Say This, Not That

Activating Workplace Diversity Through Inclusive Language Practice

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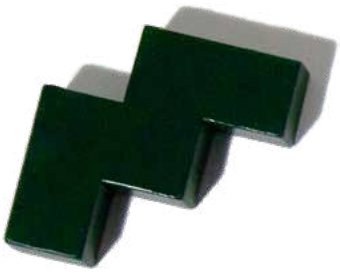
Let's start by assuming your business is not an outlier. Like the vast majority of successful professionals in today's market, you know the competitive advantage of workplace diversity. You've read the statistics, articles, and reports that urge business leaders to engage in diverse hiring practices and to build an inclusive culture through empathetic, participative leadership. Your business has allocated necessary resources to fight the homogeneity of its team. Now, you want to learn about inclusive language so you can embrace the humanity of your colleagues.

Or perhaps your team is not particularly diverse. Perhaps you're a one-person human resources department and want to write inclusive job descriptions that attract diverse job seekers. Maybe you work as a sales professional and find yourself pitching to increasingly diverse decision makers. Perhaps you are a public speaker and need to address a large group of people without excluding anyone in the room. You feel sensitive to the potential missteps of discriminatory language. You want to make everyone feel welcome, but you don't know the right thing to say.

Even people who champion diversity can be nervous about choosing the correct words for identities they have not often encountered. In fact, your sensitivity is evidence that you are learning. How do you address the chief marketing officer who identifies as a queer Black woman or the new administrative intern from Oman who uses a service animal at work? These moments put us face-to-face with our own discomfort, assumptions, and unawareness. They force us to reflect on our unconscious biases and linguistic habits.

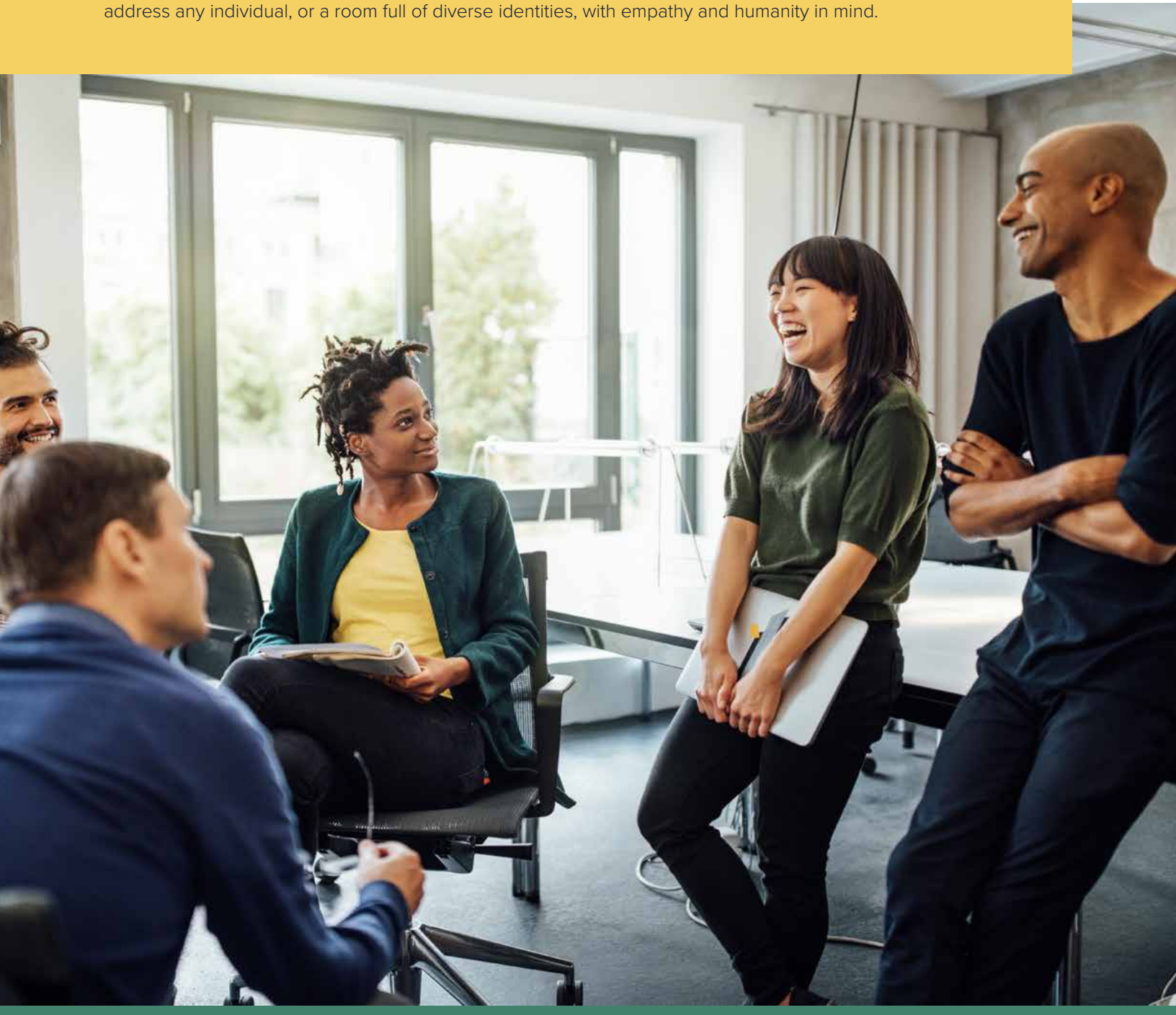
In some ways, it is easier to create policies and procedures that foster diversity than it is to change the small patterns of our daily lives that subtly reinforce exclusion and discrimination. Word choice is just one example. If you build a diverse team and insist on inclusion but use casually insensitive terms that silently offend or discourage participation, you have taken one step forward and two giant steps back.



