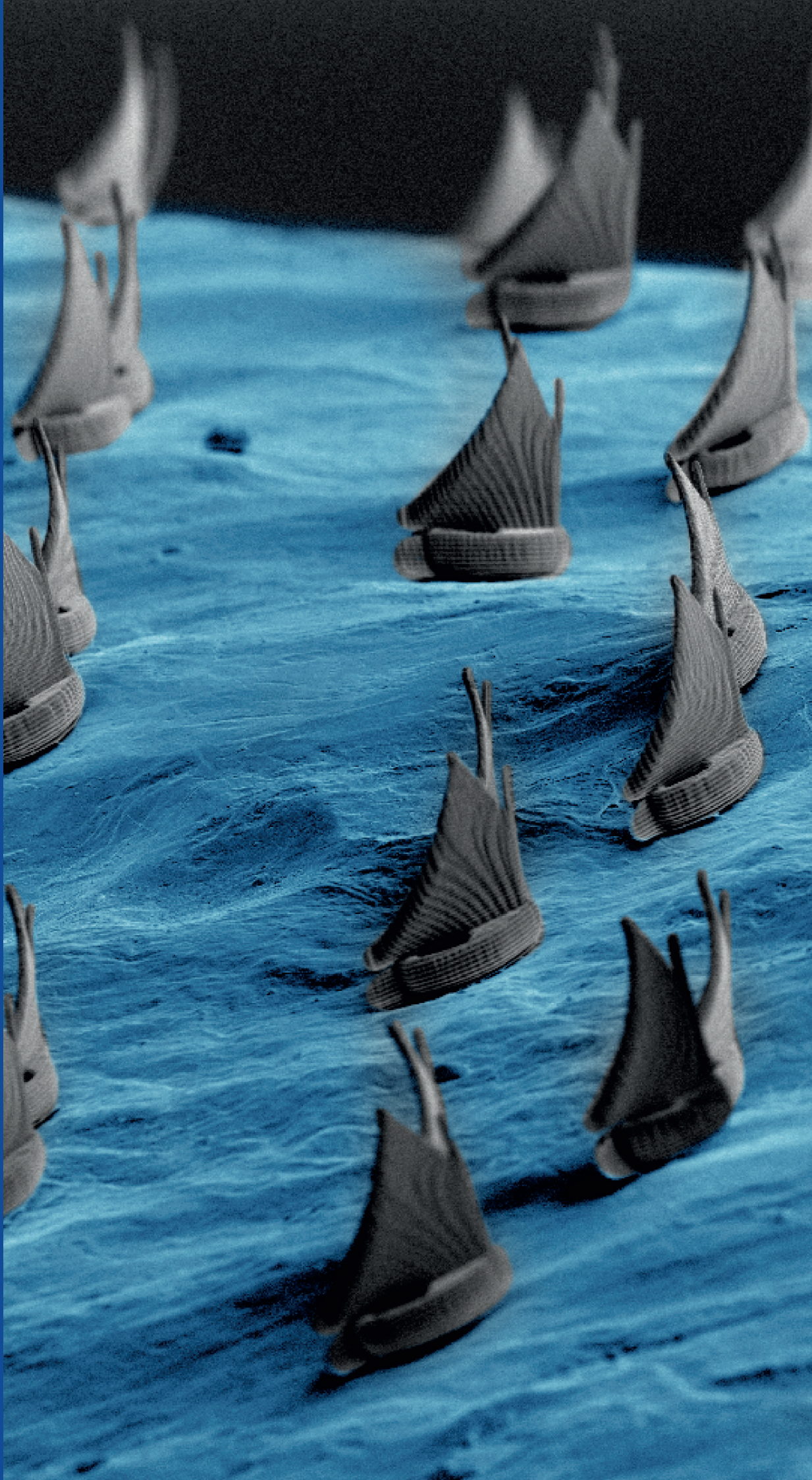
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Ageism refers to prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination directed toward individuals or groups based on their age. It can affect people of any age, although it is mostly associated with discrimination against older people.

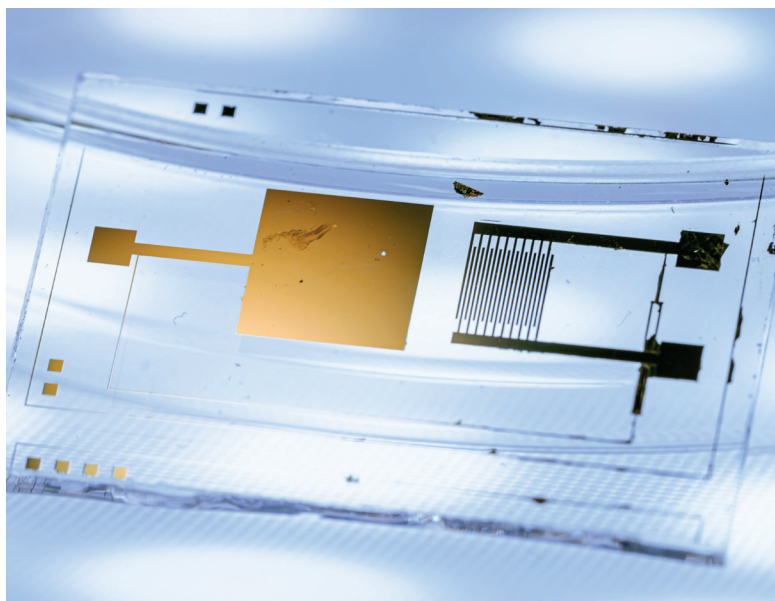
### Understanding ageism

Ageism is a form of **discrimination, similar to racism or sexism**, that is **based on a person's age**. It includes stereotypes (how we think), prejudices (how we feel), and discriminatory actions (how we behave) toward individuals of any age group. It can begin early in life. **From a young age, children are exposed to age-related stereotypes, which they may internalize**, shaping both their self-image and their perception of others.



### Why is ageism a problem?

Ageism poses **serious health risks**. It can harm self-esteem, contribute to **poorer physical and mental health**, increase risk-taking behaviors, and even lead to a shorter lifespan. It also **contributes to social exclusion**, deepens **economic inequality**, and **denies individuals equal treatment**, making it a clear form of discrimination. By fostering division between generations, ageism can **weaken social cohesion** and obscure the important **contributions each generation makes**.

Research indicates that ageist language can detrimentally affect individuals' performance and elevate stress levels.



## Common expressions and their alternatives

| <br><b>Avoid this</b>                                 | <br><b>Instead try</b>                                       | <br><b>Why?</b>  |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Too young to get it"</li> <li>• "They are young and inexperienced"</li> </ul>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "They have a different perspective"</li> <li>• "They are learning and gaining experience"</li> </ul> | <p>Negative assumptions about youthfulness dismiss valuable viewpoints and potential contributions.</p> <p>Recognizing learning as a process respects developmental stages and encourages inclusion of diverse ideas.</p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Old person.</li> <li>• Seniors.</li> <li>• The elderly.</li> <li>• Elderly people.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older person.</li> <li>• Older adults.</li> <li>• or specify age when relevant</li> </ul>            | <p>Terms like "old" and "elderly" often imply decline, frailty, or obsolescence, reinforcing negative stereotypes that ignore an individual's true abilities and contributions.</p> <p>Although "senior" is widely used, it too can carry unintended ageist connotations suggesting a fundamental divide between older and younger people.</p> <p>Definitions and understandings of age may vary.</p> <p>Neutral, respectful language promotes inclusion and recognizes the diversity of experience among older adults.</p> |



### Avoid this

- Phrases that suggest ageing is an obstacle, catastrophe, or problem



### Instead try

- "Ageing is a normal human experience"
- "Ageing brings wisdom, experience, and deeper appreciation for life"



### Why?

Fatalistic language about ageing ignores the positive aspects and risks promoting stereotypes about decline or burden.

