Inclusive Communication at Greiner

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1. Introduction

Dear colleagues,

This **guide to inclusive communication** supports us in all forms of internal and external communication. The aim is to create a communication culture that is as inclusive as possible, in which no one is discriminated against or excluded. As a globally active family business, **openness and appreciation** are particularly important to us.

Our group-wide diversity policy which supports diversity, equity & inclusion forms the basis for a conscious and responsible approach to diversity at Greiner. It reinforces our principles, values and understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion and shows that Greiner opposes all forms of discrimination, harassment and bullying without exception. We want to ensure that our employees can increase their individual potential regardless of gender, age, background, social status, sexual orientation, religion and mental or physical abilities.

Inclusive communication is a far-reaching topic. Therefore, this document cannot cover every aspect that exists in detail. We are convinced that inclusive communication is not something we learn and memorize. Instead, it continually develops from a desire to communicate respectfully and positively, through practice of the learned skills.

In this guide, you will find points of reference for various challenges that we are confronted with in our day-to-day work. The examples and recommendations given are not intended to impose one-size-fits-all solutions. There is **no one right way** to express yourself inclusively. By using the guidelines as a reference, teams can develop an authentic form of communication for themselves that does not exclude or discriminate against anyone.

As language is constantly changing, we will also adapt these guidelines as needed.

The Greiner Diversity Team
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2. Learning to Understand Inclusive Communication

What does inclusive communication mean for Greiner?

For Greiner, inclusive communication is a **deliberate form of communication** that promotes respect and appreciation in information exchange and, in case of doubt, also demands it. In line with our corporate values, we want to ensure that people with their individual backgrounds, abilities and identities are treated openly, respectfully and fairly.

Inclusive communication is **not limited to our choice of words**. It also includes gestures, body language, visual and auditory representation and the way in which information is presented.

Inclusive communication is a skill that needs to be actively learned and consolidated through practice. A basic prerequisite for inclusive communication is that we also **treat people who do not communicate inclusively** with respect and fairness.

Many situations in everyday working life show that inclusive communication is a continuous process, for example:

- email communication between colleagues
- meeting facilitation
- casual conversations in the workplace
- performance management
- **In short: in every exchange with our fellow human beings.**

This variety of individual situations and the decisions made in them give rise to our local working atmospheres, which in turn are a key part of Greiner's organizational culture.

This clearly shows us that the motto "We are all part of the big picture" should not just be understood as an ideal, but rather be consciously lived in our everyday interactions with one another.

Why is inclusive communication important?

The concept of inclusive communication is important regarding the following areas:

+ **Integrating diversity:** inclusive communication helps to break down barriers between one another and to create a sense of belonging and safety for all. This allows us to better develop our individual abilities and needs, which in turn leads to better decisions and work results.

+ **Avoiding discrimination:** unconscious bias is often anchored in our language and therefore manifests itself in discriminatory statements, among other things. Greiner is committed to combating discrimination. Sexist and any other form of degrading communication contradicts our values and the basic concept of inclusive communication.

+ **Recognizing and considering needs correctly:** Inclusive communication takes the needs of people with different abilities – especially disabilities – into account. Disability should not be considered a problem. The focus should rather be on external conditions that have a disabling effect on people with different abilities. These include the needs of the workforce as well as customer needs. An understanding of who is (not) being communicated to is essential for this.

+ **Promoting empathy:** Inclusive communication encourages us to put ourselves in the shoes of our colleagues. Conflicts and disagreements often arise because we have difficulty understanding the situation and perspective of others. Inclusive communication promotes a respectful exchange, as we build empathy when we know each other better.

+ **Communicating efficiently:** Inclusive communication improves the likelihood that the content of messages is received as originally intended and by everyone to whom these messages are directed. This prevents misunderstandings from the very beginning. This efficiency is invaluable for a globally active company like Greiner.

What happens if we don't communicate inclusively?

We understand that the absence of inclusive communication can be the cause of numerous problems.

However, these problems are often not immediately and directly linked to the form of communication. The following points can be signs and/or consequences of a lack of inclusive communication:

× **Lack of commitment and dissatisfaction among employees:** When employees feel that their needs and perspectives are not being considered, it often leads to lower engagement, dissatisfaction or (internal) resignation.