Language is both a mirror and a force, constantly reflecting and influencing our actions, attitudes, and beliefs. That can be scary if you think that every word is a window to your unconscious bias, but each of these interactions can also be a window to your best intentions and your personal growth. You know the risk of getting it wrong; this guide will show you how to get it right.

What's important is that you take the first step. Start learning, and start practicing. Along the journey, you will certainly make mistakes, but you will also find that people are forgiving when they know you are working to be more inclusive. To reap the benefits of a diverse workforce, it is critical to understand both the advantages and applications of inclusive language.

Inclusive language is the daily practice of intentional and unbiased word selection that acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, and promotes equitable opportunities. This guide details best practices for inclusive language and will help you build the foundational skills required to confidently address any individual, or a room full of diverse identities, with empathy and humanity in mind.



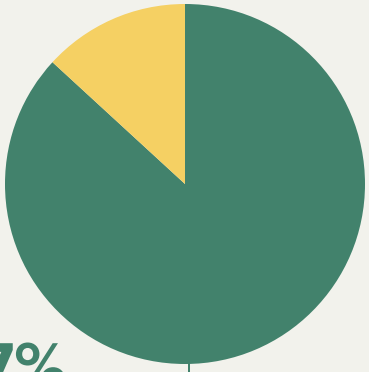
The Challenge: Diversity Without Inclusion

The last decade of research into successful business practice shows a significant correlation between diversity and performance. In fact, a diverse work environment fosters innovation, increases revenue, and improves decision-making results. Ethnic diversity allows for more broadly contrasting viewpoints, especially if that diversity exists within leadership teams, where most decision making occurs. This enables more creative problem solving and greater innovation, ensuring that the best ideas win. Gender diversity contributes a similar advantage. According to the same 2018 McKinsey report, companies in the top 25th percentile for gender diversity on their executive teams are 21% more likely to experience above-average profitability.

If we expand our definition of diversity beyond ethnic and gender parameters, the correlation is even more compelling. Perhaps the most well-known and frequently reported diversity statistic from recent years is from a 2018 Boston Consulting Group study that says, "companies that reported above-average diversity on their management teams also reported innovation revenue that was 19 percentage points higher than that of companies with below-average leadership diversity—45% of total revenue versus just 26%."

> **Companies with the most ethnically diverse executive teams—not only with respect to absolute representation but also of variety or mix of ethnicities—are 33% more likely to outperform their peers on profitability.**
>
> —McKinsey & Co.

Recent data also proves that diverse teams make better business decisions. "They bring more perspectives, experience, and information, which helps to reduce cognitive biases and improves accountability [...] In fact, the most diverse teams made better decisions 87% of the time." Statistics like these motivate business leaders to diversify their teams but don't teach them how to cultivate increased productivity or innovation within those teams.



87%

of the time diverse teams made better decisions

Until recently, achieving workplace diversity was often seen simplistically as an HR challenge: one that good recruiting could solve. Companies were quick to argue that their lack of diversity, especially in senior and executive roles, was a problem of time and available talent. After all, hiring requires patience, and recruitment opportunities depend heavily on business growth.

Over time, our definition of diversity expanded from race and gender to include disability, geography, education, age, neurodiversity, and more. Business leaders learned to embrace existing variance within their organizations. They also started to realize that diversity is not so much an achievement as a perpetual business practice.

85% of today's employees believe that "a diverse and inclusive workforce is crucial to encouraging different perspectives and ideas that drive innovation."

—Forbes

As modern employees repeatedly insist, cultivating diversity isn't only good for business; it's good for workers too. Recruitment alone does not retain top talent. Those new employees simply won't stay long if they do not feel welcome, valued, and respected.

High turnover rates among diverse employees cost large corporations tens of millions of dollars each year. In fact, "the average cost to replace a terminated employee (i.e. employee turnover) is about 50% of that employee's annual salary." To reduce and prevent employee turnover, we must support diverse recruitment with inclusive language and inclusive business practices.

As Nick Otto writes for Employee Benefit News, "while hiring and selection are important, oftentimes organizations place more emphasis on finding the people who fit the workplace as opposed to shaping the workplace to fit the best people." **Today's employees want to work in an accessible environment that welcomes each person's perspective. They want not only diversity, but also inclusion.** Therein lies the challenge.

Diversity vs. Inclusion: Diversity refers to the traits and characteristics that make people unique while inclusion refers to the behaviors and social norms that ensure people feel welcome.

To activate the benefits of workplace diversity, we must also cultivate a culture of inclusion using human-centered, equitable language. Otherwise, we quash the valuable perspectives we have worked so hard to find.

The Solution: Inclusive Language in Practice

For communication to be effective, it needs to appropriately address its intended audience. **Inclusive language seeks to honor the diverse identities of every person in the room and invites them to be part of the conversation.** Inclusive language may be just one brick in the effort to build an equitable culture, but it's the cornerstone.

It is human nature to organize and categorize our social world. Our brains are always seeking the most efficient way to process information and, therefore, necessarily take shortcuts to categorize information. Everyone holds a unique set of innate and sometimes automatic beliefs about various social groups based on family views, personal experiences, media messaging, and social group perspectives. These are called our unconscious biases, and although they may be natural, they are often uninformed, unfair, or simply wrong. That is because unconscious biases rely on social stereotypes.

Unconscious biases are also often centered around perceived in-group/out-group identities. An in-group is a social group to which someone identifies, and an out-group is one to which they do not. In-group/out-group thinking is also natural and stems from our inherent tendency to organize the world. However, we run into problems when we start to rank our in-groups and out-groups as superior or inferior.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE ASKS US TO EXAMINE OUR OWN UNCONSCIOUS BIASES, IN-GROUPS, AND OUT-GROUPS, THEN PAY ATTENTION TO OUR LINGUISTIC HABITS AROUND THEM. IT CALLS FOR THOUGHTFULNESS AND PERSONAL GROWTH SO THAT WE MAY AVOID REINFORCING HARMFUL LANGUAGE AND ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT NORMS.

