Checklist for inclusive language

A Write checklist

Inclusive language means choosing words that include everyone — regardless of their age, gender, culture, background, disability, or identity.

This checklist covers practical ways to use inclusive language so you can communicate with respect, clarity, and care.

How to use this checklist

- Read the full list to refresh your understanding of inclusive language
- Make notes to track your progress and refine your writing
- Add new terms or tips as you learn — language and norms are always evolving
- Do not rush — take the time to check each item
- Share this list with your coworkers to promote inclusive language

1. Use gender-neutral words

- [ ] Use gender-neutral job titles (instead of ‘fireman’, say ‘firefighter’)
- [ ] Avoid gendered words (instead of ‘manpower’, say ‘workforce’ or ‘staff’)
- [ ] Use people’s preferred pronouns
- [ ] Use ‘they’ when gender is unknown or unspecified
- [ ] Use inclusive words where gender is irrelevant (instead of ‘maternal leave’ or ‘paternal leave’, say ‘parental leave’)

2. Be respectful of names and identities

- [ ] Spell and format people’s names correctly — check hyphens and capitalisations
- [ ] Do not stereotype people by their ethnicity

- [ ] Acknowledge people's iwi if someone shares it
- [ ] Avoid guessing and always check if you're unsure

3. Check for bias

- [ ] Choose a mix of age, abilities, ethnicity, or gender in your examples
- [ ] Avoid biased phrases like 'culturally deprived' or 'culturally disadvantaged'
- [ ] Avoid discriminatory language (instead of 'elderly', say 'older person')
- [ ] Avoid mentioning attributes like gender or ethnicity if they're not relevant (instead of 'male nurse' say 'nurse')
- [ ] Check if your tone is fair, respectful, and inclusive
- [ ] Ask a colleague to review your work and help you spot hidden biases

4. Represent disability with care

- [ ] Ask the person if they prefer 'people first' language (for example, person with disability) or 'identity first' language (for example, disabled person)
- [ ] Emphasise their strengths, not weaknesses (instead of 'partially blind', say 'partially sighted')
- [ ] Use language and images that represent them as an equal member of society
- [ ] Mention the disability only if it's relevant to the story or context
- [ ] Avoid ableist language (words or phrases that portray disability as a weakness)

5. Use plain language

- [ ] Start with a clear purpose
- [ ] Make sure the content answers the readers' most likely questions
- [ ] Organise the content logically, placing the most important information at the top
- [ ] Use descriptive and informative headings
- [ ] Keep paragraphs short and focused
- [ ] Write short sentences (15–20 words per sentence) — use more active voice
- [ ] Choose plain, familiar words
- [ ] Use an appropriate, engaging tone
- [ ] Use left alignment, white space, a readable font size, and good contrast
- [ ] Proofread to remove inaccuracies and inconsistencies