

GENDER SENSITIVE LANGUAGE

This term refers to the importance of using gender sensitive language in official and internal documents as one of the aspects to enhance gender equality within an organisation.

Below is a list of successful practices relating to gender-sensitive language, according to R&I peers research.

PRACTICE 1: Inclusive and non-sexist language guide

General information

Title	Gender Balance criterion
Organisation	Mondragon Unibertsitatea (MU) – Faculty of Business Studies
Type of organisation	University (non-profit cooperative private university)
Country	Spain

Specific information

Aim of practice	Create awareness about and promote best practices concerning the use of inclusive and non-sexist language
Time Frame	2015 to present
Beneficiaries	Institution staff, administrators, faculty-members, researchers and students
Tools used	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online and offline resources to understand state-of-the-art on inclusive and non-sexist language• Expert input• Surveys and study groups with university stakeholders• Awareness-building exercises: talks, seminars, etc.• Online survey and dissemination tools
Steps and procedures followed to implement tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review on the state-of-the-art on inclusive and non-sexist language• Generate lexicon and best practices on communicating in inclusive and non-sexist manner• Hands-on review with staff about it
Description / benefits / comments	A guide is a useful tool as part of a broader strategy to decrease exclusion and sexist behaviour in a research institution, by starting with an emphasis on language.

Evaluation

Works well	A guide can advance the state-of-the-art on the topic of gender equality and also serve as a departure point to broach other GEP topics such as
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	gender biases in hiring practices, etc.
Transferability	Language is very particular to a culture, of course, but within that context, elements of the guide can be transferred among institutions, especially those with greater linguistic similarity. Concepts around inclusive and non-sexist language can also translate more or less readily from culture to culture. Cultures sharing a similar language can even reuse elements of the same guide, adapting it as necessary to the local context, and in so doing, add to the state-of-the-art on the matter.
Learning potential	The existence of such a guide is an opportunity to establish a dialogue and create greater awareness of gender bias in the target institution and beyond.
Gender perspective	Language is a key barrier to gender equality, and highlighting the gender-bias in the language, changing the narrative by generating a “new” lexicon — by reusing existing vocabulary in new ways, and even generating new words — is key to driving a cultural shift toward greater gender inclusivity – as we speak the way we think.
Sustainability	The guide can be updated over time and benchmark progress towards greater inclusivity, including the gender dimension, and therefore play an integral role in a long-term gender equality programme.

PRACTICE 2: Junior Faculty "observers"

General information

Title	Junior Faculty "observers" in Senior Faculty committee meetings
Organisation	Ozyegin University
Type of organisation	University
Country	Turkey

Specific information

Aim of practice	The main purpose of the junior faculty “observer” programme, an initiative of the university rector, is to support mentorship of junior faculty members by senior faculty members, and thus to smooth their transition to senior roles over time.
Time Frame	2015 to Present
Beneficiaries	Junior and senior faculty members, institution staff
Tools used	Junior faculty members participate as observers to senior faculty committee meetings to address issues facing all faculty, including those related to gender equality and language.
Steps and procedures followed to implement tools	In the context of the committee meetings, issues pertaining to language and communication practices can be reviewed for their inclusive and non-sexist nature.
Description / benefits/ comments	Direct involvement of faculty members at all seniority levels in discussing language and communication practices in the university, with an eye on inclusion and gender equality, already has the benefit of promoting age

	diversity within the faculty, which is a clear step towards greater diversity of all kinds.
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Evaluation

Works well	The junior faculty "observer" approach is a relatively easy activity to implement and directly create awareness about topics related to diversity and (gender) inclusion, including language use.
Transferability	This approach is easy to transfer from one research institute to another as it is an initiative originated directly with the rector. Its initiation and follow-up are, therefore, constrained in theory, only by this one factor that. When triggered, the approach can deliver a direct, positive and even significant impact on a gender equality programme.
Learning potential	The step from "observer" to "participant" may be large in terms of what junior faculty may contribute to senior faculty committee meetings, but the learning potential for junior faculty in this context is also great.
Gender perspective	The opportunity to promote a gender— or any — perspective following an "observer" format is constrained to the circumstances specific to the environment at the time, as well as to the interests of the individual observer. As such, this approach does not necessarily guarantee that a gender perspective will be promoted, but it certainly does provide a possibility.
Sustainability	Since the approach is driven by the rector personally, it is not clear how easily this activity can be sustained, if the s successor does not give equal priority to its continuity.

PRACTICE 3: Language review

General information

Title	Review of language in University Communications by classic philologists and language specialists
Organisation	University of Bologna
Type of organisation	University
Country	Italy

Specific information

Aim of practice	Create awareness around stereotypes, gender-bias and exclusive nature of language, and its impact on university communications
Time Frame	2015
Beneficiaries	Institution staff, administrators, faculty-members, researchers
Tools used	Led by the Committee for Gender Equality, making use of study groups, lectures by expert faculty, website and other dissemination tools
Steps and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain faculty approval for the project

followed to implement tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formally or informally, assemble project experts, admin staff and faculty partners for project team • Review and agree on communications for treatment • Draft implementation plan • Work by experts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of state-of-play on inclusive & non-sexist language lexicon • Review of communications for treatment • Draft suggestions for inclusive & non-sexist language • Agree on alternative language • Update implementation plan • Execute implementation plan • Review and feedback on implementation • Complete implementation • Provide input for future implementations
Description / benefits / comments	The engagement of language and philology experts in the consideration of university communications for their potentially exclusionary or sexist nature gives the opportunity to provide insight into the role of language in perpetuating stereotypes, and of utilising language — while supported by experts — that can be used to reverse those stereotypes.

Evaluation

Works well	This practice provides the opportunity of advancing discussion on the sometimes inherently exclusive and gender-biased nature of language, and the chance to promote best practices through language, reversing those trends.
Transferability	Language is particular to a culture, but the practice of engaging experts to review language for its potential bias is possible in any context where such experts practice. They need to be granted the opportunity to leverage their knowledge for the purpose of promoting inclusion and gender equality.
Learning potential	Input into communications by language experts provides a unique insight for those engaged in GEP work to learn, to effectively use language, to promote inclusion and diversity, stimulating explicit discussion on the impact of language in perpetuating and fighting stereotypes.
Gender perspective	Language can play a key role in promoting gender equality, by engaging experts in language and philology to unlock the current situation. This is critical for optimising language use in university communications in order to achieve diversity and gender inclusion targets.
Sustainability	Review of language by experts ideally feeds into a benchmarking and/or larger gender equality programmes that could have concrete outputs, like a guidebook or training modules that can contribute to implement and integrate the GEP.