Emphasizing ageing as a natural process supports a culture of respect and encourages focus on health and wellbeing at all stages of life.

- Senile.

- A person with dementia
- A person with a cognitive disability

"Senile" is outdated and carries negative, dismissive connotations that can be hurtful and inaccurate.

Using person-first language respects the individual beyond their medical condition.



## Tips and considerations to address ageism

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Tackling ageism effectively requires a comprehensive approach that addresses its root causes and challenges deeply ingrained social norms. Recognizing how ageist stereotypes can be embedded in everyday language is a crucial first step. Below are a few key actions to help counter ageism.



**Focus on skills and experience** rather than age.



**Acknowledge** that ageism **exists and affects people** of all ages.



**Promote education and awareness** about ageism and its impact.



**Encourage intergenerational dialogue** and opportunities for people of different ages to connect and learn from one another.



**Choose a respectful, inclusive language that values individuals across all age groups.**

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## Using inclusive language related to disability promotes dignity, reduces stigma, and fosters an environment of respect and understanding.

It acknowledges the individuality of people with disabilities and avoids perpetuating stereotypes.

### Foundational concepts to understand disabilities

**Ableism** is a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the assumption that people with disabilities need to be “fixed” in one form or the other.

**Caregiver:** a person who takes care of the needs of another person who is not fully independent and provides them with assistance.

**Disability** is an extensive concept encompassing impairments of physical, behavioral, psychological, intellectual, and socioemotional nature.

**ICF (International Classification of Functioning Disabilities and Health)** “provides both a unified, standardized language and a conceptual reference model for describing health and related states. It is part of the WHO (World Health Organization) Family of International Classifications.”

**Identity-first language** emphasizes the disability before the person (e.g., saying “a blind person” or a “deaf person” rather than “a person who is blind or deaf”).

**Invisible disability** refers to a physical, mental, or neurological condition that is not apparent externally but can impose restrictions or difficulties on an individual's mobility, perception, or daily tasks. Some examples of invisible disabilities are brain injuries, mental health conditions, chronic pain, hearing, and vision impairments, among others.

**Person-first language** emphasizes the person, not the disability (e.g., saying “a person who uses a wheelchair” rather than “a wheelchair-bound person”).

**Person with disabilities:** those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.



## Understanding disabilities

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- ▶ Disabilities are a normal part of life. Everyone experiences a disability at some point, whether temporary or permanent.
- ▶ In 2023, approximately 1.3 billion people worldwide had a significant disability. It represents 16% of the world's population, or 1 in 6 people. This number is increasing due to longer life expectancy and the rise in long-term illnesses.
- ▶ There are many types of disabilities, including:
  - Physical disabilities
  - Mental disabilities
  - Learning disabilities
- ▶ Some disabilities are hidden, such as:
- ▶ Attention-Deficit or Hyperactivity Disorder
  - Mental health conditions
  - Chronic pain
  - Hearing impairments
  - ✓ These hidden disabilities can make it harder to do everyday tasks, but they might not be obvious to others.
- ▶ A significant number of disabilities are invisible.

**People with disabilities are diverse, each with unique impairments and identities. It is important to recognize their differences and embrace the diversity of their experiences, rather than categorizing them as a homogeneous group.**

## Inclusive language for disabilities




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Individuals with disabilities have specific ways of self-identification, which they would sometimes appreciate others adopting. Respecting and using the disability language preferences shows respect for their choices. For example, some people view their disability as an important part of their identity and therefore use identity-first language, describing themselves as 'a blind person.' Others prefer to emphasize themselves rather than their disability and use person-first language, referring to themselves as 'a person who is blind.'

The language used when discussing disabilities is undergoing continuous refinement. At the core of this evolution lies the fundamental principle of recognizing the inherent value and dignity of every individual. It is important to prioritize the preferences of individuals with disabilities when it comes to how they wish to be identified, rather than focusing solely on stylistic choices.



## Common expressions and their alternatives

| <br><b>Avoid this</b>  | <br><b>Instead try</b>  | <br><b>Why?</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confined/restricted to a wheelchair.</li> <li>• A person who can't hear.</li> <li>• A deaf.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A person who uses a wheelchair.</li> <li>• A person who uses a device to hear.</li> </ul>   | <p>Focuses on the person's ability and autonomy, rather than focusing on what the person cannot do. "Confined" implies limitation and passivity.</p> <p>Using "a deaf" reduces the person to their condition. Person-first language acknowledges the individual.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A handicapped/disabled person.</li> <li>• Disabled/handicapped.</li> <li>• An epileptic.</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instead use person-first language:</li> <li>• A person with a disability/with a handicap.</li> <li>• A person with epilepsy.</li> </ul> | <p>Person-first language avoids defining people by their disability. Also, in Italy and other countries, "handicapped" is considered outdated and offensive since May 14, 2024.</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Severely disabled.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A person with intensive support need.</li> </ul>  | <p>Focuses on the individual and their support requirements rather than severity of their disability.</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bathrooms/parking for handicapped.</li> <li>• Handicapped parking/bathrooms.</li> </ul>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible bathrooms.</li> <li>• Accessible parking.</li> <li>• A bathroom/parking reserved for a person with a disability.</li> </ul>  | <p>"Accessible" highlights functionality and inclusivity rather than labeling people.</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psycho.</li> <li>• Crazy.</li> <li>• Insane.</li> <li>• Maniac.</li> </ul>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A person with an emotional or behavioral disability.</li> </ul>   | <p>The old terms are stigmatizing and inaccurate. They serve more as insults than as respectful or precise descriptions.</p>   |

**Avoid this**

- A normal person.
- A healthy person.

**Instead try**

- A person without a disability.

**Why?**

"Normal" or "healthy" imply that people with disabilities are abnormal or unhealthy. The inclusive term emphasizes equality.

- A blind/deaf person.

- A person who is blind/deaf.

The disability does not define the person.

- To suffer from a disability.
- To be afflicted by a disability.
- To be stricken by a disability.
- Troubled with a disability.

- To have a disability/impairment/condition.

Not everyone with a disability suffers or feels afflicted. Using neutral language respects diverse experiences.

### Keep in mind these considerations for inclusive language use



**Consider relevance:** mention someone's disability when it is directly relevant to the situation at hand.



**Move beyond disability** by stopping defining individuals solely by their disability. They are multifaceted people with unique talents and experiences.



**Eliminate negative stereotypes** by stopping portraying people with disabilities as vulnerable or a burden.



**Exclude victim language** by avoiding using terms like "suffering from," "afflicted by," or "victim of" when referring to a disability.



**Do not use collective nouns** like "the disabled" and remember that many **disabilities exist on a spectrum**, and **many disabilities** are not **readily apparent**.



**Prioritize person-first language, as it highlights the person rather than the disability.** (Exception: always respect an individual's preference if they request a different wording).



