

Language and Image

A guide to equity in gender representation
For people working and studying at the three university-level institutions in Lucerne

Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts

HOCHSCHULE
LUZERN

FH Zentralschweiz



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Dear reader

This is the English-language version of the 2020 “Sprache und Bild” guidelines jointly published by the three university-level institutions in Lucerne. Equal representation matters in any language, but the specific issues and shortcomings vary. You will find this reflected in this guide, which is considerably shorter in translation. Why? A significant proportion of the issues described in the German version simply do not exist in English. Unlike German, English has no grammatical genders and, with few exceptions, nouns describing people can be used for men and women alike. Traditional female-only forms such as “actress” are increasingly being replaced with their gender-neutral counterparts (“actor” in this case) and instances where there is no gender-neutral option available are rare. Having said that, non-binary gender identities are as poorly represented in English as they are in other languages. This guide offers some strategies to make our language and the images we use more inclusive. Fair communication strives to include all: by using language and images carefully and respectfully, we can break stereotypes - both in our heads and on paper.

Some bristle at having to change habits, perhaps unaware that equitable communication is not difficult at all. With this guide, we aim to provide guidance on the equal treatment of all genders, using examples that are intended to show that it takes but a little imagination and creativity to achieve it.

Take a couple of minutes to read this guide and get inspired to rethink, rewrite, and effect positive change.

In speech as in writing, always include people who do not (exclusively) identify as male or female.

Avoid binary language when addressing groups of people.

⊕ Esteemed guests, Dear colleagues, Dear readers, Hello everyone!
⊖ Ladies and gentlemen

When asking someone to share their official gender, please bear in mind that some countries (e.g., Australia) have an "X" option in addition to "M" and "F", and that some allow their citizens to not have an official gender designation at all.

⊕ Always give at least three options when asking for people's gender in forms and surveys, etc.
Official gender:
W / M / X / none or other
Gender identity:
W / M / other: _____
Preferred form of address:
Ms / Mr / Mx / no address

Use gender-neutral language.

Avoid gendered language. In English, there are a few inherently female nouns (mostly old-fashioned ones) that can be easily replaced with a gender-neutral option.

⊕ We met the new head of school. Call the housekeeper.

⊖ We met the new headmistress. Call the chambermaid.

He, she, or they?

Use “they” as a generic third-person singular pronoun to refer to a person whose gender is unknown (or irrelevant). Do not use “he” or “she” alone as generic third-person singular pronouns. Only use combination forms such as “he or she” if you know that these pronouns match the people being described.

⊕ A member of staff can receive a bonus if they attend the training. Each pupil brought their favourite toy to school. The cup of tea is theirs.

⊖ Each student needs to bring his or her own device. As a parent, he or she will be held accountable for his or her child’s actions.

⊕ After an exam, anyone would be happy to get their results quickly.

⊖ Any student would be happy to get his or her test results quickly.

Of course, “they” is not only a third-person singular pronoun: many people who identify as e.g., non-binary or gender-fluid use “they” as their preferred pronoun.

⊕ Evan said they can call you back. Please let them know if you are free this afternoon.

Always address people using their preferred gender and correct title.

When addressing someone, use language that reflects their gender: masculine for boys and men, feminine for girls and women, both masculine and feminine *or* gender-neutral for mixed groups, and gender neutral for people identifying as non-binary or gender-fluid.

⊕ Dear Ms König. Your coworker, Mr Koller, has notified us that he will withdraw his application. Hello, Mx Shaw. Your partner Olive said their train has been cancelled.

If you are unsure how to address people, just ask them.

When naming people, e.g., on lists, in registries and other contexts, always use their full name, role and proper title if possible.

⊕ Tonight's guests of honour are Professor Gitte Krüger-Burn, Musicologist at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, and Dr Samuel Burn, Lecturer for Theology at the University of Lucerne.

⊖ Tonight's guests of honour are G. Krüger-Burn and her husband.

Be careful to use appropriate language in historical accounts, citations and translations.

Historical accounts must be accurate.

⊕ In 1971, Swiss men voted to give women the vote.

In some cases, quotes must be reproduced verbatim, while in others, it is fine to paraphrase to make the language clearer or more inclusive. Know the difference!
⊖ “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.” (Rousseau) must not be changed to “Everyone is born free, and everywhere they are in chains.” (Rousseau)
⊕ However, you may change “The Pilots’ Association” said they supported the stewardesses’ call for higher wages.” into “The Pilots’ Association said they supported the flight attendants’ call for higher wages.”

Make sure to use gender-inclusive language in translation.

⊕ Simply turn the (grammatically male) “Deutschschweizer Nationalräte” into the (gender-inclusive) “Swiss German members of the National Council”.

Be mindful when choosing images.

Show the diversity we have or wish for. Images create reality.

Depict balanced, mixed groups and make sure to address underrepresented groups of people. Choose images where male and female people are equally distributed across the foreground and centre, and at the margins.

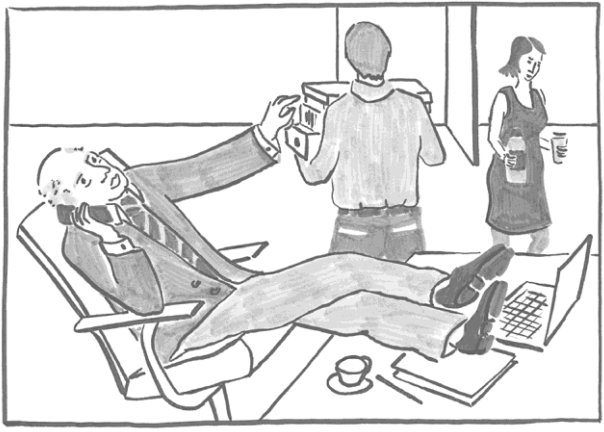




Challenge notions of “normal”. Images have an impact.

Avoid or break stereotypes conveyed through people’s appearance and activities. Help to foster a climate of openness, permeability and agility in our institutions by showing diverse role models.





Showcase social contexts. Images are powerful.

Give women and men varied but equivalent roles and avoid dominant or submissive body language. Compensate for differences in stature by arranging people accordingly.





Be careful when assigning meaning. Images evoke emotions.

Choose a neutral point of view. A camera angle looking down signifies a submissive subject, a low angle conveys dominance. Be careful how you lead the eye. A person placed in the centre will be noticed and appear important. Eye contact builds trust.





Show a climate of respect and appreciation. Images have a lasting impact.

Be mindful of hierarchies. Carefully assign levels of initiative and activity, expectation and passivity. Before you select an image, make sure you understand its potential impact and the values it might convey.





Use any opportunity to raise awareness through writing and images.

Images can be powerful tool to break stereotypes. Use captions that reinforce your message:

⊕ Hans Würsch, a socio-cultural animator, is serving soup to pupils at the Hubelmatt day-care centre.
⊕ Roza Barsani, a lecturer for electrical engineering, presents a self-moving robot.

Avoid clichés.

Avoid disparaging idioms and negative stereotypes about individuals or groups.

⊖ The fair sex, the strong sex, the man of the house, etc.

Have your writing, presentations, and (visual) concepts checked for stereotypes.

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