

Inclusive Language

A LANGUAGE FREE FROM
PREJUDICES AND STEREOTYPES
IN THE OFFICE AND BEYOND



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Introduction

You will probably agree that language shapes our reality. Our way of seeing the world depends on the words we use. The effect we want to achieve depends on their selection. With words, we can hurt and offend, but they can also create feelings of happiness or appreciation.

At Monterail we are fortunate enough to work in an environment where we can all promote equality and respect for diversity in different ways. Only in an inclusive environment that accepts, respects, and values diversity can people truly fulfill themselves. Inclusive language is a starting point for a healthy work atmosphere. The language we use can ensure that no one feels excluded or unwelcome.

Linguistic research proves that what we say is not only a reflection of reality but also a tool for creating it - this is a huge field for language activism. In press texts, company communication, and everyday language, it is possible to correct inequalities and exclude the mechanism of discrimination against others.

In this Guide, we have collected some rules that are important to us in the context of internal and external communication in our company. We are not language specialists, but hold ourselves responsible for communication within Monterail. At the same time, we encourage each other to change our language habits also outside of work, to inquire, ask and change constantly.



1. What is inclusive language?

DICTIONARY DEFINITION

Inclusive language

Is intentionally egalitarian word choice that avoids expressions that show bias or prejudice. Additionally, inclusive language combats terminology that is elitist, racist, sexist, etc. This includes avoiding words and phrases that reinforce outdated cultural norms, standards, or expectations. Inclusive language is:

- Gender-neutral language
- Person-first language
- Proper acknowledgment of people and cultures
- Respectful language
- Accessible language
- Non-stereotypical language

The workplace brings together many people from different walks of life. People of different genders, ethnicities, nationalities, and abilities. Effective communication prioritizes inclusion while celebrating, embracing, and supporting the identities of these diverse groups.



● Why does inclusive language matter?

When you use inclusive language you:

- Invite a more diverse group of people to participate in dialogue with you (for example during the team/company meeting or office/online integration)
- Create and support representation for people who may need it
- Express respect by validating the existence of all
- Promote equity and equality
- Express your values and attract like-minded people
- Set an example for other people

● And where to start in the workplace:

● Check what language your job advertisements are written in and what illustrations accompany them

Job advertisements should contain neutral words and phrases that do not indicate, for example, the gender of the candidate. By avoiding phrases such as “young dynamic team”, you can prevent applicants over a specific age from applying to you. By building your communication on Social Media based mainly on photos and reports from crazy integrations, you can also show an organization in which people in the role of parents will not feel well and be included in the organizational culture. ([Write your Ideal Job Description](#))

● Consider adding your pronouns to your email signature to normalize the discussion around gender and pronouns

You can also do it on your communication channels such as Slack and LinkedIn.



- **Ask how someone wants to be referred to**

This can be both in the context of pronouns and also of names/nicknames. This is a very good practice at the stage of the first contact with the candidate or later in the onboarding process. When we're not sure how to pronounce someone's name, say it and ask them to pronounce it.

- **Give context**

This is a very important rule when introducing a new employee to the workplace. Each company has internal sayings, abbreviations, or slang. It is natural that groups of friends and teams create their own internal language. However, do not assume that a new person who joins will understand everything. Introduce them to your idiosyncratic language and give context to where he came from.

- **Remember to switch**

In Monterail, a great number of people speak Polish, but there are also many employees who do not speak Polish. While we remember to create documents, official communication, and communicate on Slack channels in English, it is harder to remember about inclusive language when we have a conversation, e.g. in an office kitchen, or during integration. It is important to take this into account also in less formal spaces. Advice: Add information on your profile on Slack / Teams or other communicators about which languages you speak.

- **Learn from others and be open to feedback**

It's obvious that you don't know everything and probably you'll make some mistakes. Ask, learn from others, read, react to feedback or needs that arise in your work environment.



Inclusive language in job advertisements

When you post a job listing, the type of language and graphics you choose to use impact which candidates apply. The more inclusive the content, the greater the likelihood of a diversified pipeline, and inviting the right person to the team. We would like to share with you a few tips on how to create more inclusive job postings.

● Try to use gender-neutral language

Job advertisements should contain neutral words and phrases that do not indicate the gender of the candidate.

