

# Recommendations for inclusive communication in health research

Written, oral and audiovisual



Hypatia Community

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**Hypatia Community:**

This document has been developed within the framework of the work programme of the Hypatia Community of Practice (Hypatia Community). This community was set up following the first Summit for Gender Equality and Women's Leadership in Biomedical Sciences and Health Sciences. The summit was held in Girona on 22nd October 2019 with the participation of the directors of biomedical & health research centres in Catalonia. The Hypatia Community has promoted several actions coordinated by the Agència de Qualitat i Avaluació Sanitàries de Catalunya (AQuAS) and, since 2017, AQuAS has promoted a "responsible" or transformative research evaluation model. It uses ex-ante, ongoing, ex-post, and impact evaluation instruments to identify transformation needs and to promote progress through the participation of key agents in the system (Health Research Evaluation System, SARIS). In the case of gender equality, the Catalan Research Results Centre and the PERIS (Strategic Plan for Research and Innovation in Health of Catalonia) evaluation reports have been the key instruments of accountability used to promote transformative participatory actions.

# SUMMARY

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# Presentation

This document is an instrument that aims to promote inclusive language through a series of recommendations. It contains examples and strategies of preferable and non-recommended uses to demonstrate practical applications, and aims to provide resources, inspire others, and raise awareness to contribute to consolidating the full, respectful, and non-discriminatory inclusion of any group and diversity. For this reason, the document includes examples not only of the treatment of gender, but also of the communicative treatment of disabilities, health issues, and cultural groups.

This tool is intended as support for inclusive communication in health research institutions, complementary to the official language guidelines and style manuals of these institutions. It is therefore aimed at all staff in research institutions, whatever their field or speciality.

The document is divided into two parts. In the first part, you will find recommendations for written and oral communication and, in the second, recommendations for audiovisual communication (including references to social media, infographics, images, and videos). At the end of the document, there is a bibliography containing all the guidelines consulted and other reference documents that may be of interest.

# 9

## **recommendations for inclusive written and oral communication**

The following recommendations aim to promote neutrality and equality in written and oral communication through diversity, visibility, and reducing traditional stereotypes.

# 01

## Avoid words that use *man* when you want to include other people

✓ **Humankind has / Humanity has / The human race / Humans have faced many epidemics**

✗ *Mankind has faced many epidemics*

---

✓ **The laboratory employed more personnel during the epidemic**

✗ *The laboratory employed more manpower during the epidemic*

---

✓ **Allergies to synthetic/artificial fibres  
Participants were exposed to high levels of human-caused noise**

✗ *Allergies to man-made fibres*

*Participants were exposed to high levels of man-made noise*

---

✓ **French people / The French had lower levels of cholesterol**

✗ *Frenchmen had lower levels of cholesterol*

---

# 02

## Find alternatives to *he* or *she* when you are talking to or about a group, or giving instructions

Use *they/their* for singular words

✓ **The technician must leave their labcoat on the hook provided on leaving**

**A researcher can request leave from their group leader**

**When a student is selected they will be informed**

✗ *The technician must leave his labcoat on the hook provided on leaving*

*A researcher can request leave from his or her group leader*

*When a student is selected he/she will be informed*

---

Use *one*

✓ **A researcher in Spain earns less than one in Germany**

✗ *A researcher in Spain earns less than he would in Germany*

---

Avoid the pronoun

✓ **Patient inclusion is not dependent on age**

✗ *Inclusion of a patient is not dependent on his age*

---

→ Avoid alternating *he* and *she* in texts or forms such as *he/she* or *he* or *she* if possible.

# 03

## Use a neutral approach (job titles, etc)

Most job titles are gender-neutral in English, but a few are not

✔ **Jane Smith and John Brown are the chairs for the two sessions**

✘ *Jane Smith and John Brown are the chairman and chairwoman for the two sessions*

---

✔ **The institute has appointed an ombuds officer / ombudsperson**

✘ *The institute has appointed an ombudsman*

---

✔ **Please provide a layperson's abstract**

✘ *Please provide a layman's abstract*

---

✔ **We must hire three stewards for the conference**

✘ *We must hire three hostesses for the conference*

---

Avoid adding *woman/male* etc to jobs titles, but note that some titles like *midwife* are used for men and women)