**Describe accurately and respectfully.**



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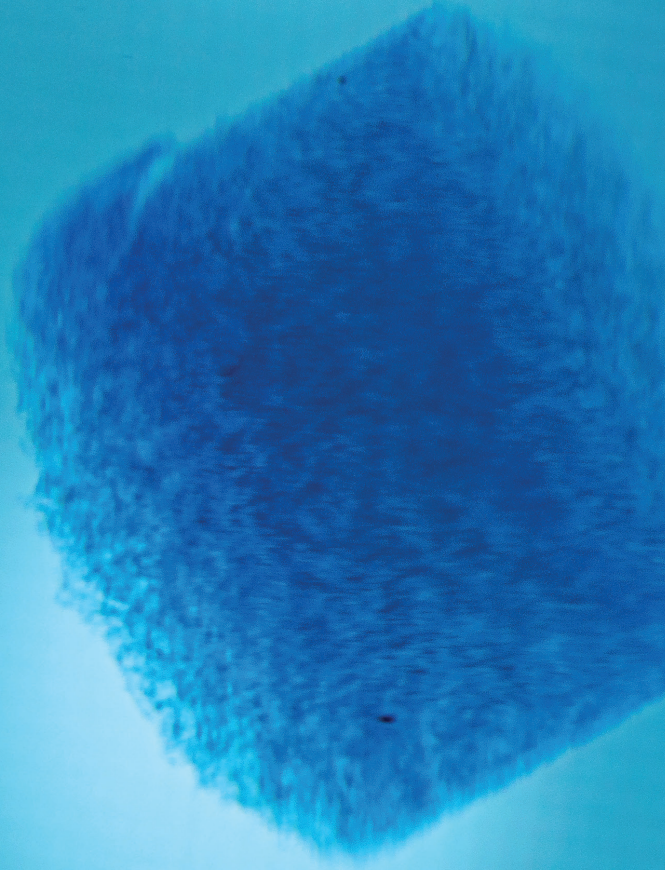
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Inclusive language is key when discussing someone's background. Stereotypes based on ethnicity, nationality, or cultural background can be inaccurate and misleading.

## Foundational concepts to understand Ethnicity and Culture

**African American:** The term *African American* refers specifically to Americans of African ancestry. It is not always interchangeable with Black, as African American describes an ethnicity, while Black is a racial category.

**Black:** *Black*, with a capital "B," is used when referring to people in a racial, ethnic, or cultural sense. It recognizes the shared history, culture, and experiences of Black people, particularly those of African descent, and acknowledges the term's cultural and historical significance beyond simply describing skin color. *Black* can be used regardless of nationality. Since capitalization is still a debated issue, it is best to ask individuals how they prefer to be referred to.

**Culture:** "the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs."

**Ethnicity:** *Ethnicity* refers to a person's self-identification with a national origin, linguistic group, or tribal affiliation. It is often confused with race, but the two are distinct. *Race* is a social construct based on perceived physical traits, while ethnicity is rooted in cultural heritage and shared identity. Ethnicity can be fluid, and individuals may identify with multiple ethnicities.

**Indigenous:** "is an umbrella term. Indigenous peoples are culturally distinct ethnic groups whose members are directly descended from the earliest known inhabitants of a particular geographic region. Indigenous communities are incredibly diverse with varying cultures, histories, ancestral lands, languages, forms of governance, and spiritual traditions."

**People of color:** *People of color* is a preferred term over minority to describe individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. It is better to say *minoritized communities* rather than *minorities*. Use people of color or communities of color when referring to non-White groups, but whenever possible, be specific (for example: *Asian American women*, *Black students*, or *Indigenous communities*).

**Race:** "Race divides human populations into groups often based on physical appearance, social factors, and cultural backgrounds. Race was constructed as a hierarchical human grouping system, generating racial classifications to identify, distinguish and marginalize some groups across nations, regions, and the world.

- ✓ In our commitment to inclusive language, we have opted to move away from the term "race." While commonly used in English, the historical weight it carries and the potential for misunderstandings across cultures and individual experiences do not fully align with the nuanced identities of our IIT community.

**Tokenism:** The practice of doing something (such as hiring a person who belongs to a historically marginalized community) only to prevent criticism and give the appearance that people are being treated fairly.

## Understanding why inclusive language matters for ethnicity and culture

- ▶ Background vs. Identity: someone's birthplace might not reflect their cultural identity, and their nationality may not align with their ethnicity.
- ▶ The individual is essential, everyone has diverse and rich experiences, we all have unique identities, ethnicity, and culture;
- ▶ Broad generalizations and assumptions about entire ethnic or cultural groups are dangerous;
- ▶ Context is key: considering if mentioning someone's ethnicity or culture is necessary to the conversation.

## Common expressions and their alternatives

| Avoid this   | Instead try   | Why?  |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confusing race and ethnicity: writing race/ethnicity with a slash.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Race and ethnicity.</li> <li>• Race or ethnicity.</li> </ul>   | <p>Race and ethnicity are distinct concepts. Race is a social construct based on physical traits; ethnicity refers to cultural identity and heritage. The slash incorrectly implies they are interchangeable.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentioning a person's ethnicity when it is not relevant to the story: "A Black journalist was interviewing me".</li> </ul>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not mention a person's ethnicity when it is not relevant to the story.</li> </ul>   | <p>Mentioning ethnicity unnecessarily reinforces distinctions where none are needed and can perpetuate bias.</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When mentioning multiple people from the same racial or ethnic group, writing "the Blacks," "the Asians," or "Blacks."</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black people / Asian people</li> </ul>   | <p>Always refer to people, not just an ethnicity. Saying "the Blacks" ignores the diversity within the group and reinforces stereotypes. The plural "Blacks" is offensive.</p>                                    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the following terms "Minorities/ Minority" or "Minority communities" when describing nonwhite communities.</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If relevant, name the specific group(s). If not possible, prefer: <i>religious minority, systematically excluded groups, groups experiencing underrepresentation, or historically underserved/marginalized communities.</i></li> </ul> | <p>"Minority" focuses only on numerical status and ignores power dynamics, exclusion, and historical contexts. Alternative terms acknowledge structural inequalities.</p>   |