Inclusive language also combats the slights and microaggressions that occur in moments of unintentional word choice and the way those microaggressions can contribute to a sense of inequality. The term microaggression refers to the casual, frequent, and often preconscious insults and indignities referring to a person's identity.

These subtle acts of exclusion, whether steeped in deeper prejudices or not, pervade our culture and often reveal our unexamined unconscious biases. These seemingly small insults have a cumulative effect on mental health, productivity, and problem solving. They can also create a feeling of hostility and discrimination.

Inclusive language, on the other hand, helps to create an office culture that feels safe, encouraging, and openly accessible. It welcomes and respects all forms of personal identity and the intersectionality between them. For those who might be unfamiliar, intersectionality is the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, gender and sexual orientation as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

A 2019 Boston Consulting Group study shows the impact of intersectional identities on the feeling of otherness in the workplace. The study uses "white, heterosexual-cisgender men who are not veterans and who have no disability" as the control group and reports that 74% of the people in that group feel that their perspectives are welcome and valued at work.

However, "respondents with one dimension of diversity—for example, white females, racially diverse males, or veterans—were on average 4 to 6 percentage points less likely to feel included. Moreover, the more dimensions of diversity respondents reported, the less included they were likely to feel," the study shows. People with three dimensions of diversity—queer women of color, for example—showed an even higher rate of feeling excluded.

WHEN EMPLOYEES FEEL DEFINED BY THEIR OTHERNESS, FEEL EXCLUDED FROM A MAJORITY-DEFINED WORKPLACE CULTURE, OR BELIEVE THEIR PERSPECTIVES ARE NOT WELCOME, THEY ARE LESS LIKELY TO CONTRIBUTE IDEAS, LESS LIKELY TO DO GREAT WORK, AND MORE LIKELY TO LOOK FOR EMPLOYMENT ELSEWHERE.

In today's chaotic and competitive environment, diversity, equity, and inclusion make all the difference. In fact, they may be your most valuable tools for driving innovation and great decision making, but they must go hand-in-hand. Inclusive language is the cornerstone of an inclusive work environment. So, how do you get started?

First, remember that you won't get everything right. What is important is that you keep learning and trying. When you make a mistake, own it, correct it, and move on. Inclusive language, in its most fundamental form, focuses on learning, understanding, and embracing the humanity of communication. Here is what that looks like in practice.

What to Say When You Don't Know What To Say

THIS GUIDE PROVIDES BEST-PRACTICE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDELINES FOR SEVEN CATEGORIES OF INDIVIDUAL IDENTITIES:

1. **Gender identity, sex, and sexuality**
2. **Disability and invisible illness**
3. **Mental, emotional, and cognitive diversity**
4. **Physicality**
5. **Race, ethnicity, and nationality**
6. **Religion**
7. **Acquired diversity**

Each category begins with an overview of the reasoning and context for general recommendations and then includes a quick-reference table of specific recommendations for inclusive terminology.

Toward the end, you will find a final section of colloquial expressions that should be avoided because of their discriminatory histories. This list is certainly not exhaustive but is intended to provide a quick glimpse into the charged and complex etymologies of many common phrases.

The objective is to offer an inclusive language thesaurus for you to consult as necessary to improve how you speak with others. The pages that follow may be particularly helpful as you prepare for a speaking engagement, enter a meeting, or arrive at a sales appointment with a new account.

As you get to know people, pay attention to the terms and phrases they use for themselves. This is the heart of inclusive language practice. Your language should mirror their own. However, it is important not to generalize or assume. What you know about one person may not apply to another. For instance, even within the same family one person may use the word gay or lesbian while another uses queer.

Inclusive language avoids generalization and seeks to customize identity descriptors for every person in the room. It also rejects the false notions of normality and deviation that imply the dominant majority is normal and everyone else is inferior, subordinate, irregular, broken, or incomplete. The truth is there is no such thing as normal. When you don't know what to say, remember these six rules.

SIX GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

1. **Put people first.** For example, a person with a disability versus a disabled person. This language acknowledges the complexity of identity; each person is so much more than their descriptors. In addition, only mention descriptors when they are relevant to the discussion.

2. **Use universal phrases.** It's important to know your audience. Most idioms, acronyms, and jargon don't translate well outside your organization or to other cultures and can easily impede effective communication, making people feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or left out.

3. **Recognize the impact of mental health language.** When we conflate everyday behaviors, moods, and personality characteristics with real mental diagnoses (for example, bipolar, PTSD, OCD), we minimize and deprecate the impact of someone's experience with these conditions. You should also avoid derogatory terms that stem from the context of mental health such as schizo, paranoid, or psycho.

4. **Use gender neutral language.** Reject the generic use of man (as in mankind, policeman, or you guys). Those terms insinuate a preference for men. Instead, opt for terminology that is gender neutral (like humanity, police officer, or everyone) and acknowledges the full spectrum of gender identities, including those that are nonbinary (i.e. you all, team, or staff).

5. **Be thoughtful about the imagery you use.** Terms like black, dark, and blind often hold a negative connotation as descriptors and can therefore be offensive. Diversify your use of symbolism and try to speak literally (It was a sad day, not It was a dark day).

6. **Ask if you aren't sure.** Most people are happy to walk you through the language that makes them feel properly respected. Take the time to find out how someone self-identifies. Share your own pronouns when introducing yourself and explain, "I want to be sure I'm honoring you properly. May I ask how you identify?"

