



Recommendations for gender- and diversity-sensitive language

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1 Initial position

Language is not static, it is shaped by social changes. The current changes in language towards the inclusion of gender diversity and the consideration of diversity aspects have increasingly led to ambiguities and uncertainties. Due to these recent developments, the university executive board has mandated the Equal Opportunities Office to clarify the inclusion of gender diversity in language. This document is intended to provide an orientation framework and tools for this purpose.

Recommendations will be made here on the use of gender- and diversity-sensitive language. Attention will be drawn to expressions which are not accepted at BFH.

This document does not deal with barrier-free communication and the handling of language in the staff and student administration systems. On the basis of the diversity policy, suitable solutions will be proposed for this in a different framework.

The different expectations of various stakeholders can lead to areas of tension. It is not (currently) possible to resolve these. However, the dialogue on the different expectations is to be continued at the BFH.

2 Recommendations

Language shapes our reality and our thinking, so equal opportunities also require non-discriminatory language that addresses everyone. Recommendations for BFH are formulated below. Further examples and application notes of gender- and diversity-friendly language can be found in the guides listed at the end of the document.

The following recommendations show contexts and corresponding forms of gender- and diversity-sensitive language.

2.1 Making women and men visible

If the author/speaker wants to explicitly make both women and men visible, they can use both feminine and masculine pronouns (she or he) (see [Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English, United Nations](#)).

2.2 Gender-neutral forms

If gender does not play a role or if the functions, roles or actions of the person are foregrounded, use neutral wording (see [Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English, United Nations](#)). Gender-neutral wording also includes non-binary people.

2.3 Including non-binary people

To address and include non-binary people, use gender-neutral personal names, titles and pronouns. In English, the singular 'they' can be used as a gender-neutral pronoun (see [Gender-inclusive and -fair language](#), p26-29).

2.4 Considered and differentiated use of language

Think about who you want to address and adapt your language accordingly. Keep this in mind when communicating, eg when addressing people, in lists of people or on forms if you have design options here. Remember: A considered and differentiated use of language addresses different identities equally (see [Non-sexist language guide for Swiss universities communicating in English](#)).

2.5 How to choose diverse and inclusive pictures

Images establish realities and arouse emotions. Therefore, genders should be portrayed equally in the pictures. Through a careful and differentiated selection of images, gender clichés and stereotypical gender roles are avoided and appreciative relationships are reflected so that no gender is devalued. (see [How to choose diverse and inclusive photos](#)).

3 Not accepted

- **Clichés and stereotypes**
- **Discriminatory** and derogatory terms

4 Further information

Further examples, suggestions, ideas for implementation and more detailed information on the use of gender- and diversity-sensitive language can be found in the following guides:

General guides

[Non-sexist language guide for Swiss universities communicating in English](#) (University of Lausanne)
[Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English \(United Nations\)](#)

Examples of gender-neutral forms of address, personal names and pronouns

[Gender-inclusive and -fair language](#), p26-29 (Prout at Work)

Examples of diverse and inclusive pictures

[How to choose diverse and inclusive pictures](#)