# ETHNICITY AND CULTURE



## Avoid this

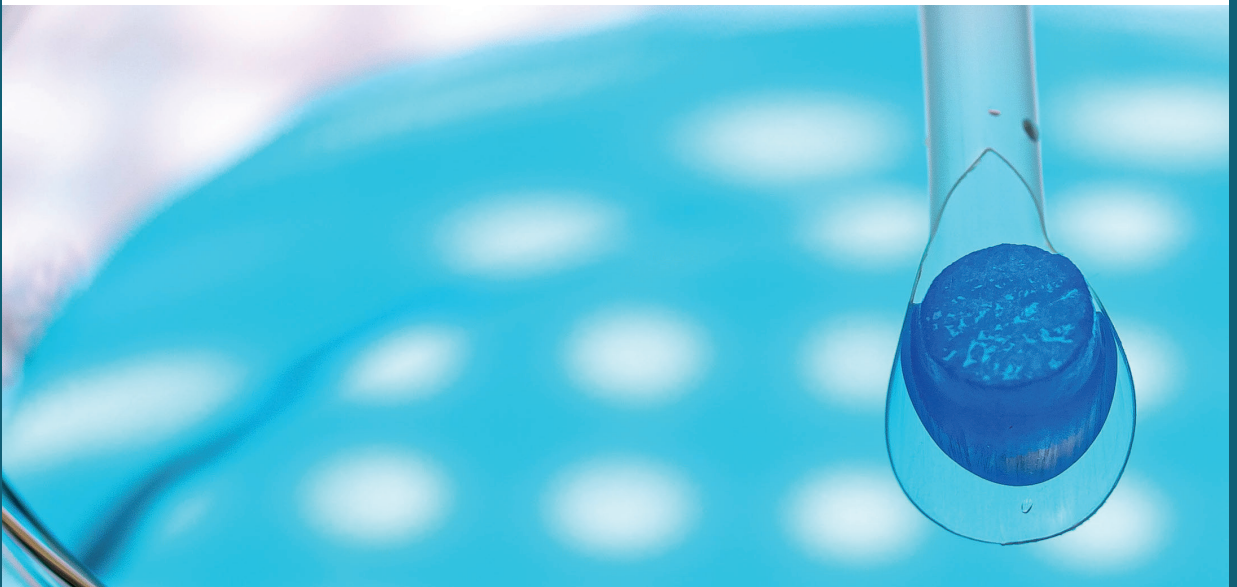


## Instead try



## Why?

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using cultural and ethnical stereotypes even if they are positive: "Americans are loud".</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be mindful of cultural appropriation. Avoid assigning stereotypical traits or cultural elements to individuals based solely on ethnicity.</li> </ul>                         | <p>Stereotypes, even positive ones, reduce people to simplistic ideas and ignore individual diversity.</p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negro.</li> <li>Oriental.</li> <li>Eskimos.</li> <li>Hispanics/Latinos (when used without specificity).</li> </ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be specific about nationality or ethnicity. Examples: <i>South American (Brazilian, Colombian, Argentinian)</i>. Use <i>Inuk/Inuit</i> instead of <i>Eskimos</i>.</li> </ul> | <p>These terms are outdated and offensive. "Orientals" is geographically vague and can be pejorative. "Eskimos" is a colonial term, Inuit or Inuk is respectful. Always ask individuals how they prefer to be identified.</p>                      |
| <p>Write nationality and ethnic group names in lowercase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>italians.</li> <li>japanese.</li> <li>asian.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capitalize the names of nationalities and ethnic groups:</li> <li>Italians.</li> <li>Japanese.</li> <li>Asian.</li> </ul>  | <p>Nationalities and ethnic groups are proper nouns and should always be capitalized when used collectively (e.g., The French, The Chinese, The Germans).</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Colored people.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People of colour.</li> </ul>   | <p>"Colored people" is an outdated and discriminatory term, originally used to discriminate. People of colour is more respectful, but note that "people of colour" and "Black" are not synonymous – be accurate and specific when appropriate.</p> |



## Keep in mind these considerations for inclusive language use



**Ask individuals** about their preferred terminology when unsure.



**Evaluate the relevance** of specifying individuals based on ethnicity or nationality. Only include details if relevant.



**Use specific terminology:** instead of using broad generalizations, refer to distinct groups of individuals with specific terminology.



**Avoid stereotypes** related to a person's ethnicity, culture, or socioeconomic background;



**Capitalize nationalities:** in English, nationalities and peoples are typically capitalized (Italians, Germans, French, Americans).



**Use adjectives:** when referring to ethnic or racial terms, use the adjective form rather than the noun form (e.g., "The American participants" instead of "The Americans").



**Avoid assuming a person's nationality** or **cultural background** based on their appearance.



**Create a welcoming environment:** inclusive language helps everyone feel comfortable and included in the workplace. It promotes better communication and collaboration.



**Promotes equity:** fair and accurate language helps ensure that everyone has equal opportunities. It avoids unintentionally marginalizing certain groups.

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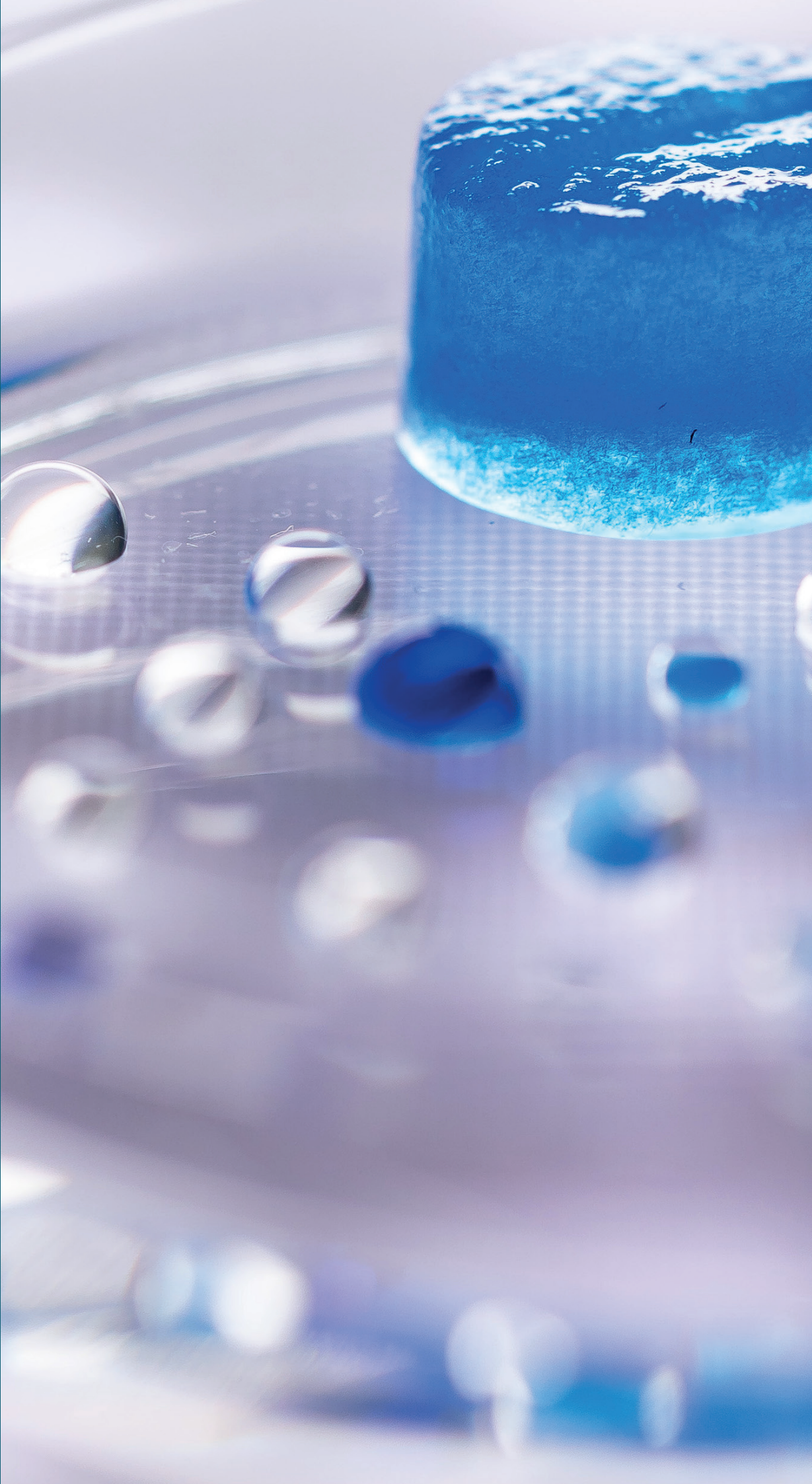
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## Understanding this dimension starts with familiarizing ourselves with key terms, including sex, gender, and sexual orientation.

This foundation fosters respectful communication, which is crucial for creating inclusive and equitable spaces.

### Foundational concepts to understand gender

**Gender:** *Gender* refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, norms associated with being a woman, man, or another gender. These norms vary across societies and can change over time. Gender is shaped by five key elements: relational, hierarchical, historical, contextual, and institutional. It reflects external expectations and social structures.

**Gender-biased language** is a language that either implicitly or explicitly favors one gender over another and is a form of gender-discriminatory language.

- ▶ Example: “during a conference, every participant should turn off his phone”.