BEST PRACTICES
FOR INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Please note: Although this handbook details current best practices, it is important to remember that inclusive language is ever evolving. Suggested terms and their contexts may change as we endeavor to find ways to honor individuals and their experiences.

GENDER IDENTITY, SEX, AND SEXUALITY

In approaching this subject, it is helpful first to understand the difference between sex and gender. In short, sex refers to a person's biological features or anatomy and is typically classified as binary: female or male. Gender refers to social constructs and identities. Therefore, it is self-defined, nonbinary, and can be changeable or even fluid.

Sexual orientation, on the other hand, refers to whom someone is sexually and/or romantically attracted. This includes the sexual orientations of heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer—which is a broader term that can apply to both gender identity and sexual orientation, pansexual, asexual, and others. People who identify as the gender they were assigned at birth, are referred to as cisgender. However, in many cases, a person's biological sex may not match their gender identity.

AS BEST PRACTICE, YOU SHOULD NEVER PRESUME TO KNOW A PERSON'S SEX, GENDER IDENTITY, OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION BASED ON THEIR CLOTHING, APPEARANCE, OR NAME. IF YOU DON'T KNOW A PERSON'S PRONOUNS, ASK. IT MAY ALSO BE HELPFUL TO SHARE YOUR OWN. PRONOUNS ARE THE WORDS WE USE TO REFER TO OURSELVES AND OTHER PEOPLE (I/ME, SHE/HER/HERS, HE/HIM/HIS, THEY/THEM/THEIRS).

As English speakers, when selecting a pronoun, we are typically also forced to choose a gender for the person we are referencing. In other words, if we see someone walking down the hall and want to refer to them, we have to decide quickly which gender we think they might be. In that moment, without knowing the person at all, we often use their appearance to make broad assumptions and can easily misgender them based on social stereotypes. Misgendering is a microaggression and can be experienced as "a form of social violence, particularly when a person misgenders someone consistently or intentionally."

The problem is, until recently, English offered no grammatically acceptable solution for referring to someone you don't know without using binary he/she pronouns. So, the best strategy for inclusive language was to insert the clunky -- and frankly still binary -- he or she or him or her. This solution created sentences like, "If an employee asks for my opinion, I will give it to him or her."

Thankfully, in recent years, English users have molded the language to be more inclusive and more concise. Now, even the traditionally conservative Modern Language Association and American Psychological Association endorse the use of a singular pronoun they. That means it is grammatically correct to say "If an employee asks for my opinion, I will give it to them," even if you are only referring to one person.

The singular they acknowledges and respects that some people do not consider gender identity or sexuality to be binary designations. The acronym LGBTQIAP+ shows the range of diversity outside of binary concepts. A decade ago, when the LGBT designation first made its way into the mainstream, it was a starting point for inclusivity.

However, as we listened and learned more about each other, the initialism expanded to LGBTQIAP+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual/ally, pansexual) with the plus encompassing all other gender identities and sexualities. That can be an intimidating idea for people who are new to inclusive language practice. With such a spectrum of identities to consider, how can you possibly know what to say?

What's important is that you not make assumptions. **The best advice is to get to know people and listen for how they refer to themselves and others. When you don't know what words to choose, take the time to ask.**

NOT INCLUSIVE	MORE INCLUSIVE	HERE'S WHY
He or She Ladies and Gentlemen	Ask for pronouns They, them, theirs Everyone	These terms imply that gender is binary (i.e. either man or woman) and do not acknowledge that people may identify anywhere along the gender spectrum and/or their biological sex may not match their gender identity. Inclusive language ensures that all people in a room or at an event are acknowledged.
Homosexual	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Pansexual, Queer It is important to ask what term a person prefers and to not assign one arbitrarily	Because of the clinical history of the word homosexual, it is used in an offensive way to suggest that gay people are somehow not normal or psychologically/emotionally disordered—notions discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s.
Man the Booth Mankind Manmade You Guys Policeman / Fireman	Staff the booth Humankind Made by hand Friends, colleagues, everyone, all Police officer / firefighter	Using man as a generic term excludes women and nonbinary gender identities and overlooks their contributions and roles in society. Inclusive language acknowledges that people with many different identities can fill the role and can contribute.

NOT INCLUSIVE	MORE INCLUSIVE	HERE'S WHY
Male / Female	Man / Woman Inquire about and use the individual's gender identity but only when pertinent to the conversation. Remember, there are genders outside the gender binary of man/woman, including, but not limited to, agender, gender queer, gender fluid, bigender, and gender variant.	Male and female refer to biological sex and not gender. In terms of communication methods (articles, social media, etc.), we rarely need to identify or know a person's biological sex and more often are referring to gender. In these cases, using gender identity terms is preferred.
Mr. / Mrs. / Ms.	First or last name Mx If they are a Dr., use that title	While generally acceptable, using titles can be problematic when you are not aware of a person's gender identity and try to guess, or when the use of the title is against a person's personal preference. These terms also exclude folks outside of the man/woman binary. When possible, and when it is not a personal preference to use one of these titles, refer to folks by first or last name. Mx is a gender-neutral title that can also be used.
Preferred Pronouns	Pronouns What are your pronouns?	Using the word preferred in front of pronouns suggests that gender identity, especially outside of the binary, is a choice and that the pronouns don't really belong to the person, they are just preferring them over their true pronouns.
Straight	Heterosexual	When used to describe heterosexuals, the term straight implies that anyone LGBTQ+ is crooked or not normal.
Transgendered	Transgender	The word transgender never needs the extraneous -ed at the end of the word. In fact, such a construction is grammatically incorrect. Only verbs can be transformed into participles by adding -ed to the end of the word, and transgender is an adjective. For example, it is incorrect to say, "Tony is a transgender," or "The parade included many transgenders." Instead, say "Tony is a transgender person," or "The parade included many transgender people."
Freshman	First-year	Using man as a generic term excludes women and nonbinary gender identities. Inclusive language acknowledges that people with many different identities can fill the role and can contribute.

DISABILITY AND INVISIBLE ILLNESS

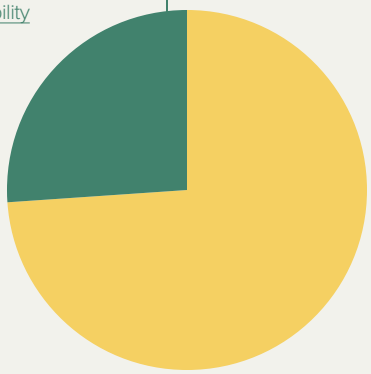
Did you know that 26% of adults in the U.S. have some type of disability and that 60% of adults in the U.S. have a chronic disease? Discriminatory and derogatory terms for people with disabilities typically generalize the entire population and diminish the value of individual personhood. Choosing the correct inclusive language means remembering our number one guideline: Put people first. When we say that a person is handicapped, for example, we reduce the complexity and fullness of their humanity, defining them only by their diagnosis, disability, or condition.

BY PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST, WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE PERSON MAY LIVE WITH THAT PART OF THEIR IDENTITY BUT THEY ARE NOT DEFINED BY IT. JUST BECAUSE A PERSON HAS A DISABILITY DOES NOT MEAN THEY ARE DISABLED.

It is also important to recognize and understand invisible disabilities and invisible illnesses. This term refers to a wide range of medical conditions and diagnoses that impact a person's life but are not immediately apparent to other people. Many of these disabilities are neurological in nature, and some are chronic or incurable. The list includes sleep disorders, joint problems, diabetes, phobias, chronic pain, autoimmune diseases, and fibromyalgia. An estimated 10% of people in the U.S. have an invisible illness, although it might not be apparent in your day-to-day professional interactions. In the absence of visible evidence, these conditions are often belittled, ignored, or trivialized.

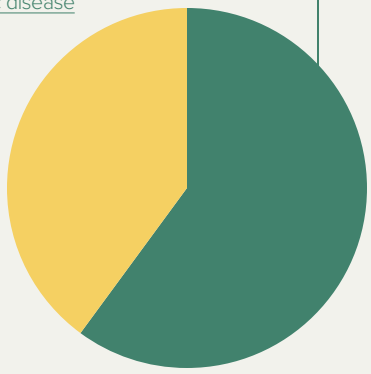
26%

of adults in the U.S. have some type of disability



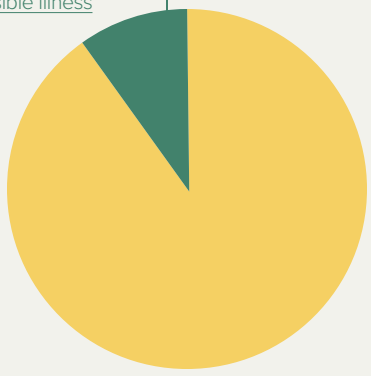
60%

of adults in the U.S. have a chronic disease



10%

of adults in the U.S. have an invisible illness



NOT INCLUSIVE	MORE INCLUSIVE	HERE'S WHY
Birth Defect	Person with a congenital disability Person with a birth anomaly	The word defect implies a person is broken or somehow incomplete.
The Blind The Deaf	Person who is blind or vision impaired Person who is deaf or hearing impaired	These terms align identity only with the person's condition or impairment.
CP victim Spastic Spaz	Person with cerebral palsy Person with spastic cerebral palsy	Using these terms to describe a hyperactive person is offensive, as it implies that people with cerebral palsy are not normal.
Dumb Mute	Person who cannot speak, has difficulty speaking, uses synthetic speech, is non-vocal or non-verbal	Dumb and mute were once widely used to describe people who could not speak. It implies that they're incapable of expressing themselves. Deaf-mute was used to refer to people who could neither speak nor hear. However, people living with speech and hearing disabilities are capable of expressing themselves in many other ways.
Epileptic	Person with epilepsy Person with a seizure disorder	Acknowledge that the person lives with a condition but is not defined by it.
Handicapped Disabled Crippled Suffers from Afflicted with Victim of Invalid Lame Deformed Handicap parking	Person with a disability People with disabilities A person who uses leg braces, etc. Accessible parking Parking for people with disabilities	These terms imply that people with disabilities are not capable. Instead, acknowledge the disability but do not use it to define a person.
Normal Person	No replacement as it is never appropriate to use this phrase to describe a person	Implies that other people are deviations from the norm.
Paraplegic / Quadriplegic	Person with a spinal cord injury, person with paraplegia, person who is paralyzed	Like so many other terms for physical conditions, these terms generalize the population and minimize personhood, which should be acknowledged first.
Wheelchair bound, confined or restricted to a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair Wheelchair user	These terms acknowledge that the person may use a wheelchair as a tool but is not confined, bound, or restricted to it.

MENTAL, EMOTIONAL AND COGNITIVE DIVERSITY

Mental and emotional health language is often interchanged with everyday moods and behaviors in a way that can trivialize the impact of real medical diagnoses. Many of these terms are exaggerative, like depressed for someone who is sad or OCD for someone who prioritizes organization.

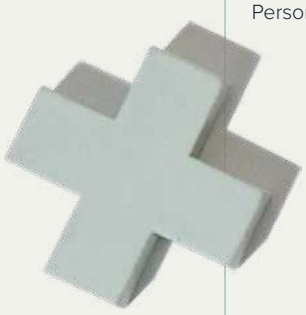
Some of these terms stem from the discriminatory and abusive history of mental and emotional health (retarded, idiot, demented, etc). Others define a person's complete identity by their cognitive processing (i.e. He is ADHD) or rely on the language of normality and deviation in ways that exclude diverse thinking. Inclusive language avoids derogatory and insulting colloquialisms and encourages us to embrace the mental, emotional, and cognitive differences each person brings to the table. It requires that we speak more literally and specifically to remove mental and emotional health stigmas.