✔ **Women represent 45% of the doctors employed**

✘ *Women doctors represent 45% of the workforce*

---

✔ **Men responding to the nursing questionnaire reported more incidences**

✘ *Male nurses reported more incidences than women*

---

Sometimes it is necessary to emphasise that both sexes are included

✔ **The session on microaggressions is obligatory for both male and female students**

✘ *The session on microaggressions is obligatory for students. (Some people may not feel it refers to them)*

---

✔ **All children received the HPV vaccine, both boys and girls**

✘ *All children received the HPV vaccine. (Some people may assume it is only relevant for one sex)*

---



# 04

## Treat men and women the same way in texts and when speaking, including informally

If you are using *Dr*, be sure to use it for all people who have the title in the context.

- ✓ **What do you think about Dr Smith and Dr Brown opening the meeting? (or John and Julia)**
- ✗ *What do you think about Dr Smith and Julia opening the meeting?*

- 
- ✓ **This is Dr Smith, Head of our Cytometry Unit and Dr Brown runs the Genomics Facility**
  - ✗ *This is Dr Smith, Head of our Cytometry Unit and Maria runs the Genomics Facility*

- 
- ✓ **“Our participation in the project is due to our strength in bioinformatics”, said Dr Pere Sanchez. “This project will benefit patients directly,” concluded Dr Nuria Martin”**
  - ✗ *“Our participation in the project is due to our strength in bioinformatics”, said Dr Pere Sanchez. “This project will benefit patients directly,” concluded Nuria Martin”*
-

# 05

## Personal pronouns

The majority of people use the normal gendered pronouns (**she/her** and **he/him**) but some people prefer to use **they/their** or even other personal pronouns (**ze/hir/hirs** or **ze/zir/zirs**). This is now reflected on sites such as LinkedIn, for example. There are also many other alternative pronouns, although they are not so frequent.

Some academics may introduce themselves and tell you their pronouns: *I am Alex Taylor, I use they/their.*

In some universities in some English-speaking countries, you may be asked to remember students' pronouns as well as their names: *Dr Taylor is giving the seminar. Ze is waiting in the room now.*

# 06

## Avoid stereotypical expressions with negative connotations or that exclude some groups

✓ **Explain your project the way you would explain it to your grandparents / a member of your family**

✗ *Explain your project the way you would explain it to your grandmother*

---

✓ **Avoid giving a weak handshake when you are introduced**

✗ *Avoid giving an effeminate handshake when you are introduced*

---

✓ **Students need to gather their courage before they give their talk**

✗ *Students need to man-up before they give their talk*

---

✓ **Don't overthink the problem, hurry up and finish the job**

✗ *Don't be such an old woman, hurry up and finish the job (sexist and ageist)*

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✓ **Parents/carers of small children**

✗ *Mothers and fathers of small children*

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✓ **Partner/spouse (informally significant other)**

✗ *Husband/wife or girlfriend/boyfriend*

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# 07

## Use people-centred language when you refer to people with illnesses

✔ **People with diabetes**

✘ *Diabetics, people suffering from diabetes*

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✔ **People living with HIV**

✘ *HIV positive, AIDS patient*

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✔ **Wheelchair user**

✘ *Confined to a wheelchair*

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✔ **People living with disability, disabled person**

✘ *The disabled, the handicapped*

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✔ **Non-disabled, enabled, does not have a disability**

✘ *Able-bodied*

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✔ **Accessible car park/toilet**

✘ *Disabled car park/toilet*

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✔ **Someone with restricted growth or short stature, person with dwarfism**

✘ *Dwarf*

---

✔ **Person with a mental health condition**

✘ *Mentally ill, mental patient*

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✔ **Neurodiverse**

✘ *Autistic*

---

# 08

## Avoid using expressions with cultural connotations for people of different ages

✓ **Advice on how to keep sessions running smoothly, “Listen to everybody and allow everybody in the group to participate with nobody dominating”**

✗ *Advice on how to keep sessions running smoothly, “Be good listeners but don’t let seniors talk for too long!”*

---

✓ **“We never stop learning”**

✗ *“There is still so much to learn, even for old age pensioners (OAPs)”*

---

✓ **There is no need to refer to people’s age if it is not relevant to the case**

