

Putting these Guidelines into Action

Being inclusive is a HKUST core value. This means everyone in the University community needs to continually strive to uphold and develop this value.

So take care to always be inclusive in your use of language, whether talking informally with one other person, taking part in a meeting or writing to a large group.



These guidelines apply to the use of any language in the University, not only English.

To learn more about inclusive language at HKUST, scan this QR code:



Guidelines for

Use of Inclusive Language in the HKUST Community

Using language that helps everyone feel valued and respected



Diversity and Equal Opportunities

- For general enquiries: deoc@ust.hk
- For discrimination/harassment complaints: ead@ust.hk
- <https://deo.hkust.edu.hk>

These guidelines were written by members of the Community for Enhancing Intercultural Learning Experiences, in consultation with faculty in the School of Humanities and Social Science and members of the Diversity and Equal Opportunities Committee.

...we will foster appreciation of diversity to bring the HKUST community together.

This will be assisted by enhanced communication and promotion of inclusiveness.

Strategic Plan 2021-2028

What is inclusive language and why is it important?

Language is powerful and the words you speak and write can exclude or include others.

Use of language that is inclusive helps everyone feel valued and respected members of the HKUST community. It helps foster a sense of belonging and promotes diversity and equal opportunity in the University.

By incorporating inclusive language use into daily campus life, students also develop the skills necessary to communicate effectively and respectfully in professional and social settings beyond the University.



How Can I Use Inclusive Language?

Eight key ways to make your language inclusive:

1 Use person-centered language: focus on emphasizing the worth of individuals as people rather than “labelling” them. For example, “A person with a substance use disorder” rather than “an addict”.

A teal speech bubble containing a white number '1' and a small icon of a person's head with red hair.

2 Consider the situation: ask yourself whether it is relevant to refer to characteristics such as nationality, gender, sexuality, or disability. For example, “My colleague facilitated the workshop”, rather than “My Chinese colleague facilitated the workshop”.

A red speech bubble containing a white number '2' and a small icon of a person's head with yellow hair.

3 Accept and appreciate different varieties of a language: be mindful that a particular accent, for example, is not an indication of intelligence or competence. Also avoid disparaging references to someone’s form of language. For example, “Singlish” (Singaporean English) is really funny.

A teal speech bubble containing a white number '3' and a small icon of a person's head with yellow hair.

4 Use language that is easy to understand: use the “common language” that everyone in an interaction understands. In addition, make sure your style of language is easily understood. Keep to plain language, not colloquial expressions and jargon. For example, instead of saying someone is “in the loop”, say they are aware.

A yellow speech bubble containing a white number '4' and a small icon of a person's head with red hair.

5 Avoid “othering”: othering is an “us-versus-them” way of thinking. Classifying nations as “good” or “evil” is one example. Similarly, stating “We do things this way here” or “They have to learn to fit in” is othering.

A teal speech bubble containing a white number '5' and a small icon of two people's heads, one yellow and one teal.

6 Refrain from stereotyping: don’t assign certain characteristics, traits, or ways of behaving to all members of a group. For example, “You’re Asian. You must be good at mathematics”.

A teal speech bubble containing a white number '6' and a small icon of a person's head with teal hair.

7 Steer clear of unbalanced language: this refers to language that perpetuates inequality or results in unfair treatment. Examples include using “he” as the go-to pronoun or referring to a woman as a “housewife”.

A red speech bubble containing a white number '7' and a small icon of a person's head with yellow hair.

8 Don’t make assumptions: avoid using language that assumes someone’s nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or other aspects of their identity. For example, don’t assume that everyone celebrates a religious festival such as Christmas. Ask instead: “What will you do over the holidays?”

A yellow speech bubble containing a white number '8' and a small icon of a person's head with teal hair.