Inclusive language at TU Delft

It is important that we make sure that everyone feels welcome and accepted at TU Delft. By using inclusive language and imagery, we prevent people from being excluded. TU Delft is an international organisation, where we generally communicate in Dutch and in English – depending on the colleagues, the group and the context in which we communicate and work. This guideline aims to offer examples and tips for using more inclusive words, phrases or sentences. There is also a Dutch version available. We will focus primarily on written language and include spoken language whenever possible.

Since this is a living document, we look forward to receiving suggestions or improvements so that our language becomes increasingly more inclusive. Words matter.

Guiding Principles

- In our language, we address everyone in an equal manner.
- Our basis is the breadth of differences, rather than what is considered the norm.
- We use inclusive forms of address.
- Proverbs and expressions are part of this guide.

Guidelines for English

1. Use neutral, general forms of address. A few examples of neutral words: partner, user, resident, person, colleague, people, student, applicant, researcher.
   Example: start a document, lecture, email, memo or speech with 'dear readers,' 'dear colleague or listener' instead of 'dear ladies and gentlemen'.

2. Work on the basis of gender diversity and write texts using the second-person singular pronoun (you) or use the plural. Also avoid references to sex or gender. Gender is about a socio-cultural construct; we talk about a spectrum on which people can be. Sex refers to the sex a person was born with. We do not use the 'he/she' pronouns. It is not inclusive and does not make for easy reading: the term 'he/she' does not take non-binary persons into account and puts men first. Instead, use neutral words wherever possible: plural or, for example, 'everyone', 'all' or 'they/them'.
   Example: 'We write: 'We give employees space' or 'As employees, they are given space' instead of: 'We give men/women who work here space.' or 'As an employee, we give him/her space'.

3. Avoid using feminine word variants such as authoress and manageress. If a neutral word or plural is not an option, choose the masculine form. These days, the masculine form is most commonly seen as neutral. A few examples: alumnus, manager.
   Example: 'The alumnus returned to their alma mater to give a speech.' The same applies for job titles. Wherever possible, use neutral words and descriptions, such as 'ombudsperson' instead of 'ombudsman' or 'chair' instead of 'chairman'. 'Manager', for example, has already become a suitable and more neutral term, as have 'supervisor' and 'team leader'.

4. Personal form of address: it is impossible to tell from a person's name or appearance how they identify. Avoid making assumptions and ask what the preferred pronouns are. To make things easier for others and set an example, you could mention in your signature or email sender information how you prefer to be addressed (she/her, he/him, they/them). This practice is becoming increasingly common.

5. Avoid stereotyping. Stereotypes tend to be negative and encourage prejudice. Example: The Dutch are straightforward; men are tough; women are industrious. Indirect stereotyping is also undesirable. For example: in a text about a woman, avoid emphasising that she can multi-task and is diligent, or that a man is a born leader, decisive and so on. You can do a quick check by switching out the male and female to see if the sentence still makes sense.
Example: 'I admire you, as a high-flying woman in science, for keeping so many balls in the air. And with a family, as well.' Would you say the same thing to a high-flying male scientist?
   a. While writing, continuously ask yourself what you want to highlight. Do you want to emphasise the differences, or rather mention and utilise the similarities? Talking about a working mother or stay-at-home father may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes. Instead of saying: 'Men are better at negotiating than women,' you could say: 'We all negotiate differently'.

6. Conversely, in some cases it is socially and politically desirable to indicate that there are differences; for example, to emphasise that TU Delft appoints women as professors. If you mention the sex of the woman by talking about Ms. Van Elten, make sure you also mention the sex of the men mentioned, for example, Mr. Ahmadi. The same applies when talking about where someone comes from; if you mention 'the lecturer from the US,' you should also say 'the lecturer from the Netherlands'.

7. When making assumptions about a living situation or stage of life, it is important to realise that not everyone is in a relationship, of average age, has or wants children, has a partner, or lives with their partner, or wants to live with them etcetera. Many scenarios and situations are possible.