× **Cultural tensions and conflicts:** Ignoring cultural differences and a lack of sensitive communication can lead to tensions and conflicts between employees. This hinders teamwork.

× **Poor working climate:** The absence of inclusive communication often leads to a working climate in which mistrust and insecurity prevail. A lack of psychological security is demotivating.

× **Lower customer satisfaction and loyalty:** Poor communication can also have an impact on customers. Interested parties who do not feel addressed due to communication issues will not become customers in the first place. Discriminatory or unfriendly interactions can cause customers to switch to other providers.

× **Lack of diverse applications for vacancies:** If mainly people apply who are very similar in their identity and CV (homogeneous tendency), this can often be attributed to how the job advertisements are designed.

× **Negative evaluations & feedback:** A lack of inclusive communication can become apparent in internal quality assurance, surveys or feedback interviews. In times of social media and online evaluations, negative experiences can quickly be made public. Hence, this feedback must be taken seriously as it always reflects the internal communication at Greiner.

At Greiner, appreciation and openness are of high importance. Therefore, we are actively committed to inclusive communication.

3. Constant Change in Language and Writing

Language is dynamic. **It changes over time as it is used.** New words emerge, meanings get blurred or expand, and grammar rules can shift. This guide will therefore also have to be adapted to new circumstances at regular intervals.

The constant change of language and writing reflects developments in society, technology and culture. Digitalization and globalization have accelerated this process, as people from different regions and backgrounds influence language use. **Language is therefore always shaped by geographical factors.**

In the English language, the use of masculine nouns/pronouns in a generic fashion was standard practice for a long time. Gender-inclusive language developed as a response to promote gender equality and fight gender bias.

Language is constantly changing. This can be noticed in terms or proverbs, for instance, which may have been widely used a few decades ago but are now considered discriminatory and outdated. In the opposite way, we might recognize words in everyday language that were previously considered an insult. We expect that our current understanding of non-discriminatory language, too, will not be valid forever.

4. Inclusive Communication in Practice

Gender-inclusive language

By applying gender-inclusive language, we can ensure that we address all genders equally. If we only use the generic masculine form, we exclude people that do not identify with this form. Numerous studies have shown that we primarily think of men, when we use the generic masculine form. Gender-inclusive language helps us to address people more precisely.

Several strategies can be adopted to apply gender-inclusive language: (1) using gender-neutral expressions, (2) using inclusive language, and (3) using both feminine and masculine forms as separate words or through the use of slashes.

Using gender-neutral expressions

When we want to address men and women, we should avoid using the masculine form, for example, using businessmen, when referring to both men and women working in business. Whenever possible, we use a gender-neutral alternative.

Avoid ⊗	Prefer ⊘
Hi guys!/Hi girls!	Hi all!
Businessmen	Representatives, Business community, Business people
Dear ladies and gentlemen	Dear all, dear guests
Husband/Wife	Spouse, Partner
Chairmen	Chair, Chairperson

Using inclusive language

Another way to avoid the generic masculine form is to modify the sentence to make it gender neutral. We can do this (1) by omitting the masculine reference word, (2) by using the passive voice, (3) by using plural forms for both nouns and reference words or (4) by making use of "they/their" to refer back to singular nouns ("singular they").

Avoid ⊗	Omitting the masculine reference word ⊘	Using the passive voice ⊘	Using the plural ⊘	Using they/their ⊘
Each manager should send one of his employees to the meeting.	Each manager should send one employee to the meeting.	One employee should be sent to the meeting by each manager.	Managers should send one of their employees to the meeting.	Each manager should send on of their employees to the meeting
The colleague must submit his project on Monday.	The colleague must submit the project on Monday.	The project must be submitted on Monday.	*Note: If we talk about a specific colleague, using the plural is not possible.*	The colleague must submit their project on Monday.
Each participant must present his ID badge.	Each participant must present an ID badge.	The ID badge must be presented by each participant.	The participants must present their ID badge.	Each participant must present their ID badge.
A new business owner needs enough money to establish his business.	A new business owner needs enough money to establish a business.	Enough money is needed to establish a new business.	New business owners need enough money to establish their businesses.	A new business owner needs enough money to establish their business.