● Avoid words: **ninja/rockstar/superhero**

These words should be removed from job descriptions as they can be gender-biased and discourage some groups from applying.

● Avoid the phrase **“Culture fit”**

In some organizations “culture fit” has become a weaponized phrase that interviewers use as a blanket term to reject candidates that don’t match expectations. If you would like to shift your recruiting focus towards intentional diversity and inclusion efforts, you’re reframing your thinking to how diverse candidates can add to your culture – not fit into it. Try to think about “Culture add” instead of “Culture fit”

● **“Young dynamic team”**

By avoiding such phrases you can avoid preventing applicants over a specific age from applying.



- **Provide illustrations of diversity**

Show diversity in the job ads also through photos and images of people with different levels of ability, skin color, and gender diversity.

- **Try to take care of accessibility**

Consider people with disabilities. Ask yourself whether the colors used, the text spacing in the advertisement mean that people using various types of readers (e.g. for blind people) are able to easily apply to the position. If you make videos, make sure you have subtitles. This will help people with hearing disabilities to become familiar with the content.





2. Language sensitive to gender or gender-neutral

DICTIONARY DEFINITION

Sexism

Sexism is the view of the superiority of one sex over the other. The inequality according to this belief is justified by nature or cultural considerations. It can be of a biological, moral, or intellectual dimension. Most often, this term is used in the context of perceiving women in terms of their gender. However, it can also be used in relation to negative attitudes, beliefs, actions towards men. Sexism is an evaluation - it refers not only to differentiation but also to the evaluation of people according to their gender; it is not only the belief that women are different from men but also the belief that they are inferior. A view may also be followed by action, unequal treatment, or omission based on gender, referred to as gender discrimination.



Using gender-neutral language makes a big difference in the workplace. It makes everyone feel welcome, no matter their identity, and it sets an example for employees that gender-neutral language is the norm and that no one should assume anything about someone without asking first.

Once employees begin using gender-neutral language, a more natural acceptance will occur. People will begin noticing the gaps in their workplace and start to address them; like only having male and female restrooms available. When inclusion becomes a priority of everyone, the entire company benefits.

Learning how to use gender-neutral words isn't usually something you were taught in school but swapping out some gendered words in your daily life can really make a difference. When you use a gender-neutral word, you are making the effort to include everyone, no matter if you know their gender or not. If a closeted person is in the room when you use a neutral word, it can make them feel more comfortable.

Below you will find some basic guidelines to be more gender-neutral or conscious.

- **Avoid phrases in which a woman is not defined as an independent being** e.g. someone's wife, daughter, partner, or mother.
- **Quote spokespersons and women experts** - especially in tough fields and industries traditionally associated with men like eg. IT :)
- **The division into female / male categories is not gender-specific.** Instead of making assumptions based on someone else's appearance, ask about the form in which you should address a particular person.
- **Make content gender-neutral wherever possible** and strive to write in a gender-fair way. If you're writing about a hypothetical person



— or if you're unsure of the person's pronouns — use they or them instead of *he/she*.

- **Avoid guys to refer to mixed-gender groups.** Instead, you can try using "Hey all", "Hey everyone" or just simply - HEY!
- **Don't make assumptions about marital or family relationships** (for example, use spouse or partner instead of husband and wife; use parent instead of *mother* and *father*).
- **Use the appropriate grammatical gender** call women female and men male, unless you are addressing the person who does not wish to do so.
- **Stop describing the appearance and judging attractiveness** here this is irrelevant to the topic, inferring from appearance leads to harmful simplifications.
- **Avoid gender-biased expressions or expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes.**

Discriminatory examples:

- "She throws/runs/fights like a girl."
- "In a manly way."
- "Oh, that's women's work."
- "Thank you to the ladies for making the room more beautiful."
- "Men just don't understand."



INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE:

3. People with disabilities

The life of a person with a disability can be very different from yours, so it's natural not to know about some things. But one thing is certain - in order to talk about disability in a non-discriminatory, inclusive and equal way, the basis is education and access to reliable information, and above all the willingness to fill these gaps. Hopefully, these few rules below will be a good start. Already during the recruitment process, people with visible or invisible disabilities can apply for our positions. It is worth remembering this.