**Gender-discriminatory or sexist language** uses words, phrases, or structures which exclude, demean, or ignore one gender, or imply that one gender is superior to another. It reinforces stereotypes and unequal treatment. At its most extreme, it denies equal value, dignity, and respect to all genders.

- ▶ Example: “researchers and their wives are invited to attend an after-work reception”

**Gender-Identity** is an individual's internal sense of their own gender: how they personally identify and experience themselves, whether as male, female, a blend of both, neither, or another identity entirely. It may or may not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

In short:

- ▶ Gender is about social expectations.
- ▶ Gender identity is about personal experience and self-understanding.

**Gender-sensitive Language** means using language that includes and respects all genders and identities equally. It avoids words or pronouns that could be biased, discriminatory, or favor one gender over another.

- ▶ **Gender-sensitive language** focuses specifically on using words and expressions that respect and include all gender identities, avoiding bias or favoritism toward any gender.
- ▶ **Inclusive language** is broader. It aims to use words and phrases that respect and include all kinds of diversity, not only gender, but also ethnicity, age, and more, to avoid exclusion or discrimination.

**Intersectionality:** is a framework for understanding how different parts of a person's identity, such as gender, ethnicity, social class, and age, combine to shape unique experiences of privilege or discrimination. It looks at how multiple forms of bias overlap and affect people's daily lives. For example, a low-income 50-year-old woman may face challenges related to both age and economic status.

**Sex:** "the different biological and physiological characteristics of males and females, such as reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, etc."

**Sexual orientation:** Refers to the direction of a person's emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to others. Common categories include heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality (experiencing little or no sexual attraction), among others.

## Understanding gender-sensitive language

The language we use reflects the social and cultural context we live in, including gender biases. English, like any language, is not free from these dynamics. Numerous studies by linguists, psychologists, and communication experts have shown that the way we structure and use English can, often unconsciously, convey stereotypes and reinforce inequality.

Expressions, phrases, and seemingly neutral language structures can contribute to sexism and discrimination, diminishing the value and visibility of certain people based on gender. In some cases, this can lead to denying equal dignity and social recognition to all genders.




**Research shows** that gender-discriminatory language can **negatively impact** both women and men, leading to feelings of ostracism and decreased motivation. These effects are explained by various psychological processes. Conversely, using gender-inclusive language can reduce negative emotions and increase motivation, particularly for those with lower levels of unconscious bias.



## The benefits of gender-sensitive language

- ▶ Avoid unintentionally offending, belittling, or favouring one gender over another.
- ▶ Create a welcoming and inclusive environment for all employees.
- ▶ Eliminate bias towards any gender.
- ▶ Promote equality through clear and respectful communication.
- ▶ Embrace and acknowledge workforce diversity.
- ▶ Promote respect by recognizing their identity, regardless of sex, gender, or any other factor.

## How to use inclusive pronouns

| <br><b>Avoid this</b>  | <br><b>Instead try</b>   | <br><b>Why?</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He/his/his.</li> <li>• She/her/hers.</li> </ul> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Someone may not remember <b>his</b> phone number.</li> <li>• When an employee attends a meeting, she should prepare a detailed report.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They/their/theirs.</li> <li>• One.</li> <li>• Who.</li> </ul> <p>Example for <b>they</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Someone may not remember <b>their</b> phone number.</li> <li>• When an employee attends a meeting, <b>they</b> should prepare a detailed report.</li> </ul> <p>Example for <b>one</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a research scientist, <b>one</b> should be curious.</li> </ul> <p>Example for <b>who</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An administrative <b>who</b> is not satisfied with the office chair should report it.</li> </ul> | <p>Traditionally, English pronouns were limited to he or she. However, language has evolved to reflect greater awareness of gender diversity. Today, many people use the singular they (and forms like them, Traditionally, English pronouns were limited to he or she. However, language has evolved to reflect greater awareness of gender diversity. Today, many people use the singular they (and forms like them, their) as a gender-neutral option.</p> <p>It can be helpful when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The person's gender is unknown.</li> <li>• The person identifies as non-binary or genderfluid.</li> <li>• The speaker wants to avoid assuming gender.</li> </ul> |

Additionally, many non-binary and genderfluid people choose they/them pronouns to describe themselves. Using someone's correct pronouns is a simple way to show respect, affirm their identity, and foster inclusion.

Other neutral pronouns like one or who can also be used in more formal or general statements.



**Avoid this**



**Instead try**



**Why?**

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Using only one gendered pronoun when gender is unknown: he or she.</p> | <p>Using both gendered pronouns: he/she or he or she.</p> <p>Example: When a researcher publishes an article, he or she should...</p>                       | <p>While they is now the preferred inclusive choice, in contexts where they may feel too informal or ambiguous, using he or she is more inclusive than choosing just one gender.</p> |
| <p>Using Active voice: a person commits an offence if he....</p>          | <p>Using Passive voice: it is an offence for a person to...</p>   | <p>Using the passive voice avoids the need for gendered pronouns entirely, making the statement more neutral.</p>  |
| <p>Guessing a person's pronoun or gender.</p>                             | <p>Ask how the person would like to be addressed.</p> <p>Indicate your own pronouns.</p> <p>Example: Hi everyone, I'm David, and I use he/him pronouns.</p> | <p>Asking or sharing pronouns is an easy way to show respect and make sure everyone feels acknowledged. It avoids making incorrect assumptions about gender.</p>                     |

Below is a comprehensive table illustrating the proper usage of the pronoun "they":


| Pronoun          | Subject                          | Object      | Possessive determiner                 | Possessive pronoun      |
|------------------|----------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| They/them/theirs | They reviewed the code together. | I met them. | Their research was published earlier. | The patents are theirs. |



## How to use gender-neutral words?

Just like gendered pronouns, gendered nouns can introduce unintended bias by assuming someone's gender incorrectly. The key to avoiding this is awareness. Because these nouns are so common, we often overlook their effect. By being more mindful in your writing and speech, you can easily choose more inclusive alternatives.

## Common expressions and their alternatives

| <br><b>Avoid this</b>   | <br><b>Instead try</b>   | <br><b>Why?</b>   |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miss</li> <li>• Mrs.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms.</li> </ul>  | <p>"Mrs." Implies that the woman is married.</p> <p>"Miss" implies that the woman is single</p> <p>Use a title that does not indicate marital status. Ms. works similarly to Mr., it does not imply if a woman is married or single.</p> <p>It is always respectful to ask the person how they would like to be addressed.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dear Sir(s).</li> <li>• Dear Madam(s).</li> <li>• Dear Sir(s) and Madam(s).</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dear all.</li> <li>• Dear recipient</li> </ul>  | <p>Using Sir or Madam assumes a binary view of gender and excludes non-binary people. Using more neutral greetings is more inclusive and welcoming.</p>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girlfriend/Boyfriend.</li> <li>• Wife/Husband.</li> <li>• Mother/Father.</li> <li>• Sister/Brother.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner.</li> <li>• Spouse (if married).</li> <li>• Parent.</li> <li>• Sibling.</li> </ul>  | <p>Gender-neutral terms are more inclusive of all relationships and family structures. They avoid making assumptions about gender or sexual orientation.</p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spokesman/ Spokeswoman.</li> <li>• Chairman/Chairwoman.</li> <li>• Businessman or businesswoman.</li> <li>• Policeman/ police officer.</li> <li>• Landlord/Landlady.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Press officer / A representative for / Speaking for.</li> <li>• Chairperson/Chair.</li> <li>• Businessperson.</li> <li>• A Police Officer.</li> <li>• Owner/ Proprietor.</li> </ul> | <p>Gender-neutral job titles are more inclusive and recognize that people of any gender can hold these roles.</p>  |

**Avoid this****Instead try****Why?**

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Saying "A man" to refer to everyone.              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person.</li> <li>• Individual.</li> <li>• Human being.</li> </ul>  | Avoid using man or he as a generic term for all people. More accurate and inclusive alternatives ensure that everyone is represented. |
| Saying "Mankind" when talking about humanity.     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People.</li> <li>• Human being.</li> <li>• Humanity.</li> </ul>    | Broader and more accurate words like <i>humanity</i> include all people, not just men.  |
| Assuming someone's gender by using "Ms." or "Mr." | <p>Use the person's title (e.g., Doctor, Professor).</p> <p>Use their full name:<br/>Dear Davide Rossi.</p> | If unsure how to address someone, using their title or full name is a respectful way to avoid gender assumptions.                     |

### Keep in mind these considerations when discussing gender issues



**Consider the relevance of mentioning gender.**



**Identify the audience to adapt your language:** are you addressing one person (whose preference you may know), or a group?



