Inclusive Language

What is it for?

Inclusive language means using words that respect everyone. It avoids words that leave out, sideline, or put down groups of people, for example because of disability, race, gender, sexuality, age, or wealth.

In accessibility, language is a critical part of the user experience. Non-inclusive language creates significant barriers, making people feel unwelcome, unseen, or disrespected. These barriers include:

- Ableist language (e.g., 'lame', 'crazy', 'blind spot') uses disability as a negative metaphor, which can be offensive and alienating
- Biased or gendered terms (e.g., 'salesman', 'guys') can exclude people who don't identify with those terms
- Complicated jargon or sayings can be real barriers for people with cognitive disabilities, people who don't speak English as a first language, or people who find reading hard
- Using labels (e.g., 'the disabled') defines people by their condition rather than as individuals

This is a communication practice, not a technical feature. It is fully supported and encouraged across all platforms and forms of communication.

How to support it

To ensure your language is inclusive, you must be conscious, precise, and empathetic in your word choices.

Use person-first language (e.g., 'a person with vision loss') unless a group or individual expresses a preference for identity-first language (e.g., 'an autistic person'). When in doubt, person-first is often a safer starting point. The Deaf community generally prefers identity-first language (e.g., 'Deaf people').

Avoid ableist metaphors. Instead of 'that idea is lame', say 'that idea is underdeveloped'. Instead of 'fell on deaf ears', say 'the feedback was ignored'.

Use neutral terms. Opt for 'everyone', 'team', or 'you all' instead of 'guys'. Use 'parent' instead of 'mother/father', and 'partner' instead of 'husband/wife/boyfriend/girlfriend' if you don't know.

Be specific and clear. Avoid jargon and write in plain language. Clearly describe functionality without assuming ability (e.g., instead of 'Click here', use 'Select the 'Submit' button').

Useful links

- Home Office Design System: Inclusive language
- Harder than you think: developing an inclusive language guide
- The Quick Guide to Inclusive Language