The movement to embrace neurodiversity is especially relevant here. Neurodiversity refers to the natural variations in human brain functions, especially around learning, thinking, and processing information. However, it is often mistakenly applied only to people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Asperger's syndrome, or Dyslexia.

THE BEST PRACTICE FOR INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE REGARDING THESE CONDITIONS IS NEURODIVERGENT.

Embracing neurodiversity means recognizing the broad range of natural cognitive functioning. In doing so, we recognize that these conditions are not deficits, abnormalities, or problems to be solved. Rather, they are differences to be leveraged for increased creativity and innovation.

NOT INCLUSIVE	MORE INCLUSIVE	HERE'S WHY
ADHD	Neurodivergent A person with ADHD	Saying a person is ADHD minimizes their personhood and makes ADHD the single defining trait of their identity.
Anorexic / Bulimic	A person with an eating disorder	Referring to a person as anorexic/bulimic minimizes personhood. This description should only be used when medically valid. To note, these are psychological disorders and not physical disorders, although they are sometimes used negatively to describe physicality.
Autistic	Neurodivergent A person with Autism Spectrum Disorder	Saying a person is Autistic generalizes the population and minimizes personhood. Use this term only when medically valid and self-identified.
Crazy Nuts Maniac Lunatic Insane Deranged Psycho Demented Depressed OCD	Surprising, wild Sad Organized, particular	Originally referring to mental illness, the terms crazy and nuts referred to people who were often institutionalized against their wills. Using these terms to describe something that is surprising or unexpected minimizes a real mental health condition. Likewise, depressed and OCD are sometimes inappropriately used to describe a mood or someone being organized.
Lame Retarded Stupid Slow Learner Moron Idiot Imbecile Down's person	Person with a mental illness, or person with a learning disability Boring or uncool as a replacement when describing something that is not engaging Person with Down syndrome	Originally referred to mental illness and used as an insult. Down syndrome is a genetic disorder caused by the presence of all or part of a third copy of chromosome 21. You should only refer to this condition when the diagnosis has been shared and it is relevant to the conversation.
Senile / Demented	Person with Alzheimer's disease Person who has dementia	Demented is slang for dementia, which is often not the intended use of the word, and senile is often used incorrectly to denote dementia.



PHYSICALITY

Like inclusive language around neurodiversity, inclusive language around physicality seeks to acknowledge the wide range of natural human differences that all deserve to be considered normal. Inclusive language about physicality intends to make every person in the room feel welcome and respected, no matter their height, weight, hair, skin, size, or shape.

Let us reiterate: **there is no such thing as normal.**

TO ACTIVATE THE DIVERSITY OF OUR TEAMS AND WELCOME EVERY VOICE AT THE TABLE, WE SHOULD AVOID COMMON PHRASES AND TERMS THAT CREATE OR REINFORCE STIGMAS, SHAME, AND STEREOTYPES ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE'S BODIES.

Some of these terms inappropriately use real medical conditions to describe physical diversity (like using the word dwarf for someone who is not of average height). Others show an unconscious bias toward a certain body size or shape. In general, referring to a person's physical appearance is not just inappropriate but also irrelevant. In the workplace, in general, physical descriptors are almost never necessary to the conversation. Instead, look for more professional and appropriate identity descriptors.

NOT INCLUSIVE	MORE INCLUSIVE	HERE'S WHY
Dwarf Midget	Little person	Dwarfism is a medical or genetic condition that results in a stature less than 4 feet 10 inches, according to Little People of America. When used in a nonmedical sense, this term can be offensive, but many view it as the acceptable term for the condition. The term midget was used in the past to describe an unusually short and proportionate person. It is now widely considered derogatory.
Fat Overweight Obese Heavy Big	No replacement, as it is never appropriate to use physical descriptors of size or shape.	Use professional language and relevant descriptors instead such as, "the person approaching in the blue suit".
Skinny Anorexic Skin and bones	No replacement, as it is never appropriate to use physical descriptors of size or shape.	Use professional language and relevant descriptors instead.

RACE, ETHNICITY, AND NATIONALITY

In understanding the context and terminology of cultural diversity, it is helpful first to know the difference between race and ethnicity. "Race is understood by most people as a mixture of physical, behavioral, and cultural attributes. Ethnicity recognizes differences between people mostly on the basis of language and shared culture," according to Nina Jablonski, an anthropologist and palaeobiologist at The Pennsylvania State University.

In fact, scientists today prefer the term ancestry instead of race, as it more accurately reflects the correlation between present-day genetic variations and a person's ancestral geographic origins. Ancestry speaks to a person's genetic history, while race relies only on categorization. It is important to note that, as a species, humans "share 99.9% of our DNA with each other. The few differences that do exist reflect differences in environments and external factors, not core biology."

Therefore, when choosing inclusive terms for cultural identities, you should never assume that you know a person's racial, ethnic, or national descriptors based on their appearance. It is also inappropriate to make assumptions based on that person's name, language, accent, or dialect.

REMEMBER THAT A PERSON'S RACE AND ETHNICITY MAY NOT MATCH THEIR NATIONALITY, AND EVERY PERSON WILL HAVE MULTIPLE, INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES.

Your second-generation Latinx accountant, for example, may identify simultaneously as Latinx, Argentine, Hispanic, and a U.S. citizen. When you don't know what to say, it's best to ask. Avoid the offensive "What are you?" and "Where are you from?" Instead, say "May I ask your ethnicity?" Remember, if this descriptor isn't relevant to the conversation, don't ask at all.