✗ *My mentor, a 71-year old grandma proves that age is just a number! He’s only 27 but has already set up a start-up*

---

✓ **Avoid thinking of people older than you as different**

✗ *..made me realize the importance of treating the elderly with the same attitude and approach as treating younger patients*

---

✓ **Avoid characterizing behaviours as unusual in older people**

✗ *I hope when I grow old I can still be as fashionable and full of life as my mentor is!*

---

✓ **We’ll ask the early career researchers to set up the seminar room**

✗ *We’ll get the kids to set up the seminar room*

---

✓ **The session is for early career researchers / PhD researchers**

✗ *The session is for PhD students*

---

# 09

## Take care to avoid language that may offend some groups

The names for ethnic groups may differ in different parts of the world. If necessary, when talking to and referring to individuals, ask how they identify.

✓ **Ethnicity**

✗ *Race*

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✓ **Ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities)**

✗ *Non-white*

---

✓ **People from a black Caribbean background, the black ethnic group, black people**

✗ *Blacks*

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✓ **People from a white European background, the white ethnic group, and white people**

✗ *Whites (or saying nothing, implying it is the norm)*

---

✓ **People with a mixed ethnic background, people from the mixed ethnic group**

✗ *Mixed race, mixed race people*

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✓ **People from the Pakistani ethnic group**

✗ *Pakistani people*

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✓ **Students from the Chinese ethnic group**

✗ *Chinese students*

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✓ **People of colour**

✗ *From an ethnic minority*

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- There are white ethnic minorities, for example Gypsy or Roma people. So ethnic minorities cannot be used to mean all groups except white groups. You can use all other ethnic groups combined to compare to the white ethnic group.
- In tables, ethnic groups are ordered alphabetically and the white ethnic group is not put first.
- Some ethnic groups are also nationalities (Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani). So Pakistani students is correct to describe students from that country. For students living in Catalonia we refer to students of the Pakistani ethnic group.

# 15

## recommendations for inclusive audiovisual communication

Strive to represent the diversity of groups and society and give a voice to people who are often invisible, without reproducing or perpetuating stereotypes. Promote and reflect the change of values in society by representing the roles of people in power with figures other than just the male, also eliminating the objectification or sexualisation of women.

## Putting it into practice

# 01

Show the **diversity of research teams** in corporate images and videos and balance the presence of different groups of people in audiovisual research materials.

# 02

As well as working towards equality in the number of appearances of men and women, also ensure the **quality of these appearances**: approach, position, what each person is talking about, the role they play in the discourse, etc.

# 03

Use audiovisuals in which **women/men occupy roles in which they are not usually shown**, such as in roles of power or practising historically masculinised or feminised professions.

# 04

**Show groups that are usually invisible**, either because of gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnic or cultural origin, religion etc, as protagonists or occupying roles of power in audiovisuals, social media, and other channels of communication.

# 05

**Show diverse teams and groups** without attributing or relating a specific gender to them, and ensure they represent the diversity of the group itself, avoiding generalisations, rivalries, and segregation. Do not segregate men and women in images as if they were two different groups.

# 06

**Balance the appearance of women and men** in images and videos, as well as male and female figures in infographics or illustrations in relation to the total number of people appearing. Ensure a balance in both the size and duration of the images within the compositions. Use male and female voices interchangeably in audiovisuals to eliminate the association of men with authority, credibility, and reliability.

# 07

Use images of people **without basing them on stereotypes** related with the identity or expression of gender or sexual orientation but on their research activity.

# 08

Use images and create visual compositions to **promote a change of values** and break with stereotypical images and clichés, making women visible in areas or activities in which they are underrepresented (such as researchers, group leaders, managers, etc.).



# 09

Incorporate the female voice, helping to **show and recognise women's successes and contributions**, their needs and expectations while creating female references.

# 10

Contribute to giving a **real image of the diversity of people** who form part of the organisation and society, avoiding a single default model of a person which often tends to be physically normative.

# 11

Use images or figures with **diverse physiques (female and male) without sexualising them**, and make sure they are in line with the general content of the communication to be made.

# 12

**Describe the protagonists** of the messages without mentioning their body, clothing, skin tone or identity/sexual orientation.