**Avoid masculine defaults:** it excludes people who do not identify with the masculine gender.



**Use inclusive terms:** opt for gender-sensitive language to ensure everyone feels recognized in your communication.



**Ask for pronoun preferences:** when unsure, directly ask someone how they prefer to be addressed in terms of pronouns, titles, and roles.



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Socioeconomic status refers not only to income, but also to factors such as educational background, occupational prestige, access to opportunities, quality of life, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class.

Many forms of discrimination exist based on those characteristics. Using inclusive language can help avoid or reduce forms of stigmatisation that are sometimes hidden in everyday language.

## Foundational concepts to understand Classism and Socioeconomic Status

**Classism:** “a form of personal bias or prejudice or a pattern of institutional discrimination based on social class and typically directed against persons or groups of a lower socioeconomic status. In keeping with its different senses, the term can be used to characterize the attitudes and behavior of individuals toward others or the structure and systemic practices of institutions or whole societies”.

**Class privilege:** “Encompasses the unearned advantages, protections, immunities, and access experienced by a small class of people who typically carry special status or power within a society or culture. This status and privilege are typically conferred on the basis of wealth and financial status, occupational prestige (e.g., the perceived societal valuation of an occupational class or job title), title or leadership within a culture, or fame and recognition. These advantages are typically granted to the disadvantage of others and contribute to the establishment of perceived and concrete hierarchies within a community, culture, and/or society”.

**Credentialism:** is the overemphasis and overreliance on degrees, academic titles or institutional prestige as indicators of someone's potential, intelligence, or worth. It leads to a belief that educational credentials are the primary determinant of an individual's value in the job market or society and can marginalize talented individuals who follow less conventional paths.

**Institutional Elitism:** a bias that favors candidates from prestigious institutions, assuming they are inherently better or more capable.

**Socioeconomic status (SES)** is the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation. SES reflects quality-of-life attributes and opportunities afforded to people within society and is a consistent predictor of a vast array of psychological outcomes.

**Quality of life:** “the degree to which an individual is healthy, comfortable, and able to participate in or enjoy life events. The term is inherently ambiguous, as it can refer both to the experience an individual has of his or her own life and to the living conditions in which individuals find themselves”.

**Social class:** a group of people within a society who possess the same socioeconomic status.

**Social status:** “the relative rank occupied by an individual, with the associated rights, duties and lifestyle, in a social hierarchy based on honor or prestige. Status can be attributed, i.e. assigned to individuals at birth without reference to their innate abilities, or acquired, which requires particular qualities and is obtained through competition and individual effort. Assigned status is generally based on gender, age, family relationships or birth, while acquired status may be based on education, profession, marital status, achievements or other factors”.

## Understanding classism and socioeconomic status

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**Socioeconomic status (SES)** refers to a person's position within society, shaped by interconnected factors such as income, education level, occupation, financial security, and access to opportunities. It is a complex, dynamic concept that goes far beyond income alone: it also includes living conditions, available resources, and the social value assigned to certain types of work and education. A person's socioeconomic status, and how others perceive it, influences their experiences, opportunities, and well-being in many ways.

Discrimination based on socioeconomic status, also called **classism**, occurs when people are unfairly treated, excluded, or stigmatized because of their perceived social class, income, or level of education. Unlike more visible forms of discrimination, classism often operates subtly: it may be embedded in institutional practices, social attitudes, or the language we use. This kind of bias can significantly affect individuals' dignity, self-worth, and life outcomes.

**Language plays a key role** in shaping how we think about socioeconomic status. The words and phrases we choose can either perpetuate harmful stereotypes or foster greater respect and understanding. For instance, generalized or pejorative terms such as "poor people" or "the homeless" reduce individuals to a single characteristic, ignoring their diversity. Similarly, language that blames individuals for their socioeconomic status (for example, attributing health disparities to "lifestyle choices") erases the structural factors, like systemic inequality, that shape people's opportunities. It is important to avoid treating lower socioeconomic status groups as homogeneous, or framing higher socioeconomic status as the default or the norm.

### Why is classism a problem?

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- ▶ **Reinforces inequality:** classism creates and maintains unfair barriers to education, healthcare, housing, and employment for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- ▶ **Damages dignity and well-being:** it fosters stigma and shame, which can harm people's mental health and sense of self-worth.
- ▶ **Limits opportunities:** assumptions and stereotypes based on class can prevent individuals from accessing resources or being recognized for their abilities.
- ▶ **Perpetuates stereotypes:** biased language and attitudes about class reinforce harmful myths (e.g., that poverty results from personal failure rather than systemic issues).
- ▶ **Weakens social cohesion:** classism divides society, contributing to resentment, exclusion, and mistrust between groups.



## Discrimination Based on Education and Educational Institutions

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Discrimination based on education refers to the unjust denial of opportunities, rights, or recognition based on someone's formal educational background; this includes academic credentials, degrees, institutions attended, or even companies they've worked for.

This type of discrimination is especially problematic when educational achievement becomes a proxy for worthiness, even when it doesn't correlate with actual competence or performance. For example, employers may overlook candidates simply because they hold degrees from less prestigious institutions, or no degree at all, regardless of their abilities or suitability for the role.

Credentialism is the overemphasis on formal qualifications and academic degrees as indicators of a person's ability, value or competence, sidelining individual merit, practical skills, or lived experience. Credentialism feeds into institutional elitism, a system where institutions (e.g., employers, academic bodies, recruiters) show preference for candidates from elite universities or organizations. This is based on prestige bias, the assumption that affiliation with certain institutions automatically reflects quality or competence.

Such bias not only narrows the talent pool but also reinforces social stratification, where access to opportunities becomes increasingly limited to those who have had the privilege of attending elite institutions, often tied to socio-economic background.

### An overlooked discrimination

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Despite its real impact, education-based discrimination remains understudied and underacknowledged. Education-based discrimination is frequently overshadowed and harder to isolate in research or policy conversations because it often co-occurs with other forms of discrimination, such as classism, racism, and sexism.

### Consequences for equity and inclusion

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This form of discrimination can have significant consequences, particularly for individuals and communities who already experience marginalization. Social science research shows that a lack of formal education is a powerful marker of broader social, cultural, political, and economic disadvantage. When opportunities are restricted based on institutional prestige rather than capability, it not only excludes talented individuals, but also limits innovation and social mobility.