Using both feminine and masculine forms

In some cases, it might make sense to use the feminine and masculine forms of the words. This can be applied by (1) using both feminine and masculine reference words, (2) alternating genders and pronouns, (3) using slashes when writing both forms of words.

Avoid ⊗	Feminine & masculine reference words ✓	Alternating genders and pronouns ✓	Using slashes ✓
Each manager should send one of his employees to the meeting.	Each manager should send one of his or her employees to the meeting.	*Note: Genders and pronouns cannot be alternated in this example.*	Each manager should send one of his/her employees to the meeting.
What he thinks is important to know. Every colleague deserves to be heard.	What she or he thinks is important to know. Every colleague deserves to be heard.	What he thinks is important to know. Her opinion matters too! Every colleague deserves to be heard.	What he/she thinks is important to know. Every colleague deserves to be heard.
A new business owner needs enough money to establish his business.	A new business owner needs enough money to establish his or her business.	*Note: Genders and pronouns cannot be alternated in this example.*	A new business owner needs enough money to establish his/her business.

Further examples

Stereotypical depictions should be avoided where possible or consciously challenged:

Stereotypical depictions ⊗	Gender-neutral alternative ✓
Cleaning lady	Cleaner/Facility Management
Fire man	Fire fighter
Stewardess	Flight attendant
Police man	Police officer

The following checklist can be used to review texts for gender-equitable wording:

- ☐ Are all persons, to whom the text is directed, addressed?
- ☐ Are female formulations and terms used for women, and male formulations and terms used for men?
- ☐ Are people with non-binary gender identities, who do not see themselves fully or exclusively as women or men, addressed?
- ☐ Are all titles and job titles consistent with the respective gender?
- ☐ Is inclusive language used to address all genders?
- ☐ Are both feminine and masculine words used or alternated?
- ☐ Are pronouns used correctly?
- ☐ Can a statement be rephrased in a gender-neutral manner without changing the meaning?
- ☐ Is the text easy to read?
- ☐ Are stereotypical role descriptions included in the text?

↗ **Learn more**

While this guide cannot cover all cases that arise in the use of gender-inclusive language, the following links provide extensive collections of gender-inclusive terms and expressions.

www.unwomen.org

ecas.org

Non-discriminatory language

Discriminatory language - whether spoken or written - marginalizes certain social groups or devalues them based on their identity. We want to prevent this at all costs.

It is clear to us that discrimination cannot be recognized or combated with a one-size-fits-all solution. **Discrimination is a systemic problem, which is historically rooted and strongly dependent on the respective context.** Discriminatory terms or generalizations can appear somewhat amusing in the right context, for example when those affected use them to make fun of their own discrimination. In most cases, however, it is the use of everyday stereotypes that is problematic. Therefore, in cases of doubt, it is not the intention ("It was only meant as a joke") that determines whether a statement is discriminatory or not, but the person affected.

In general, we recommend the following principle: We address people as they wish to be addressed. Unwanted names and nicknames should be avoided. **If in doubt, we ask the person concerned** how they would like to be addressed.

Non-discriminatory language is about **avoiding generalized attributions and derogatory terms and depictions.** This is especially true when we cannot know whether a person might feel intimidated, devalued or as if they do not belong. As a next step, consciously chosen language can help us to counter discriminatory stereotypes. Different forms of discrimination require us to consider different things:

Sexism
Sexist language begins with the idea that men and women have different strengths and weaknesses "by nature". From this, norms are then derived concerning how men and women should behave. These norms are reinforced by our language. The sexualization of people or the unsolicited evaluation of their appearance are not appropriate in a professional context. Examples of words and phrases that should be avoided:

- ✕ The stronger/weaker sex.
- ✕ Men are rational/women are emotional.
- ✕ Girl (not as a mere description but when directly addressing someone)
- ✕ "Real men..." ...don't cry/don't show emotions.
- ✕ "She is such a drama queen!"

