



Agency for  
Quality Assurance  
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Austria

AQ Austria  
quick guide  
gender\*inclusive  
language

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Dr. Jürgen Petersen, Franz-Klein-Gasse 5, 1190 Vienna

Authors: Mag.<sup>a</sup> Harriet Leischko, Mag.<sup>a</sup> Barbara Mitterauer

office@aq.ac.at

www.aq.ac.at

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# AQ Austria quick guide gender\*inclusive language

As a quality assurance agency for higher education, AQ Austria regards language as an important working tool. For daily communication, both internally and externally, AQ Austria attaches great importance to communicating in a non-discriminatory way, insofar as this is possible.

Gender\*inclusive language aims at representing people of all sexes and gender identities respectfully and on equal terms with regard to the core dimensions of a person. These components include all sexes and gender identities, age, ethnic groups and nationality, religion, ethnicity and culture, physical and mental abilities, sexual orientations and social origin/status.

AQ Austria is committed to respecting all applicable legal requirements, including the Federal Equal Treatment Act (B-GlBG)<sup>1</sup> and the Equal Treatment Act (GlBG)<sup>2</sup>, both of which explicitly prohibit discrimination. AQ Austria also respects the free expression of gender identities in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), in particular Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) and Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination)<sup>3</sup>.

## 1 Addressees

This quick guide intends to facilitate the implementation of gender\*inclusive language. It directs towards internal and external persons who write texts for AQ Austria or communicate with the agency. The intention is to help employees, board members as well as reviewers and external experts. Further assistance and examples of gender\*inclusive language and communication will be available in a more detailed script on AQ Austria's website.

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1 <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10008858>, accessed on 17 June 2021.

2 <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20003395>, accessed on 17 June 2021.

3 Further information concerning prohibition of discrimination (Protokoll Nr. 12 vom 04.11.2000) and equality: <https://www.menschenrechtskonvention.eu/diskriminierungsverbot-9298/>, accessed on 17 June 2021.

## 2 Gender\*inclusive language

Achieving gender\*inclusive expression is easier in the English language than it is in German – for example, nouns do not possess a grammatical gender in English, meaning that, in general, the same noun is used irrespective of an individual's gender. However, certain adaptations are necessary. Gender\*inclusive language is respectful and promotes the value and acceptance of all people.

Language associated with gender, abilities, age, class, size, Indigenous Peoples, racial, ethnic and religious identity is a sensitive issue. Language is always changing as societal views change and groups choose to redefine their own identities. Gender has a crucial influence on and within all types of discrimination – and, especially for people stereotyped as women, these effects of discrimination can be reinforced and intensified.

Gender\*inclusive language aims at representing people of all sexes and gender identities respectfully and on equal terms, but it is not common in English to use the asterisk [\*]. The asterisk is used in German to indicate and visualise diversity.

### Examples of gender\*inclusive language

Try to find alternatives to gendered nouns that are not heteronormative. Avoid binary constructions when talking about or addressing groups of people so as not to erase or exclude non-binary individuals.

*student, researcher, employee*

Use gender\*inclusive forms of address. Courtesy titles such as “Miss” and “Mrs” carry with them old-fashioned – and, at times, outdated – assumptions about age, gender identity, sexual orientation, or marital status. Traditionally “Miss” and “Mrs” have been used to distinguish between unmarried and married women respectively.

Until recently, this distinction depending on marital status not only defined women by their relationships with men, but also with men only. The title “Miss” was commonly used for younger women. A simple alternative when addressing or referring to women is the title “Ms”.

Another alternative is to use the abbreviation “Mx”. This title, which was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2015, is used to avoid specifying gender. Some non-binary people prefer this title as a mode of address as well.