NOT INCLUSIVE	MORE INCLUSIVE	HERE'S WHY
American America	U.S. citizen Person from the U.S.	The Americas encompass many countries. Yet, when we talk about Americans in the United States, we're usually just referring to people from the United States and not acknowledging other countries.
Eskimo	Indigenous Refer to a person's specific tribe	Comes from "ashkimeq," a Danish word borrowed from Algonquin, which literally means "eaters of raw meat." Other etymological research suggests it could mean "snowshoe netter". The term has historically been used to stereotype and demean indigenous and Inuit people.

NOT INCLUSIVE	MORE INCLUSIVE	HERE'S WHY
Colored	Person of color Black African African-American Afro-Caribbean	This is a highly offensive racial slur that was often used during segregation to separate people of color, particularly Blacks, from "Whites Only" restaurants, bathrooms, drinking fountains, and seats on public transportation, while designated "Colored" spaces were the least-desirable locations and least-maintained spaces. Person of color can apply to any culturally diverse person. Black is a term that encompasses those who are a part of the African diaspora. Calling someone who is African or Afro-Caribbean African American is incorrect. Black is a more encompassing term but to be specific, where relevant, ask.
Hispanic	Latinx, Latina, Latino Use the person's country of origin, such as Cuban	This term is widely used to describe individuals from Spanish-speaking countries. However, it is problematic when people are called Hispanic based on their name or appearance without first checking to see how they identify. Many people with Central and South American Indigenous ancestry (e.g. Mayan, Mexico) reject this term because it implies their ancestors came from Spain instead.
Illegal immigrant Alien	Born in [insert country] Immigrant Undocumented immigrant Refugee, if a person has been forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster	The term illegal immigrant was first used in 1939 as a slur toward Jewish people who were fleeing the Nazis and entered Palestine without authorization. Saying that a person is illegal dehumanizes them and implies that they are a criminal, not taking into account that they may be a refugee seeking asylum. The term also suggests that the individual, and not the potential actions they have taken, is unlawful or illegitimate.
Indian	Native American Indigenous Refer to a person's specific tribe	The term Indian in the U.S. is associated with Christopher Columbus, who mistook the Caribbean islands for those of the Indian Ocean, which were then known as the Indies. As a result of the error, people indigenous to the Americas were dubbed Indians and the term has stuck. It is sometimes associated with the subjugation and decimation of American Indigenous after Europeans arrived in the Americas.
Oriental	Person of Asian descent, or use a person's identified race or ethnicity	The term Oriental is associated with a time when Asians had a subordinate status and were excluded from the U.S. It is offensive when used to describe people because it is also used to describe objects, such as rugs, and because the Orient is no longer an acceptable term for Asia.
Slave	Enslaved people	The term slave dehumanizes individuals. Slavery is a condition, not a description.

RELIGION

When acknowledging any individual's religion, remember that religious identity is always an adjective, never a noun (a Jewish person instead of a Jew, or Jewish people instead of the Jews). This grammatical construction helps us to reorganize our language choices and acknowledge each person's intersectional identities. Religion, in particular, is often conflated with race and ethnicity in ways that can be presumptuous, derogatory, and hurtful. Not all Arab people are Muslim, for example, and every single country in the world contains a multitude of religious identities and expressions.

Some people may identify culturally with their ancestral religion but not be active practitioners or feel comfortable accepting that religious descriptor. A person who celebrates Easter and Christmas for instance may not identify as Christian, just as a person of Hindu ancestry who does not practice Hinduism may reject the term for themselves. As with so many other realms of diversity, **never assume that you know a person's religious identity or ancestry based on their appearance, ethnicity, culture, or nationality.**

NOT INCLUSIVE	MORE INCLUSIVE	HERE'S WHY
Jew / the Jews	Person of the Jewish faith Jewish person Jewish people	Put people first. These terms can be offensive and derogatory and do not acknowledge the painful history of labels placed on Jewish people.
Islamic	Muslim person / people Person of the Islamic faith	Islamic refers to the religion of Islam and can be used for Islamic art, texts, architecture, etc. Muslim (an adjective) is the appropriate word for people who practice the Islamic faith. It refers specifically to people.
Mormon	A Latter-day saint The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints	Originally used by people who opposed the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, because they did not consider its members to be Christian, this colloquial term is now considered offensive by many practitioners.

ACQUIRED DIVERSITY

Thus far, we have talked almost exclusively about inclusive language for inherent diversity: the traits a person has at birth. Acquired diversity, on the other hand, refers to characteristics and ways of thinking that a person gains by experience. Acquired diversity includes, but is not limited to, age, education, family commitments, immigration status, marital status, travel, trauma, veteran status and those who have survived conflict. Inclusive language in this realm avoids evoking real tragedy where it does not exist. (This negotiation is a war vs. This has been a difficult negotiation.)

Most importantly, inclusive language insists that we avoid idioms and slang terms that reference or falsify real trauma like addiction, poverty, incarceration, or even divorce. This includes exaggerations like "I'm starving today" and "She's addicted to coffee." These phrases trivialize the impact of challenging and difficult experience, reinforce community stigmas, and show unconscious bias against people who have experienced trauma. They also work as microaggressions, silencing people who have acquired those experiences.

In the same way that inherent diversity will push your business toward better problem solving and creative innovation, acquired diversity invites a vast range of experiences and perspectives to the table. Businesses that prioritize a strong mix of inherent and acquired diversity "avoid groupthink through cultures that welcome out-of-the-box ideas." A spectrum of people who express different viewpoints and have built their lives from varied experiences will inevitably lead to more creative problem solving and a richer, more interesting workplace culture. Therefore, inclusive language must help to create an equitable and accessible environment for all people, regardless of their past experiences.