Racism

Racism in language is often characterized by a perception of foreign cultures as fundamentally different from one's own culture. This perception can be recognized when we speak about people of color differently than about white people. It becomes manifest when people are denied certain abilities simply because of the color of their skin or their origin. In most cases, the following examples can be interpreted as racist and should therefore be avoided:

- × "She looks so exotic."
- × "Where are you really from?" - as a follow-up question, although the question "Where are you from?" has already been answered.
- × "Your German is great" - based on the assumption that someone can't be "from here" because of their skin color.
- × "Can I touch your hair?" - especially for Black people with frizzy hair.
- × The *N-word*, in any context.

Homophobia & Transphobia

Discrimination against homosexual and trans people is particularly recognizable in everyday language. Examples of this are:

- × Gay, not as a mere description, but as a synonym for "weak" or "feminine" or as a general insult.
- × "Who is the man and who is the woman in the relationship?"
- × "fag", "tranny" etc.
- × Rumors about a person's sexuality or gender identity without their knowledge or consent.
- × For trans and non-binary people, the deliberately incorrect use of pronouns (he/she/...).

Ableism

Discrimination against people with disabilities is usually characterized by a lack of knowledge about disabilities. Disabilities in themselves are very diverse and often not visible. The word "disability" is unproblematic, the problem are social perceptions of disability as deficient. It is not people who are disabled, it is the environment that is disabling, as this world is not barrier-free.

- × While "disabled" can be used to describe people with disabilities, using it as a synonym for "stupid" or "incapable" is discriminatory.
- × Terms like "impairment" or "special needs" – are euphemistic and ignore the social and structural dimension of disability.
- × The term "handicapped" reinforces a deficitioriented understanding of disability and should be avoided.
- × The term "retarded" is discriminatory, especially when used as a synonym for "stupid" or "incapable."

Age Discrimination

Age discrimination can occur towards both younger and older individuals. The following statements should be avoided:

- × "He/she won't be able to learn that anymore" when talking about older people and technology.
- × "He/she has too little experience to be taken seriously" when talking about younger people and their supposed competence.
- × "We are a young, dynamic team and are looking for support" has an exclusionary effect on older people in job advertisements.

Discrimination based on social status

This form of discrimination is reflected in language, for example, when poverty is associated with personal failure or a lack of intelligence. It also surfaces when people are shunned who cannot afford material things often considered "normal" (car, vacation, laptop, and so on).

Important to note

All forms of discrimination always have regional characteristics - the same applies to the respective language. Racism manifests itself fundamentally different in Germany or Austria compared to India, France, or the USA, as the respective countries look back on different histories. Uncovering and eliminating discrimination in language use is an ongoing process that requires openness. An active culture of error tolerance, in which linguistic missteps are dealt with without fear or shame, supports this process significantly.

Target group specific language

Target group specific language refers to the adjustment of communication to the needs and characteristics of a target group. This allows us to bring across a message as clearly as possible. Concrete examples of target group specific language are:

Simple language for people with little prior knowledge:

Language is deliberately kept simple, complex words and expert terminology are avoided.

Complex language ⊗	Simple language ⊘
"In continuous slabstock foam production, different liquids are mixed under pressure in the mixing head of the system and applied to a belt on which the mixture can expand (foam up) in a controlled manner. Once the foam has matured, it is cut and processed using various cutting technologies to achieve the dimensions and properties of the flexible PUR foam required by the customer."	"In foam production, liquids are mixed in a machine and foamed until they are solid. The foam is then cut into the desired shape."

People with another first language

With this target group, it is important to communicate in a way that is easily understandable. It is helpful to avoid complex sentences and culturally specific expressions.

Culturally specific language ⊗	Simple paraphrase ⊘
To walk on eggshells	Feeling insecure
Haste makes waste	Doing something too quickly may cause mistakes
Too many cooks spoil the broth	If too many people are involved in a process, it can cause confusion

People with disabilities

The main objective is the barrier-free provision of information - depending on the disability of the respected person. Examples are:

- Information is provided in alternative formats, such as sign language for deaf employees or Braille for visually disabled employees.
- Easy-to-read fonts and colors are used for written communication.
- Good contrast and the reading function of screen readers are taken into consideration in the design of websites.

Inclusive job advertisements

The inclusive design of job advertisements is particularly important. