



Thriving Workplaces Guide to Gender Inclusive Language in the Workplace

- ❖ **What is Gender Neutral Language** – The UN describes Gender Neutral Language as ‘speaking and writing in a way that does not discriminate against a particular sex, social gender or gender identity, and does not perpetuate gender stereotypes. Given the key role of language in shaping cultural and social attitudes, using gender-inclusive language is a powerful way to promote gender equality and eradicate gender bias.’ An example of this is avoiding masculine pronouns (he, him, his) when referring to a person that could be of any gender and masculine generic terms (policemen, firemen, etc.) when referring to groups of people that could include men, women, and non-binary folks.
- ❖ **‘They’ is your new best friend** – A term that has become popular in recent years to use instead of ‘he’ and ‘she’, ‘they’ is gender inclusive and is a pronoun that has been used since before Shakespeare to denote someone in the third-person. Mis-gendering people with ‘he’ or ‘she’ if they do identify differently, can lead to awkward situations both for them and you, so using ‘they/them/their’ is a great way to avoid this. Feel free to offer your pronouns when meeting new staff, keep them in your email footer or if in doubt, simply ask someone what their preferred pronouns are; you will not offend anyone!
- ❖ **Avoid Gender-Biased Phrases** – Some of us will have heard the terms ‘Man Up’ or ‘Don’t be a girl’ within business, and these are wrong on not just levels of sexism but in general terms of employee wellbeing. We should first of all, be encouraging employees to bring their whole selves to work and this promotes an open culture which will help the company grow as a whole. Also, if we are talking about courage, let’s use the term ‘courage’ rather than ‘man up’, and if we’re talking about resilience, let’s use term it as ‘building resilience’ rather than ‘don’t be a girl’. This goes the same for less wellbeing-damaging terms like ‘manpower’, ‘chairman’ and even ‘guys’, something we’re all guilty of using from time to time. We can use ‘everyone’, ‘team’, ‘folks’, ‘crew’ or many other gender-neutral terms to be inclusive in the workplace.
- ❖ **Dear Sir or Madam?** – In many cases nowadays, the traditional first greeting, ‘Dear Sir or Madam’ can be outdated and not very inclusive, let alone very impersonal as well. Trying to find someone’s name to refer to them is a lot easier in our digital world, or if not, simply refer to someone by their job title or the department they work in for a more personal touch. Although impersonal and outdated, you can always use ‘To Whom it May Concern’ ahead of Sir or Madam. We can always do the same with Mr. or Mrs. where we can use Mx. as the gender-neutral term, or simply not use these honorifics at all and refer to people by their names.

- ❖ **Where do we start?** – The first point of contact between employer and employee is normally the job advert and the job description that comes with it. Recent studies have shown that when adverts have gender-neutral language in, jobs that are generally underrepresented by women are more likely to receive applications from them. For example, we should use ‘salesperson’, rather than ‘salesman/saleswoman’. Research conducted by Total Jobs found that just one fifth of job adverts were ‘gender neutral’. It is also worth talking about adjectives in job adverts, and what is called gender-coded words. Research has shown that women will be less likely to apply for jobs with traits such as ‘analyse’ and ‘determine’, as well as superlatives like ‘expert’, ‘world-class’. Instead we can use more gender-inclusive language such as ‘collaborate’ and ‘support’ which females and non-binary folk are more likely to respond to. Research also shows that women are unlikely to apply for a position unless they meet 100 percent of the requirements, while men will apply if they meet 60 percent of the requirements, so let’s rethink those ‘essential’ criteria to simply ‘desired’.

- ❖ **Why Gender Inclusive Language and Diversity are key** - according to ACAS, equal and diverse companies enjoy benefits such as:
 - ❖ • Better innovation, teamwork, and employee engagement.
 - ❖ • A more diverse range of skills.
 - ❖ • Better access to different social, geographical, and cultural markets.
 - ❖ • A stronger brand reputation.
 - ❖ • Attracting and retaining more top talent.

So this shows that this is simply more than a tickbox activity and not just for a small minority of employees. This is for the whole business and will help bring people closer together and grow the business as a whole!

We’ve compiled a list of resources below to help you with making your workplace more gender-inclusive when it comes to language you use 😊 –

- [BrightHR Guide to Equality and Dealing with Discrimination](#)
- [GLAAD Media Reference Guide](#)
- [Gender Decoder Tool – Make Job Descriptions Gender Neutral](#)
- [What is Unconscious Bias](#)
- [Genderbread Person](#)
- [Better Allies Inclusive Guide to Language](#)
- [Textio Augmented Writing Tool](#)