# 13

Ensure that **icons/emojis are inclusive and plural** and that they have a generic, neutral or abstract value, and make use of colours without attributing them to a specific gender or ethnic group.

# 14

Opt for photographs or videos with open horizontal shots showing activities, equipment or people without focusing attention on any part of the body, or use close-ups to present people individually. Avoid high or low angle shots.

# 15

Also try to use other languages or dialects.



### Videos

✔ Include the full name of the people and their post or position. Opt for using the name given by the person themselves

✔ Use wide angles so as not to objectify or sexualise women's bodies



✔ Or close-ups to show facial expressions, without objectifying or sexualising

✔ Avoid high-angle and low-angle shots



**Research institute profile**  
@researchinstituteprofile

**NEW** A study lidered by @researcherprofile shows therapy’s potential adopted in...

🗣️ “The results open a new window for patients treatment...”  
🖋️ Published in @sciencemagazineprofile

More information ➡️ [link](#)



Use wide angles so as not to objectify or sexualise women’s bodies



Show the true diversity of the research teams



Help improve the perceived image of research work



**Research institute profile**  
@researchinstituteprofile

● Dr Maria XXX @researcherprofile: “Researcher pronouncement”

This research can make a difference in the disease treatment... thanks @associationprofile1 and @associationprofile2 funding.

Read the article ➡️ [Link](#)





**Research institute profile**  
@researchinstituteprofile

We've participated in the X research annual meeting organized by @researchinstituteprofile broadcasted by @tvtvprofile

👂 Watch the meeting again and @researcherprofile intervention about the importance of implicate #patients and the public in #healthresearch:

[Link](#)



**Research institute profile**  
@researchinstituteprofile

📅 Register for the second #researchnameevent

◆ Conference title

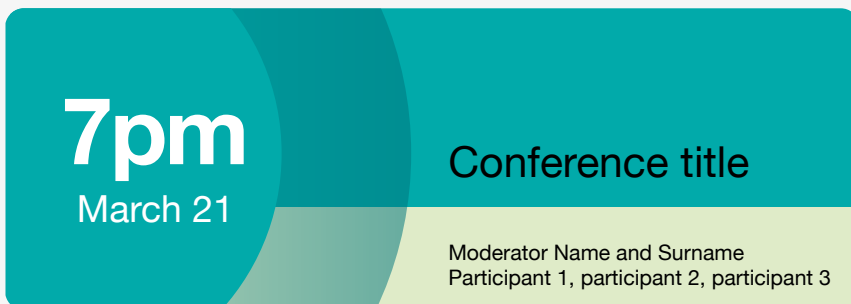
🗣️ Moderator @perfilparticipant

With participant1, participant2, participant3

📅 March 21


📍 @researchinstituteprofile

[Link](#)






Conference tweets

- ✓ Use neutral emoticons
- ✓ Include the full names of the people taking part
- ✓ Treat people equally

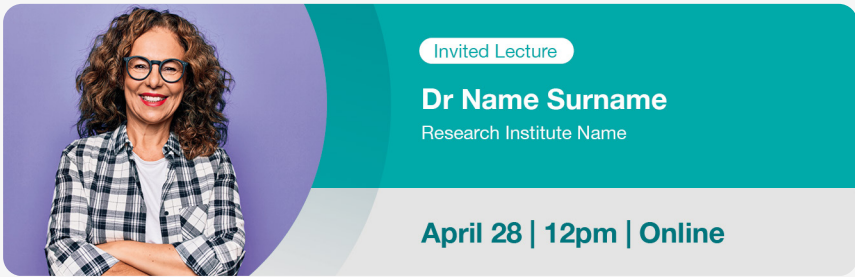
 **Research institute profile**  
@researchinstituteprofile

#InvitedLecture are here again with Dr Name Surname @participantprofilet from @researchinstituteprofile


“Conference title”

 April 28  
 12pm  
 Online

Register now  
[Link](#)






The poster features a portrait of a woman with glasses and a plaid shirt on the left. On the right, a teal background contains the text: 'Invited Lecture', 'Dr Name Surname', 'Research Institute Name', and 'April 28 | 12pm | Online'.

