PES Women Language Style Guide

Language matters. The words we use shape out thoughts, our reality and our experiences. Since language has the power to change social attitudes and biases, using gender-inclusive language is the first step towards creating a more feminist, equal and just society. This means abstaining from using expressions which discriminate against a particular sex or gender and not perpetuating gender stereotypes, either in spoken or visual communication.[1] Inclusive language in general means making sure that everyone's identities, experiences and agency are recognised and respected, without prejudice or discrimination.

The purpose of this PES Women language style guide is to provide some simple tips for how to make yourself, your organisation or political party more inclusive in the way you communicate, in particular with regards to gender. We want to encourage everyone to reflect, respect diverse voices, and challenge oppression.

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[1] https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/index.shtml

DO…

1. Use non-discriminatory and gender-neutral language

Many languages implicitly favour men and exclude women and non-binary people – Let's put a stop to that!

Be consistent in how you refer to people and how you show curtesy. If you address a man by his name, last name, title, or profession, do the same for women and non-binary people.[1] Generally, use "Ms." instead of "Mrs." or the equivalent in your language.

Use gender-neutral words like "humankind", "staffing" and "chairperson" instead of "mankind", "man-power" and "chairman". Try to use gender-neutral pronouns if this is possible in your language, like "they/them/their".

Say "women and men" instead of the other way around. To include non-binary people, use for example "participants" instead of "ladies and gentlemen".

Use similar terms when describing the same characteristics in people, regardless of gender. Use terms of equal status and avoid phrases that suggest one gender is inferior.

2. Respect people's right to self-identify

When referring to specific individuals, use their chosen name and pronouns that correspond their gender identity.

3. Use terms preferred by the community in question

Do not use terms that are considered offensive or incorrect by the people they refer to, just because it is easy or commonly done. Certain terms may be acceptable when used by someone inside the community, but should not be appropriated by people outside the group. Research further or seek advice if you are unsure of what terms are okay to use.

4. Give a platform to marginalised voices

Listen to and learn from other speakers' and writers' lived experiences of intersectional gender oppression, which may be different from your own. If you have a privileged platform, use it to feature their voices in conferences, debate panels, and written texts.

5. Use inclusive visual communication

A picture is worth a thousand words. When choosing photographs or illustrations for your publications and social media, make sure you do not perpetuate gender stereotypes and do not feature only straight, white men. If your written or spoken message is inclusive, make sure the accompanying visuals are too without falling into the trap of "tokenism".

DON'T…

1. Don't use gender-biased expressions or language that perpetuates gender stereotypes

Be careful of reinforcing gender stereotypes by using terms such as "bossy women" vs. "ambitious men". Don't use expressions which suggest all women or all men are innately the same, for example "cry like a girl" or "boys will be boys". Similarly, do not use images that perpetuate such stereotypes.

2. Don't assume the whole world is male

Don't use masculine nouns and pronouns to generalise about a group of people. Don't say "chairman", "man-made" etc. when there are gender-neutral alternatives. When listing names or introducing a group, don't automatically put the men's names first. When citing statistics in texts and speeches, try to use gender-disaggregated data.

3. Don't emphasise gender if it is not necessary

Don't specify that someone is a "woman doctor", "female writer" or "female politician" unless her gender is relevant to the message. Family details and marital status are only relevant in stories about families or marriage.[1] The same goes for sexual orientation, race or other descriptors.

4. Don't refer to someones physical appreance or personal status/experience

When writing about or interviewing someone, especially people in public positions, don't ask them details about their style, relationships or work-life-balance that are irrelevant to the story. Make sure focus is put on the content of their work, if that is why you talk about them.

5. Don't assume someone's sexual orientation or gender identity, or wilfully call someone by the wrong gender pronouns.

This is hurtful and may be traumatic. Use the terminology and pronouns preferred by the person in question. If you are unsure of which pronoun to use, ask respectfully (if appropriate to the situation).

Further Resources

https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/index.shtml

https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/SUMOFUS_PROGRESSIVE-STYLEGUIDE.pdf

https://everydayfeminism.com/2018/06/feminist-editors-style-guide/

https://ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/glossary_october_2015_edition.pdf

https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1263

https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1059046481133077