



# Guide to using inclusive language



## About this guide

As content producers, we write for a vast and diverse audience. Our content must represent our audience, be inclusive and respectful. This guide will help you to:

- increase your awareness of what inclusive language is
- understand why it's important
- be mindful of the language you use when producing content for internal and external audiences

Language is dynamic and evolves over time and place. This guide is not exhaustive, but is intended to be a reference for current and suitable terminology. Keeping up to date with the evolution of language will help you choose the most appropriate words for the situation.

This guide also:

- encourages you to be mindful of the role that unconscious bias plays in our written and spoken language
- helps us to relate to our colleagues and customers better
- encourages a culture of inclusivity, diversity and equity in our organisation, where inclusive language is a core part of our communications
- helps us to achieve our core value of being a progressive organisation

'How to use inclusive language' includes information on the nine protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010 (age, trans identities, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, disability, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation) and our own — care experience.

## How to use inclusive language

The protected characteristics

'People-first' and 'identity-first' language

Gender-neutral language

Referring to mental health

Neurodivergence

Socio-economic status

## ^ What is inclusive language and why is it important?

Inclusive language is the use of words and phrases that show an awareness of the vast diversity of people around us, respectfully referring to people rather than their attributes or characteristics. It's language that doesn't distinguish or discriminate people on the basis of the protected characteristics, outlined in the [Equality Act 2010](#).

### Language that is inclusive:

- is progressive, positive and respectful
- is easy to understand and accessible to all
- is gender-neutral
- avoids generalisations, stereotypes and biases
- is historically and culturally mindful

Using inclusive language is more than just avoiding offensive words — it's about promoting a fair and equal culture. As a public body, we have a duty under the [Public sector equality duty](#) to help reduce socio-economic inequalities in society.

The three aims of the [Public sector equality duty](#) are to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

Using inclusive language should go some way towards achieving these goals.

It's important that we know the history, connotation and effects of our language, with consideration to whether they align with our brand, values and audience.

## ^ Who decides what is and isn't inclusive?

While there's no shortage of feedback and opinion on what is or isn't inclusive, ultimately, it's up to those who belong to marginalised groups to decide the parameters of what language or terminology is appropriate.

Inclusive language is a broad topic with very few concrete rules. There are many different groups of people with different priorities, histories and perspectives. There's no single authority that can tell us what good or bad practice is. The best way for us to decide what is inclusive and what isn't is by asking our audience, colleagues and stakeholders, and encourage open discourse on the topic.

What might be preferred language for one person may not be preferred by another. Whenever you are unsure of preferred language, ask the individual concerned what their preferred terminology is.

## ^ How to be inclusive

Language influences culture. Due to persistent inequality and discrimination in society, we must adapt our language to encourage change. Our writing should represent our audience, our internal colleagues, our stakeholders and, as far as possible, society as a whole. The best ways to achieve this are to:

- be conscious of the history of any informal terms you use because terms which were previously acceptable can quickly become inappropriate
- correctly reference people and their cultures and avoid gender-biased words and phrases
- consider people's learning preferences and accessibility needs
- avoid stereotypes and be mindful of your own unconscious biases

If in doubt, speak to with colleagues who have that particular area of expertise. See the [Who can help you](#) section for more information and contact details.

Go to [How to use inclusive language](#) section for information on:

- [the protected characteristics](#)
- ['people-first' language and 'identity-first' language](#)
- [gender-neutral language](#)
- [referring to mental health](#)
- [neurodivergence](#)
- [socio-economic status](#)

Equality, diversity and inclusion training can help develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes we need to create an inclusive and welcoming work environment. [You can access the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training module on SQA Academy.](#)

## ^ Who can help you

There are three teams across SQA that each work on different aspects of equality, diversity and inclusion:

- [HR Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(EDI\)](#) develop, review and implement equality, diversity and inclusion policies, processes and engagement activities that ensure SQA is an organisation where all colleagues can bring their authentic selves to work, are valued for their uniqueness, and have a voice that is heard.
- The [Corporate Equality Team](#) work with colleagues across the organisation to promote and embed equality, diversity and inclusion, and support SQA to meet its responsibilities relating to the [Equality Act 2010 \(Public sector equality duty\)](#) and the Children and Young People Act 2014. This Team also support work to develop SQA's equality and corporate parenting action plans, SQA's Equality Steering Group, Equality Sub-Groups, Corporate Parenting Steering Group, Children's Rights Steering Group and Employee Networks.
- The [Policy Analysis and Standards \(PAS\) Equalities Team](#) supports Operations and Qualifications Development colleagues, ensuring that qualifications and assessments are as equitable as possible for all learners, and that equalities

considerations are embedded into all stages of the design and review of SQA's products and services.

If you're looking for lived experience, peer support and guidance, contact:

- [Appreciate Culture and Ethnicity \(ACE\) Network](#)
- [Disability Network](#)
- [Men's Shed](#)
- [Rainbow Network](#)
- [Women's Network](#)



How to use inclusive language



Different models of disability and mental health



Glossary of LGBTQIA+ terms



Resources we used to help create this guide