### Why are credentialism and institutional elitism a problem?

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- ▶ **It limits diversity of thought and experience:** prioritizing elite institutions excludes talented individuals from non-traditional backgrounds, reducing the range of perspectives and ideas that drive scientific innovation.
- ▶ **It reinforces social and economic inequality:** access to prestigious institutions often depends on socio-economic privilege. Favoring them in hiring or recognition perpetuates class-based barriers and limits social mobility.
- ▶ **It overvalues brand over merit:** focusing on where someone studied or worked can obscure actual skills, creativity, and contributions, leading to missed opportunities for excellence that comes from less-known paths.
- ▶ **It discourages inclusion and opportunity:** job offers or academic programs that favor "top-tier" backgrounds send exclusionary signals to capable candidates, undermining inclusive recruitment and talent development.



| <br><b>Avoid this</b>                       | <br><b>Instead try</b>  | <br><b>Why?</b>  |
|--|--|---|
| <p>[name] didn't go to a well-known school but is surprisingly good.</p>   | <p>[name] brings a valuable perspective from its unique research path.</p>   | <p>The original statement is condescending and reinforces the idea that only those from prestigious schools are expected to be competent.</p>   |
| <p>"Impressive profile, this researcher is from [prestigious lab/company]."</p>  | <p>"It's experience in [field/topic] demonstrates strong technical and collaborative skills."</p>  | <p>Avoids overvaluing institutional affiliations and highlights concrete achievements instead.</p>  |
| <p>"Our researchers come from the world's best institutions".</p>  | <p>"Our researchers come from world-renowned institutions".</p>  | <p>"Best" implies a subjective and elitist judgment that may unintentionally devalue researchers from less-known but equally rigorous institutions.</p>   |
| <p>"Candidates must come from highly prestigious research programs".</p>   | <p>"Candidates with demonstrated research experience and potential, regardless of institutional affiliation, are encouraged to apply."</p>             | <p>Excellent research can come from a wide variety of educational and professional trajectories. This framing promotes fairness and opens opportunities to a more diverse talent pool.</p>                            |
| <p>Prioritizing candidates based on where they studied or worked, rather than their actual performance or contributions.</p> | <p>Focus on actual performance or contributions.</p>   | <p>In science and research, innovation often comes from diverse, interdisciplinary, and non-linear backgrounds, not just elite pathways.</p>  |
| <p>Using the term "class": <i>low/high class</i>.</p>  | <p>Socioeconomic status.</p>   | <p>Terms mentioning class can sound pejorative or outdated. Socioeconomic status is more neutral and descriptive.</p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Poor people</i>.</li> <li>• <i>Low-income</i>.</li> </ul>                        | <p>Below the poverty level/ threshold.</p> <p>In the lowest or highest income bracket.</p> <p>Precise the income brackets and levels, if possible.</p> | <p>Terms like poor and low class can be pejorative or loaded with negative assumptions. Poor has also historically been used in a racialized way. More precise language respects dignity and avoids stereotyping.</p> |

# SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



## Avoid this

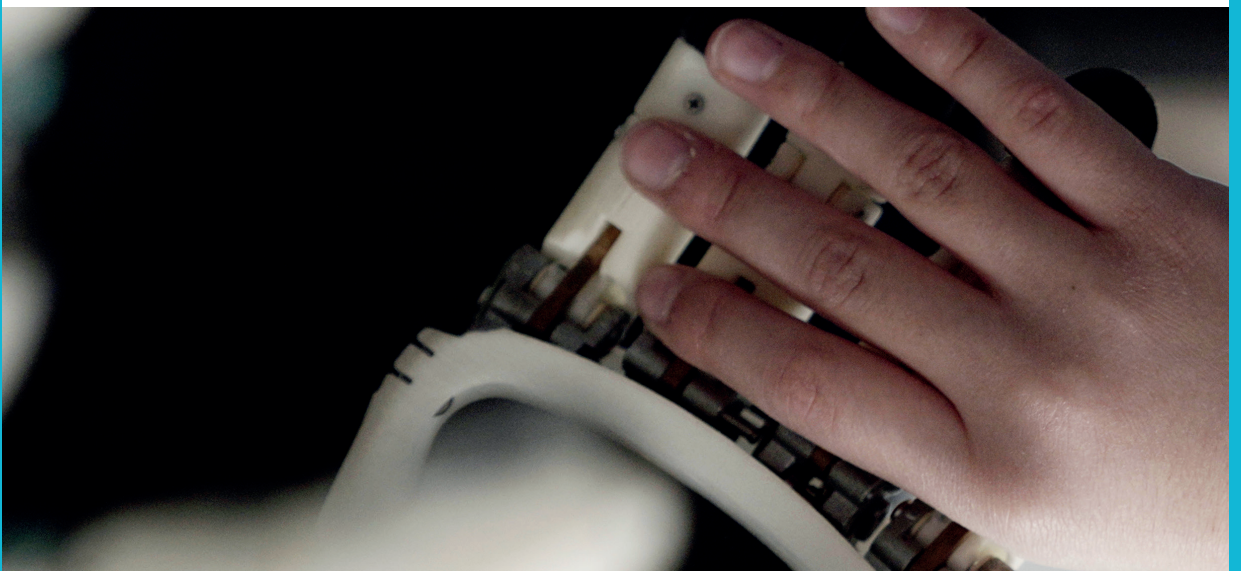


## Instead try



## Why?

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Terms that suggest an unchangeable state: the homeless, the poor.</p> <p>Pejorative terms for places: ghettos, disadvantaged neighborhoods.</p> | <p>People experiencing homelessness.</p> <p>People who are unhoused/ undomiciled/ without a fixed address.</p> <p>Under-resourced neighborhoods.</p> | <p>Use language that centers people's experiences, not labels.</p> <p>Avoid blaming individuals for structural inequality.</p> <p>Be precise and respectful when describing communities.</p> |
| <p>Having little education.</p>  | <p>A person who has a high school diploma.</p> <p>Opportunity gap.</p> <p>Be as precise as possible.</p>   | <p>Avoid pejorative or judgmental terms. Be specific and neutral when describing educational background or opportunity.</p>  |
| <p>Avoid using broad, pejorative, and generalizing terms: "welfare reliant".</p>   | <p>Person-first language: a family who receives [name of social welfare program].</p>  | <p>Welfare reliant is stigmatizing and suggests blame or laziness.</p> <p>Person-first language centers the people and removes negative assumptions.</p>                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illegal immigrant.</li> <li>• The undocumented.</li> </ul>  | <p>People who are undocumented.</p> <p>People who lack the documents required for legal immigration.</p>   | <p>The individuals themselves are not illegal, despite their undocumented status.</p> <p>Use person-first language to avoid defining people by their condition.</p>                          |



Keep in mind these considerations for inclusive language use:



**Acknowledge** the value of diversity **in academic and institutional backgrounds**



**Avoid** phrases that imply **only certain institutions produce competent people.**



**Refrain from** using institutional affiliation as **shorthand for intelligence or value.**



**Be mindful** in hiring materials, recommendation letters, and public discourse not to reinforce prestige-based hierarchies.



**Mention** socioeconomic status only **when relevant.**



**Be mindful of language** helps to challenge stereotypes, foster empathy, and contribute to a more inclusive and respectful communication.



**Recognize diversity and avoid generalizations:** experiences within SES groups vary. Avoid stereotypes and biases by using specific details (e.g., "low-income families in rural areas" instead of "the poor").