8. Be careful when using proverbs and expressions. They may appear to fit a situation, but often come with many references and positive/negative connotations. Try to be aware of this and say or write exactly what you mean whenever possible. In texts, we want to avoid expressions such as: man up, boys will be boys, the tailor makes the man, blacken someone's name, the black sheep of the family, etcetera. Instead, you could say: be brave, children will be children, a person is well-dressed, tarnish someone's reputation, the odd one out.

9. If you use examples in text, photos or drawings, make sure to use neutral or diverse examples. Alternate gender, age and background. Also keep this in mind when selecting imagery: reflect diversity and inclusion in photos and illustrations as well, by showing a variety of people (big, small, young, old, a person of colour, a person with a disability, etcetera), so that many people can recognise themselves in the images or illustrations.

10. Be mindful of the discussion about person first language and identity first language when it comes to neurodiversity and physical, mental or chronic vulnerabilities. There are people who view their variation or vulnerability as inherently part of their identity, and therefore prefer phrasing such as "autistic person" or "deaf person". However, other people prefer "person with autism" or "person with a hearing impairment/vulnerability". This is to indicate that it is also something separate from them as humans and that their identity is more than the impairment itself. That is why it is always good to ask a person for their preference first. It is also important to note that a vulnerability is an experience that exists because of an environment that is not inclusive for everyone.

Forms of diversity

There are several forms of diversity that you could consider in your communication:

- Education/studies
- Socio-economic status
- Generation/age
- Ethnicity
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity
- Persons with physical disabilities
- Neurodiversity
- Religion/philosophy

Suggestions for language use

Word	Alternative
Native/migrant	Someone with a ... background. Use this consistently. In other words: if you mention a person's Asian background, also mention a European background or if someone has a migrant background.
Developing country	Mention a specific aspect of development or name specific countries. For example: a country that is developing in agriculture and industry with the aim of reducing poverty in the country.
Ethnicity/ethnic group	Avoid or use sparingly, and preferably name the country or culture (or a mix thereof) as specifically as possible if relevant.

Word	Alternative
Caucasian/black (of colour)	White/a person of colour/of mixed ethnicity. Exception: 'Black' can be used if it is relevant. For example: 'Martin Luther King Jr. fought for the rights of Black Americans.' If referring to a specific experience or social circumstance that only Black people experience, the word 'Black' can be used.
Western/non-Western/the West,, Middle Eastern,Far East/Far Eastern, etc.	Use names of continents or countries. So: people from Europe, South America, Japan, India, China, etc.
Surinamese/Turkish (if you mean a Dutch person)	Surinamese Dutch/Turkish Dutch.
Moroccan/Turk (if you mean a person from that country)	A Moroccon person, a Turkish person or a person from Marocco.
Blind, deaf, hard of hearing	Someone (person) with a visual or hearing impairment or a blind, deaf, hard-of-hearing person. Please note: Be mindful of the discussion on identity-first and person-first language. There are also people who prefer 'vulnerability' instead of 'impairment.' Please always ask a person for their preference first.
Low/highly educated	People with an academic, higher/intermediate vocational education, or practical/theoretical education.
Socio-economic status Poor/rich people	People in poverty, people facing poverty, people from higher socio-economic classes.
Husband/Wife	Partner.
Gay/lesbian/transgender/transsexual/LQBTQ+ person	A gay man/a lesbian woman/a trans person/a transgender person/an LGBTQ+ person (man, woman)
Sexual preference:	Sexual orientation.

Practical support

Consider the following:

- Have someone else read your text, preferably a person with a completely different background.

- Below are some links to external websites for information or inspiration:

  - [Women Inc. Style Guide](#) (in Dutch)

  - [Tips from the central government](#) (in Dutch)

  - [Tips for inclusive communication about disability](#) in (Dutch)

For more tips or advice, please contact the communications team of your board or faculty.