NOT INCLUSIVE	MORE INCLUSIVE	HERE'S WHY
Addicted Like Crack	A fan of Excellent Delicious	While addicted can be appropriate in some situations, it can also cause harm to those who are truly experiencing addiction, are in recovery, or have friends/relatives who have experienced addiction.
Starving I'm broke	I'm hungry I'm low on cash	When used in place of simply saying "I'm hungry" or "I'm low on cash," these terms appropriate real situations of hardship and can cause harm to individuals who are experiencing extreme poverty or hunger crises.
War / At war War zone Battle Go to war	Hostile environment Difficult Confrontation Dispute Get after it Go get 'em	These terms are appropriate only when used to describe actual war. Otherwise, when used to describe difficult situations or meetings (i.e. This negotiation is a war.), they evoke real tragedy that can be problematic for veterans or survivors of war.

ADDITIONAL TERMS AND PHRASES TO AVOID

In considering common phrases and expressions, two of our six guidelines are especially important: **Use universal phrases, and be thoughtful about imagery.** This list is intended to provide a short glance into the complex etymologies of many colloquial expressions.

Although it would be impossible to include a full compendium of English phrases with discriminatory histories, the point is to show that many of the terms we often use in casual conversation stem from a harmful and discriminatory past. These expressions could be interpreted as microaggressions and quietly undermine the inclusive language you have worked so hard to practice.

NOT INCLUSIVE	MORE INCLUSIVE	HERE'S WHY
Basket Case	Nervous	This term originally referred to a person, usually a soldier from World War I, who had lost all four limbs. The basket in this sense refers to the basket that the person would need to be carried around in and has negative historic meaning.
Cake Walk Takes the Cake	That was easy	Slave owners would sometimes hold balls for entertainment, where slaves would perform dances to win a cake. Cakewalks became popular through the racism of 19th-century minstrel shows, which portrayed Black people as aspiring to be and dance like white people.
Ghetto Barrio	Use the official name of the neighborhood you are referring to	These phrases have long histories but eventually came to indicate any socially segregated, non-White, urban neighborhood.
Gyp / Gip	Use Romani to refer to a person of Romani descent Use cheat to refer to a person who is dishonest	Most likely evolved as a shortened version of gypsy, more correctly known as the Romani, an ethnic group now mostly in Europe and the American continents. The Romani typically traveled extensively and made their money by selling goods. Business disputes naturally arose, and the masses started thinking of Romani as swindlers. Today, gyp has become synonymous with cheating someone.
Long Time No See	I haven't seen you in a long time.	Originally used to mock Native Americans or Chinese Pidgin English.
No Can Do	I can't do it.	Originally a way to mock Chinese people.

NOT INCLUSIVE	MORE INCLUSIVE	HERE'S WHY
Paddy Wagon	Police car	The term Paddy originated in the late 1700s as a shortened form of Patrick and later a pejorative term for any Irish person. Wagon refers to a vehicle. Paddy wagon either stemmed from the large number of Irish police officers or the perception that rowdy, drunken Irish people constantly ended up in the back of police cars.
Peanut Gallery	Crowd Audience	This phrase usually refers to ill-informed hecklers or critics. In reality, the peanut gallery names a section in theaters, usually the cheapest and worst, where many Black people sat during the era of Vaudeville.
Pow Wow	Use if referring directly to an Indigenous tribal pow wow Meet or get-together, if referring to any gatherings outside Indigenous culture	This term is appropriate if you are referring to an actual Native American pow wow, which is a traditional and modern sacred gathering or ceremony involving one or more tribes. Applying the term as a verb (i.e. let's pow wow) or using it to describe a business meeting or social gathering outside the Native American culture is inappropriate.
Rule of Thumb	Standard General rule	The rule of thumb has been said to derive from an English law that allowed a man to beat his wife with a stick as long as it was no thicker than his thumb.
Sold Down the River	Betray	During slavery in the U.S., masters often sold their misbehaving slaves, sending them down the Mississippi river to plantations where conditions were much harsher.
Tribe / Spirit Animal	Friends Network Squad	The term tribe, while used in a variety of contexts, is oftentimes used to describe a group of close-knit friends or colleagues. This term can be seen as an appropriation of Native American culture, especially in the U.S. context. This term is appropriate if you are referring to an actual Native American tribe. Spirit Animal is also an appropriation of culture and therefore inappropriate.

Conclusion

Inclusive language is the cornerstone of an inclusive workplace culture. It activates the power of diversity and builds the foundation for a fair and equitable work environment. By drawing attention to our own linguistic patterns and moving forward with intentional, unbiased language, we speak to every member of the audience, respect each team member's individual perspective, and seek to understand the complexities of human identity.

It is easy to notice blatant racism, sexism, or discrimination. It is much harder to examine our own unconscious biases, in-groups, out-groups, and deep-seated, potentially harmful, patterns of language. Still, real change requires work.

As you begin your inclusive language practice, remember that inclusion is a method, not an achievement. Inclusion requires us to keep learning, keep practicing, and keep pressing forward. You may not get everything right, but you are trying and you will make progress. **Remember that the first steps are always the hardest, but the tangible benefits of diversity, equity, and inclusion—increased productivity, better problem solving, creativity, innovation, employee retention, and an open, equitable culture—are absolutely worth the effort.**

ABOUT TDM

The Diversity Movement was created by a core team of innovators at Walk West through collaboration with an international group of diversity practitioners, business experts, and marketing leaders to provide a comprehensive set of training, educational, and actionable resources to help organizations move beyond compliance-based thinking to a mindset that enables business transformation. Diverse teams that are fully engaged in decision making and execution are more innovative, more profitable, and more productive. Learn more at thediversitymovement.com.

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