DICTIONARY DEFINITION

Disability

is an evolving concept and (...) results from the interaction between people with disabilities and barriers resulting from human and environmental attitudes, which make it difficult for these people to fully and effectively participate in society, on an equal basis with others



- **Remember that it is the person, not their disability, that is the most important**, so always say: a person with movement/sight/hearing/intellectual disability/autism spectrum/crutches/wheelchair. They emphasize the primacy of humans - disability should never take away subjectivity or dictate how someone moves in the social sphere of life.
- **The wording "disabled person" is unfair** because it causes the person to be defined through the prism of only one aspect of their identity, while absolutely everyone has the right to be seen in other components of human existence as well.
- Language is constantly changing, so watch these changes and react to words that are no longer used because of their harmful nature. **The terms "disabled, blind, crippled" or "handicapped" are offensive** - do not use them and take part in activities aimed at increasing public awareness of their harmfulness.
- **Be respectful and open-minded - communication is essential**, so whenever you are unsure how to behave towards a person, just ask them.
- **Always go directly to the person you are talking to, and not to their guardian or accompanying family member**, as very often such communication undermines their subjectivity and autonomy.
- **Respect the right to privacy**. Direct questions about disability are tactless and telling about it can come naturally, by someone's own will, so don't be intrusive.
- **Listen to the language people with disabilities use about themselves**.



- **Don't use terms like crazy, psycho instead** - person diagnosed with a mental health condition, a person with a psychiatric disability.
- **Before speaking to a deaf or hard of hearing person**, make sure they are looking at you. Depending on the situation, you can wave your hand, touch her shoulder.
- **If a deaf or hard of hearing person does not understand a sentence**, do not repeat it and express what you want to say differently.
- **If you cannot understand the person with a speech disorder, ask them to repeat it** - If you are not sure if you understood correctly, you can repeat the information to check.
- **When publishing videos on corporate social media, take care to include subtitles.**





INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE:

4. Nationality & Origin

More and more organizations, not only corporations, are becoming international. Our colleagues at work include people from various European, Asian, African, etc. countries. More and more companies have the option of remote work, which makes it easier to employ people from outside Poland. Not infrequently (as is the case with Monerail), customers of companies are scattered all over the world. We associate many nationalities and thus cultures and religions. It is worth considering the needs of different people in your internal and external communication.

DICTIONARY DEFINITION

Immigrants

people coming to a new country as part of voluntary migration (work, education, family reunification). A mistake

Refugee

a person who, due to a well-founded fear of persecution due to his race, religion, nationality, belonging to a specific social group or political opinion, resides outside the country of which he/she is a citizen and because of these fears, he is unwilling or unable to return to it.



- **Try not to treat Africa / Asia as one organism.** Africa has 54 countries and Asia has 48, if you can be more specific, please do so.
- **Race generally refers to physical differences** that groups and cultures consider socially significant, **while ethnicity refers to shared** cultures, such as language, ancestry, practices, and beliefs.
- **Don't use geographic descriptors with religious or other terms to describe specific groups of people.** For example, Muslim is not synonymous with Arab.
- **In general, use Black (capitalized), not black, when referring to people of African descent.** When referring to a specific group or individual, use the term they prefer, such as Black, African American, African, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latino or other.
- **Avoid proverbs and phrases that reinforce stereotypes**, such as "Not surprisingly, the Asian-American students did best in the math contest" or "Black people can run fast".
- **... But also avoid all jokes that may reinforce stereotypes** related to origin/religion/nationality/ethnicity.
- **Do not focus on a skin color unless it is relevant to your communication.** Instead, let's use terms referring to, for example, the continent - African, or to the country of origin - for example, Ethiopian. After all, we say a Pole, not a white person.
- **Be not politically correct**, but be decent and respectful towards those you write and speak about.
- **By using the word "foreigner", you emphasize the "otherness/strangeness"** of people from other countries. Similarly in the case of



“foreignness”, although we understand that its elimination from the media coverage is not possible due to the existing legal provisions and institutions. The term “migrant” indicates a specific type of experience - migration (regardless of its type and direction) and is more neutral in terms of meaning.





INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE:

5. LGBT + People

According to Dalia Research, there are approx. 2 million LGBT + people in Poland (5% of the population). LGBT + people often have more difficult and complex relationships with their families, loved ones, neighbors, or work colleagues. Remember that the LGBT + community is diverse. Therefore, try to use umbrella terms such as “LGBT + communities”. They are better than the terms: “homosexual circles”, “gay activists”, because they also include other people belonging to the rainbow community.

Non-heterosexual people are often exposed to exclusion and hate speech. There is no legal form of recognition of same-sex unions in Polish legislation. The only legal regulation against discrimination against LGBT + people in Poland is the Labor Code. So let's make sure that our communication in the company takes into account the needs of non-heteronormative people.

DICTIONARY DEFINITION

Sexual orientation

means an innate or unchanging sexual attraction towards other people. Romantic orientation refers to romantic attraction. For example, you may be sexually attracted only to men and romantic at the same time to any person, regardless of their identity



Gender identity

is the inner conception of oneself as a man, a woman, a mixture of both or neither of them. It shows how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. It may be the same or different from the sex assigned at birth (then we are dealing with a transgender person).

Gender expression

is an external expression of gender identity. Expression most commonly includes behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, which may or may not correspond to socially defined behaviors and traits typically associated with being male or female.

- **LGBT +** - abbreviation of the words: lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender persons, where + means other non-normative persons that do not fit into the first four letters of the abbreviation.
- After the acronyms, let's add the term **"person" or "community"**.
- Instead of homosexuality, lesbianism, gay (as a pejorative) - being **gay/lesbian/bisexual/queer**.
- sex change - **transition**: Trans women were born wrongly sexed on birth certificates, and trans men were born wrongly sexed on birth certificates. Change of gender is also incorrect, because transgender people do not change gender, but they do transition.



- **Let's not say "normal people" to describe cisgender persons.** We are suggesting that everyone else is outside the norm, and that's not true.
- **We do not say Sexual minorities** - this term reduces LGBT people to sexuality, ignoring other features that make up the group's identity.
- **We do not say - LGBT ideology. - LGBT+ people are PEOPLE, not ideology.**
- **Do not make** the assumption that all relationships are heterosexual, and render same-sex relationships invisible, instead of using terms "wife/husband" or "girlfriend/boyfriend" try "spouse" or "partner".
- Many people use the terms in good faith: "gay marriage" or "same-sex couple." It is definitely better to use the expressions "same-sex marriage" or "same-sex couple", or "same-sex marriage".
- Because we do not know if in a relationship of two men or two women both people are homosexual (they can be bisexual, for example).

We do not decide on the language of a given community if we are not part of it. Regardless of what we think is "more correct"



Dictionary

A foreigner - a person who does not have the citizenship of the country in which he resides. In order to live in Poland, a person must have a legal stay (regulated residence status), and in order to work, they must additionally have a work permit (or be exempt from the obligation to have one). In the public debate, the notions of - migrant are spread, which are considered the most neutral.

Inclusion - including people from groups experiencing unequal treatment to function in an organization or group in a way that ensures their participation on an equal basis, influence and choice in creating the organizational culture, while ma-

intaining a sense of psychological security

The gender pay gap - (gender pay gap) - the difference between the average gross hourly wages received by women and men. It is calculated on the basis of wages paid directly to employees, before income tax and social security contributions are deducted. Only companies employing at least ten people are taken into account. This way of calculating the gender pay gap does not take into account all factors that may play a role, such as the level of education, the number of hours worked, the type of work, career breaks or part-time work. However, it shows that



across the EU, women generally earn less than men.

Anti-discrimination education - deliberate actions increasing the level of knowledge about - discrimination and violence motivated by - prejudice, as well as knowledge and skills related to the promotion of equality and - diversity. Anti-discrimination education shapes the attitudes of individuals and groups of people that express respect for other people and their otherness.

Actions affirmative, positive action

- The state or an employer-type organization uses certain temporary solutions, undertakes actions or introduces specific legal measures aimed at - equalizing the opportunities by privileging people belonging to certain groups at risk of - social exclusion, in order to reduce the actual inequalities these people are experiencing. Such actions are allowed, however, they may be used only for a specified period of time, as otherwise they may turn into systemic discrimination against people belonging to the majority, previously privileged groups.