*Honoured Guests, Dear/Esteemed Colleagues, Esteemed Guests/ Dear Friends/ Mr, Ms and Mx*

Academic titles in English are not binary:

*Professor, PhD, Dr*

## E-mail or written correspondence

### Salutation for an unknown recipient or a form letter

In cases where the recipients' names, gender identities, or preferred modes of address are unknown, using forms of address, which are not heteronormative, is recommended. Instead of gendered salutations like “Dear Sir/Madam”, “Ladies and Gentlemen”, or “Dear Boys and Girls”, formulations can be used like “Dear Representative of Organisation xy”, “Dear Friends and Colleagues”, or “Dear Students”.

### Salutation for a specific recipient

In cases where a person's name is known but not their gender identity, the following formula can be used:

*Salutation + academic title (where appropriate) + the addressee's full name (given name/s or initials + last name), as in “Dear Professor Ali Mohammad Saleh”.*

### Mailing address

Omit gendered courtesy titles (“Mr”, “Mrs”, “Miss”, “Ms”) when adding an address to the letterhead or envelopes: Simply state the person's full name, followed by their address.

### E-mail signature

Each user can indicate the preferred pronouns in the e-mail signature. Simply add them in parentheses after the name.

*Best regards,  
Professor [First name] [Last name], PhD (Pronouns: she, her, hers)*

*Sincerely,  
Dr Michelle Foucault (they, them, theirs)*

Indicating your preferred pronouns in e-mail communication not only helps others to avoid misgendering you; it can also communicate to others that you are aware of the fact that there are more than two sexes/genders. This information might make it easier for trans, intersex, and non-binary people to share their gender identities and preferred pronouns. Moreover, by adding personal pronouns to the e-mail signature, this practice is normalised and helps to raise awareness of non-binary gender identities.

## Pronouns must refer to the action takers and must consider all genders

*The researchers present their projects to the audience.*  
*The researcher presents the project to the audience.*  
*The researcher presents their project to the audience.*  
*If an expert wants more information, please contact us.*  
*If experts need more information, please contact us.*  
*Dear expert, if you need more information, please contact us.*

## Use plural forms

In many cases, using plural forms of nouns and pronouns is an excellent way to avoid using gendered language without causing any confusion or losing any meaning:

*If experts require more information, they should contact us.*

## Use the imperative

*If an expert requires more information, please contact us.*

## Use the passive

*If an expert requires more information, the contact form can be used.*

## Avoid heteronormative expressions

people/humanity - ~~mankind~~  
staff/labour force - ~~manpower~~  
English person/English people - ~~Englishman/Englishmen~~  
synthetic or artificial - ~~manmade~~  
advisory panel - ~~committee of wise men~~  
person, adult, individual, etc. - ~~man/woman~~

## Avoid heteronormative job titles, roles and positions

firefighters - ~~firemen~~/firewomen  
flight attendants - ~~steward~~, stewardess/air hostess  
athletes - ~~sportsmen~~  
press officers - ~~spokesmen~~  
business manager/business person - ~~businessman~~  
political leaders - ~~statesmen~~  
chair/chairperson - ~~chairman~~/chairwoman  
first-year student - ~~freshman~~

Here is an example where the professional's gender is relevant to the meaning of the sentence:

*Carol preferred to talk to a female police officer about her experiences of domestic violence.*

## Avoid stereotypes and discriminatory terms

*strong/weak sex, act like a man, cry like a little girl*

In general and where possible, the most appropriate thing to do is to check with the person in question what their preference is. For some it is still appropriate being addressed as e.g. blind or fat person in order to eliminate a social stigma.

Try to represent all genders equally.

Represent each gender, represent people as having agency and avoid referring to a person simply as someone's spouse/parent/sibling.

## 3 Gender\*inclusive language hints

For AQ Austria THE one and only discrimination-free language does not exist. The daily use of language is a constant effort towards new, creative attempts to question perceptual habits as well as raising awareness for discriminatory language. The aim is to change and develop the daily use of language.

Gender\*inclusive language is exciting\*beautiful in writing as well as reading – is fun and creates an environment that values diversity, promotes an inclusive, respectful culture and strengthens a sense of belonging.

Further hints in English and German are available in the more detailed guide [“AQ Austria Verortung: Gender\\*inklusive Sprache”](#).