**Maintain dignity:** words should show respect for everyone, regardless of SES.



**Be mindful** not to equate professional success or wealth with worth.



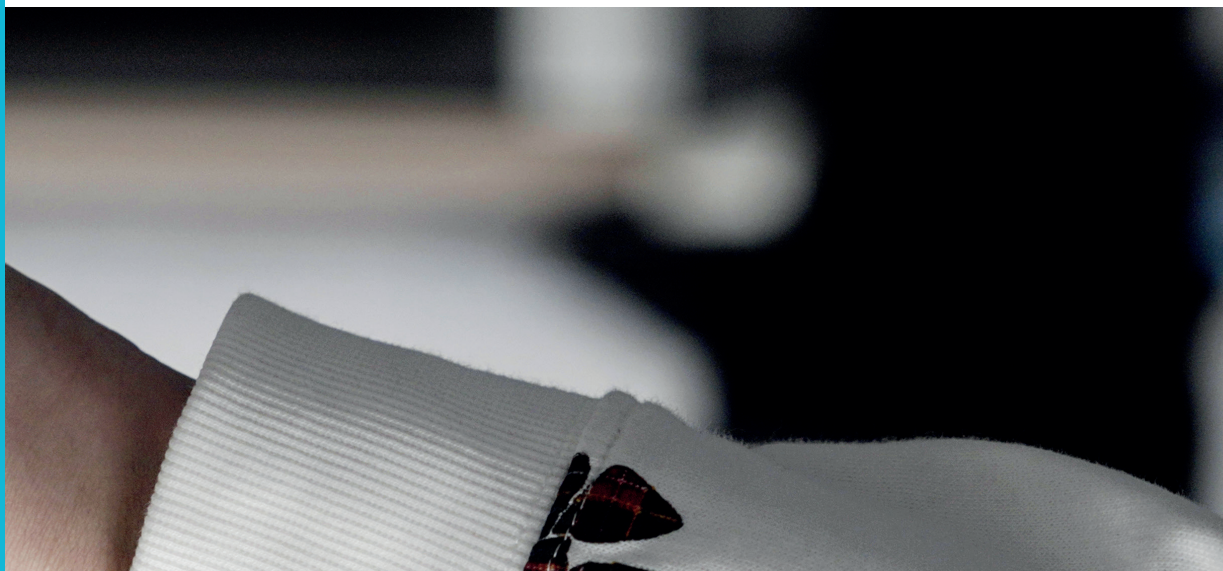
**Ask yourself whether you can use person-first language.**



**Provide context:** to provide specific context rather than relying on vague or moralizing terms. Consider the country, economic situation, or specific social welfare when discussing SES.



**Avoid classism:** do not perpetuate stereotypes about social class.





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## KEY TAKEAWAYS OF INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE



### Respect self-identification

Always use terms and pronouns that individuals use for themselves; this applies to age, gender, disability, ethnicity, and cultural background.



### Avoid stereotypes and assumptions

Do not assume abilities, preferences, values, or experiences based on someone's age, disability, cultural background, gender, or socioeconomic status.



### Recognise your own prejudices

Be aware of your biases and how they can impact communication. Reflect on your language choices and how they affect others.



### Use person-centered and neutral language

Focus on the person first (e.g. "person with a disability") and use neutral, descriptive terms rather than labels or metaphors that can be exclusionary or harmful.



### Describe accurately and responsibly

Use data, context, and multiple perspectives. Avoid relying solely on personal experience when representing groups or social issues.



### Choose inclusive job titles and references

Use gender-neutral and inclusive job titles (e.g. "chairperson", "team", "everyone") and avoid outdated or gendered terms.



### Stay mindful of tone and context

Language can unintentionally convey bias or reinforce systemic inequality. Avoid jokes, idioms, or casual remarks that reflect stereotypes about age, class, gender, ability, or culture.



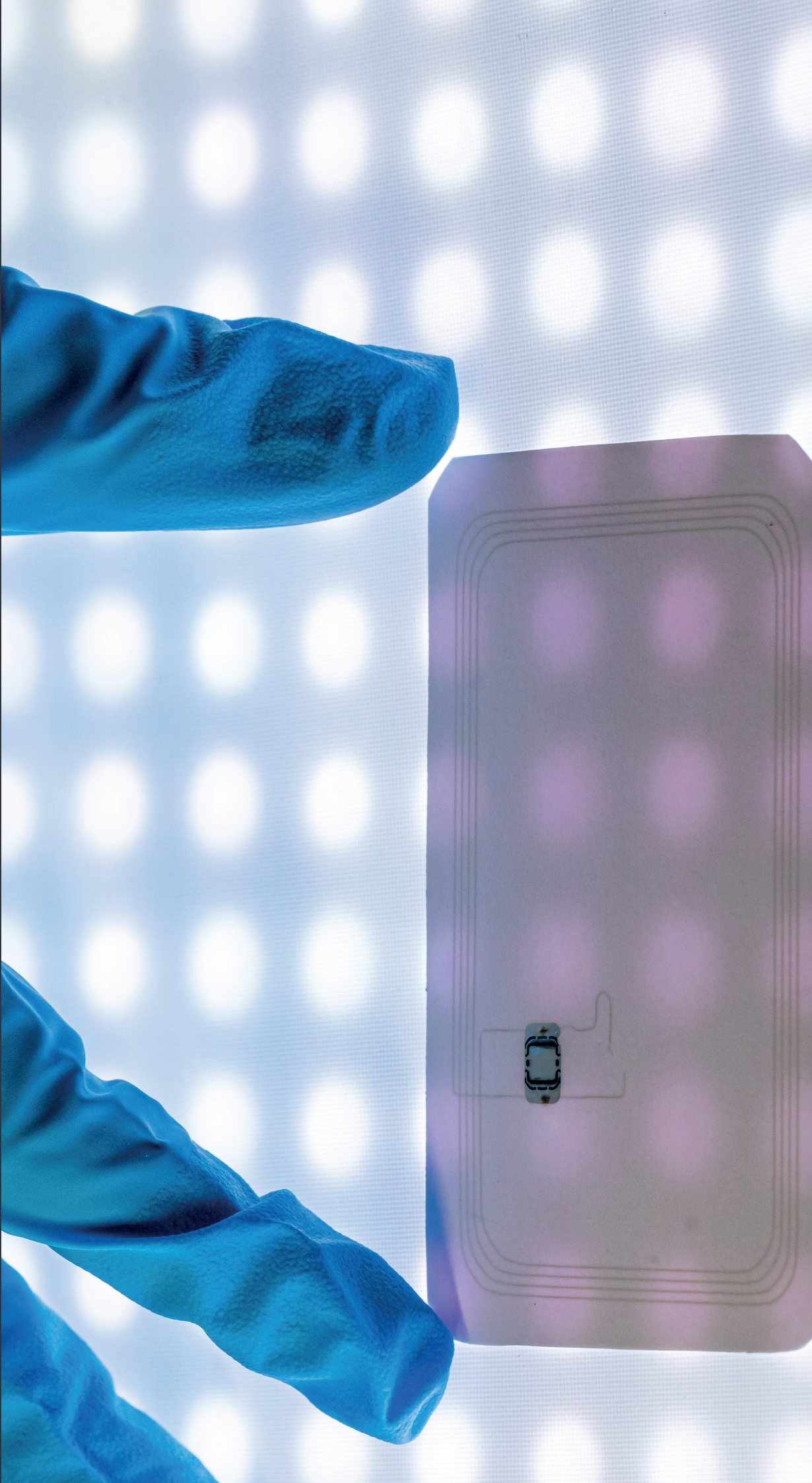
### Recognise diversity and avoid generalisations

Each person's experience is unique. Avoid speaking "for groups" or making broad generalisations.



### Keep evolving and stay open

Inclusive language is a dynamic practice. Listen to feedback, keep learning, and adapt your language choices as norms evolve.



*We acknowledge the use of ChatGPT 3.5 (Open AI, <https://chat.openai.com>) to assist in the research process and summarize my initial notes.*













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