Hate speech - Public verbal or written statements and iconic representations that express extremely negative feelings and views towards individuals or groups; these are, for example, humiliation, insults, slander, defamatory, accusing and derogatory statements. Statements considered to be hate speech most often refer to the phenomenon of - racism, hatred towards sexual minorities and - xenophobia. Hate speech is sometimes used in jurisprudence as a border point for the freedom of speech, limiting the freedom of expression. Freedom of expression is restricted by the dignity of the other person and protection her right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Unconscious bias - a term that refers to cognitive errors that arise in the processing of information about ourselves and others. These errors are based on stereotypical assumptions towards specific social groups. Unaware attitudes (positive and negative) can lead to errors in judgment and making decisions while at the same time contradicting unambi-



guously declared and consciously held beliefs.

Person - a term often used in - inclusive (equality) language to emphasize the subjectivity of another person, ascribed to people regardless of their situation, condition, gender, sexual orientation, origin or views. The use of the terms: person, persons, community of persons allows to avoid a harmful concentration on a selected aspect or the presence of one feature. These phrases appear frequently in the Conceptual framework, and therefore there is no cross-reference to the entry.

Diversity - concept that comes from recognizing, respecting and drawing on differences between people. Among the many features that differ us from each other, the most frequently mentioned and essential for functioning in various spheres of social life are: gender, skin color, national or ethnic origin, religion, denomination, - worldview, age, - (not) fully - fitness, - sexual orientation and - gender identity. Noticing these differences, meeting them and reaping benefits from them, and thus - or perhaps going - consciously developing strategies,

policies and programs that create the climate for respecting and using these differences for the benefit of an organization is called managing diversity.



What if you make a mistake?

Accept that you are human and that it's okay to make mistakes. If you do make a mistake, apologize, correct/change what you have said, learn from the mistake, and move on. We are all in the process of learning - all the time.

INSTEAD OF	TRY	WHY?
<i>Hey Guys</i>	<i>Hey All</i>	It is one small step away from making a more conscious effort to dismantle patriarchy
Culture fit	Culture add	Reframing your thinking to how diverse candidates can add to your culture – not fit into it
Minorities	Underrepresented groups	When referencing as a group of <i>others</i> It implies that a group is a lesser part of the whole and gives the power to the <i>majority</i>
<i>OCD, ADD, Spaz, Lame, bipolar</i> as emphasis, or to exaggerate	Wild, hectic, intense, out of hand	Some of these are derogatory, some refer to specific conditions, either way, they are not terms to be used for <i>effect</i>



INSTEAD OF	TRY	WHY?
<i>Him or her</i>	<i>They</i> (yes: it's acceptable even when referring to one person)	It is just not gender neutral
<i>Ninja or rockstar</i>	Advertise job openings with neutral, straightforward titles	Women are less likely to apply when these types of descriptors are used
Wife/husband or girlfriend/boyfriend	Partner or spouse	Reinforces the assumption that all relationships are heterosexual, and renders same-sex relationships invisible
Seniors, old folks	Older people	Such phrases can be stereotyped
Salesmen, businessmen	Salesperson, business person	It is just not gender-neutral
Manpower	Workforce	It is just not gender-neutral
Mother/father	Parent/Caregiver/Guardian	Try to avoid heteronormative language



INSTEAD OF	TRY	WHY?
<i>He's crazy!</i>	He is acting outrageous and unpredictable!	Word <i>crazy</i> often offends people struggling with mental illness, as well as those without, thereby trivializing very real conditions, undermining their individual experiences, and contributing to harmful stereotypes
Man up	Be brave	This term perpetuates stereotypes that men need to appear strong at all times and implies women can't be
Sexual preference	Sexual orientation	This term has a contested implication that someone's sexuality is their choice

Awareness is the first step, action is the second

This guide is obviously not complete and never will be. We know that, as a society, we are always evolving and the language we use must also evolve.

I think that when we start our journey of consciously using inclusive language, at the very beginning we should answer the following questions:

- Is it necessary to refer to personal characteristics such as sex, religion, racial group, disability, or age at all?
- Are the references to group characteristics couched in inclusive terms?
- Do the references to people reflect the diversity of that audience?

But also do not be afraid to ask questions, make mistakes and correct them, and learn all the time.

Below we have created a cheat sheet for you that will help you build internal and external company communication.

Let's stay in touch!

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**diversity
&
inclusion**

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