

**Sexual  
harassment :  
it's not part  
of the job**

# How to achieve a gender-inclusive vocabulary at work?

For a better use of English and a recognition of the diversity of gender identities and gender expressions in the workplace





This document is a non-exhaustive synthesis of various existing strategies regarding inclusive language. We encourage you to explore all the existing strategies and to deepen your research.

This document is an easy and practical tool to learn the various ways to make a document and your speech more inclusive in the workplace.

This document has been reviewed by :



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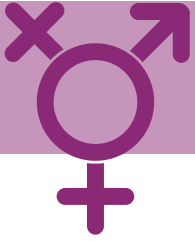
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# About gender diversity

Gender identity represent the way you describe your gender : male, female, somewhere in between or neither. It is not determined by a person's biological sex and can be distinguished from the gender assigned at birth. Gender identity is a personal and intimate experience that is unique to everyone.

## What is the transidentity ?

A **trans person** is a person whose gender identity does not correspond to the one assigned at birth. The word trans encompasses the words "transgender" and "transsexual", considered obsolete today. The transidentity is the identity of a trans person.

## What is the non binary identity ?

A **non binary person** is a person whose gender identity is neither exclusively male nor exclusively female. This identity can be a mix of different genders, both female and male or neither.

These definitions are taken from the online lexicon of the  
**Fondation Emergence.**

Find other definitions on the organization's website:  
<https://en.fondationemergence.org/lexique>

Inclusive vocabulary in the workplace is essential because it is the employer's responsibility to provide an inclusive and respectful workplace environment for workers.

**Adopting an inclusive vocabulary may be challenging but isn't that difficult!**

**A little bit of practice and it will become natural to use gender-neutral words in your speech and writing.**

80%

of trans people are experiencing **discrimination** at work especially because of:

- Individuals in the work environment refuse to use the correct first names and pronouns;
- Employers refuse to edit the employee's records to update informations and reflect their gender;
- Misgendering\* by the co-workers and/or employers.

*\*Misgendering someone is using uncorrect pronouns and adjectives of a person by forgetting, ignorance or spite.*

# Adopting an inclusive vocabulary at work

## Why adopt an inclusive vocabulary?

Speech can be a form of domination which influences people's mental representations of a society. The words and the expressions used can convey well-known stereotypes and bias used by generations like "a good father", "running or crying like a little girl", etc.

Using a gender-neutral language allows to:

- End the invisibility of women and sexual and gender minorities;
- Deconstruct stereotypes and bias;
- Ensure equal representations of all existing identities;
- Recognize the existing diversity of social identities ;
- Prevent harassment at work and discriminatory violences.

English is a more inclusive language than French. However, it is important to not use the masculine to represent a group of people or to talk about jobs (like "policeman") for instance.

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## Different simple strategies exist to adopt a gender-neutral vocabulary and to be more inclusive:

- Using non-discriminatory formulations;
- Using gender-neutral formulations.

**Use a strategy you are comfortable with.**

Gradually start to initiate change in your organization and communicate the different strategies to all of your staff.

There isn't a best strategy: you can mix and match the strategies as necessary.

# 1. Using non-discriminatory formulations

- **Avoid gender-biased expressions (especially for jobs)**

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The policeman

The police officer

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The fireman

The firefighter

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The husband or the wife

The partner

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- **The forms of address**

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"Mrs."

"Ms." or "Mx"

*It's better to try to generalize "Mrs" instead of "Ms" because you don't need to make a difference between a woman who is married and a woman who is single.*

*The "Mx" form is a gender neutral greeting to replace "Mr" and "Mrs"*

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## You are wondering if your language is discriminatory?

According to the *Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English*, written by the United Nations, **just reversing the gender of your sentence can help you to know if you're using a discriminatory language.**

Example:

- "Men cannot do two things at the same time."
- "Women cannot do two things at the same time."

Would reversing the masculine and the feminine change the meaning of your sentence? Does it sound weird to you?

Reference : <https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>

## 2. Using gender-neutral formulations (1)

- **The gender-neutral pronouns**

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**He/She** needs to know

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We need a manager who is reasonably flexible in **his/her** approach

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If the employee is not satisfied, **she** can come to see me, we'll find a solution.

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An employer needs to justify **himself** when **he** take that kind of decision.

**They** need to know

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We need a manager who is reasonably flexible in **their** approach

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Any employee **who** is not satisfied, can come to see me, we'll find a solution.

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Employers need to justify **themselves** when **they** take that kind of decision.

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### **In fact**

**Using the pronoun "they" is relatively ordinary.**

The singular pronoun "they" is usually used by writers when the gender of a person is unknown but also to refer to a specific known person who is using "they" as their pronouns.

"They" is sometimes used by non binary people to identify themselves.

## 2. Using gender-neutral formulations (2)

- **Rephrase your sentence to avoid gender terms**

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During a virtual meeting, an employee has to raise **his** hand before **his** intervention.

During a virtual meeting, **use** the "raise hand" function before speaking

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The officer has to explain the situation **he** is observing.

The officer has to explain the **observed** situation.

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### **Don't forget**

- Avoid gendered words
- Avoid using of masculine as a default
- Dismiss stereotypical and sexist expressions

### **In practice:**

If you don't know the gender of the person, it's better to use they/them than just the masculine form.

You can also introduce yourself by saying your own pronouns. This tip helps normalizing the diversity of gender identities.

### **It's ok to make mistake!**

If you do, apologize, continue your conversation and use the right pronouns.



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