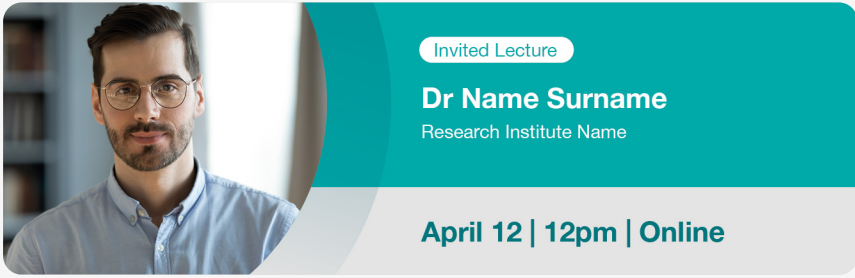
 **Research institute profile**  
@researchinstituteprofile

Don't miss Dr Name Surname @participantprofile #InvitedLecture:

“Conference title”

 April 13  
 12pm  
 Online

Register now  
[Link](#)



The poster features a portrait of a man with glasses and a light blue shirt on the left. On the right, a teal background contains the text: 'Invited Lecture', 'Dr Name Surname', 'Research Institute Name', and 'April 12 | 12pm | Online'.



**Research institute profile**  
@researchinstituteprofile

Research team from #investigationname project has won the prize #prizename... organized by @prizeprofileprofile

[Link](#)



Help raise awareness of the successes of female researchers

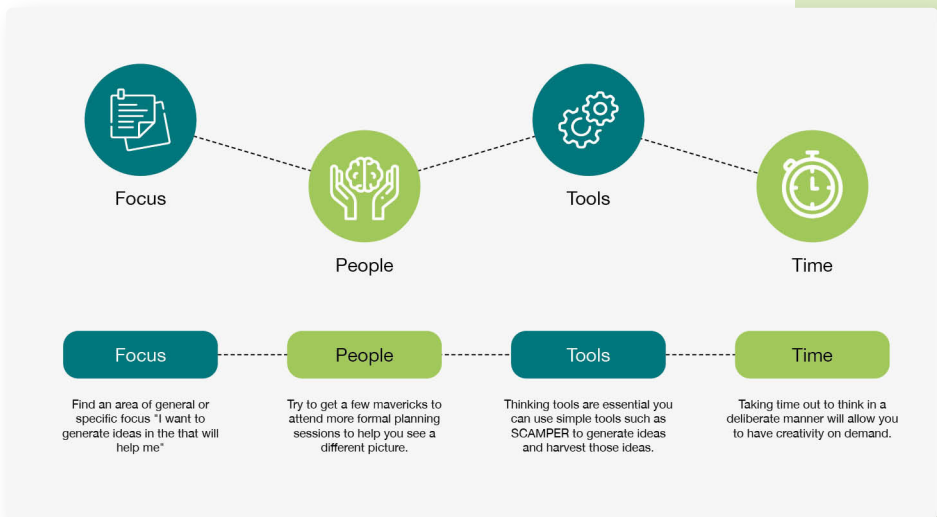


**Research institute profile**  
@researchinstituteprofile

🔍 The -study name- shows the efficiency of drugs in mutation cases as... Name and Surname @researcherprofile, #researchinstitutename researcher, is co-author:

[Link](#)





✓ Use neutral emoticons and illustrations

✓ Make use of colours without attributing them to a specific gender or ethnic group

# Reference guides and documents

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The Agency for Health Quality and Assessment of Catalonia (AQuAS) is a public entity of the Catalan Health Ministry of the Government of Catalonia acting for public policies. Its mission is to generate relevant knowledge by evaluating and analysing data for decision-making in order to improve the health of citizens and the sustainability of the Catalan Health Care System. AQuAS is a founding member of the International Network of Agencies of Health Technology Assessment (INAHTA) and the International School on Research Impact Assessment (ISRIA), it is a corporate member of Health Technology Assessment International (HTAi), of the CIBER group (Networked Biomedical Research Centers) in Epidemiology and Public Health, and of REDISSEC (Spanish Research Network on Health Services in Chronic Diseases), and of RICAPPS (Research Network in Chronicity, Primary Care and Health Promotion), as well as an associated unit of the INGENIO (CSIC-UPV) research centre. AQuAS was awarded the Josep Trueta Medal for its health merits by the Government of Catalonia.

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