



Inclusive Language at Otago Guidelines

Purpose

To assist staff and students to use language inclusive of all people. Inclusive practices, including using inclusive language, promote the full participation of staff and students and enable all to reach their full potential.

Definitions

Inclusive Language	respects individuality and diversity, is free from stereotypes and avoids phrases and words that may make people feel excluded and under-valued.
Stereotype	is an exaggerated or distorted generalisation about an entire category of people that does not acknowledge individual variation. <i>Stereotypes</i> form the basis for prejudice and discrimination.
Ingroup/outgroup	Ingroup refers to a group to which a person identifies as being a member (often defined by shared interests but also shared characteristics such as gender or ethnicity). Outgroup refer to a group with which a person does not identify. Attitudes and behaviours directed toward ingroup members tend to be more positive than those directed toward outgroup members.

Content

1. Guiding Principles

- Inclusive language acknowledges diversity and individual differences and is respectful to all people.
- Inclusive language promotes the participation of all and avoids words and phrases that exclude people from being seen as a part of a group or team. The University is a place where removing barriers to participation of students and staff is paramount so all can achieve their full potential. ([Equity and Diversity Strategic Framework](#) and [Equity and Diversity Policy](#))
- Inclusive language avoids stereotyping people. Stereotyping overlooks individual differences and can lead to unfair and unequal treatment (i.e. discrimination).
- Inclusive language acknowledges language change. Previously accepted terms may no longer be perceived as acceptable.
- Staff and students are encouraged to use inclusive language consciously and actively in order to acknowledge diversity in the community, celebrate individual differences, and challenge stereotypes.

2. Inclusive Language in Practice

- When describing people, use language that emphasises individuality over a membership in a particular group. For example:
 - Unless relevant to the discussion, avoid labelling people by a country of origin or ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, sex, gender, appearance or social economic status. For example, use “the student” instead of “blind student”.
 - If a group membership is relevant, emphasise individuality, in this example “the student who has impaired vision”.

- (b) Avoid words and phrases that might exclude people in your audience. For example:
- Avoid terms promoting an ingroup versus outgroup dynamic, such as “people like us”.
 - Some people might not understand New Zealand specific references and expressions, so it is important to clarify their meaning.
- (c) Avoid stereotyping, i.e. making assumptions based on a membership in a particular group (e.g. sex, gender, age, disability, ethnicity, cultural identity, or sexuality). Be aware that many stereotypes are reiterated unconsciously. For example:
- Avoid gender stereotypes (“men are naturally [...]” “she is quite [...] for a woman”).
 - Avoid phrases portraying people as victims (“despite their disability/age”).
 - Avoid comments about people’s performance based on their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, ability or age (“their grades are quite good considering they are from....”).
 - Avoid “positive stereotyping” such as suggesting that a particular group is talented in certain area (“[ethnicity/gender] are good at [...]”).
- (d) Embrace gender-neutral language, i.e. language that is unbiased towards a particular gender. Avoid language implying that certain roles or professions align with a specific gender. For example:
- When referring to all people, use gender-neutral terms such as humankind instead of mankind, a police officer instead of a policeman, or an office cleaner instead of a cleaning lady.
 - Avoid using gender-specific modifiers. Expressions such as “female artist” or “woman lawyer” imply that the occupation in question normally belongs to men. Use gender-specific modifiers only when the gender of the person is part of the point being made.
 - Avoid presumption of gender for an occupation. Instead of “the writer tells his reader” you can say “the writer tells the reader” or “the writer tells readers”.
 - When giving examples in your teaching or research, consider using gender neutral names (“Jo” instead of “John”) and pronouns (“they” instead of “she” or “he”).
- (e) Refer to people by their preferred name and title. For example:
- Use “Ms” instead of “Miss” and “Mrs” unless the person has specifically indicated otherwise.
 - Refer to people by their correct job title (for example “departmental administrator” not “secretary”).
 - Respect people’s stated name even if it is different to their name on University records.
 - If you are unsure about pronunciation, ask the person for clarification.
- (f) Avoid offensive and disrespectful language. For example:
- Do not make remarks, jokes or mockery about people’s biological, personal or cultural characteristics (for example mimicking the way people speak or deliberately misspelling or mispronouncing people’s names).
 - Do not use demeaning terms such as kids/girls/boys for students or staff.
 - Purposively using a pronoun different from the one someone has asked you to use (for example refusing to use he/him pronouns when referring to a transgender man and instead using she/her pronouns).
 - Do not use outdated terms.

- (g) Avoid making assumptions about people’s cultural identity, ethnicity, or citizenship based on their appearance, language or accent. New Zealand is a diverse place; many people living in New Zealand were born overseas and/or identify with more than one ethnicity and/or speak more than one language.
- (h) Be inclusive and respectful of sexual and gender diversity and be mindful of the appropriate terms. Gender is a personal concept of self as female or male, or neither/other. Sexual orientation refers to the gender to which a person is attracted.
- At the time of writing these guidelines the terms most commonly used to describe sexual and gender minorities in New Zealand are LGBTTI or LGBTTIQA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, takatāpui, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual).
 - “Trans” is a generic term often used to describe people whose gender differs from their sex assigned at birth; this encompasses transgender, genderqueer, androgynous, gender-diverse, whakawāhine, fa’afafine, tanga ira tane or fakaleiti.
 - “Cisgender” is a term used to describe someone whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned at birth.
 - Gender identity and its expression vary greatly and not all people fit neatly into one of the commonly used terms. Respect the preference of the individuals or groups concerned and let them self-identify.
 - Use people’s self-defined pronouns (such as he/she/they). Some people state this information in their written communications (e.g. email signatures) or wear pronoun stickers indicating their pronoun. If in doubt, ask them.
 - Do not assume sexual orientation. For example, you can use the term “spouse/partner” instead of “wife and husband”, or “parents/guardians/family” instead of “mother and father”.
 - When addressing groups of people use terms that are inclusive of all genders (“distinguished guests” instead of “ladies and gentlemen”).
- (i) Review and update existing teaching materials and other documents distributed to students or staff to ensure that the principles of inclusive language are followed.

3. Use of Te Reo Māori

The University promotes the use of te reo Māori and Māori cultural practices. Please familiarise yourself with the [Māori Language Policy - Ngā Kaupapa mō te reo Māori](#).

Related Policies, Procedures and forms

- [Equity and Diversity Policy](#)
- [Equity and Diversity Strategic Framework](#)
- [Māori Language Policy - Ngā Kaupapa mō te reo Māori](#)
- [Writing style guide](#)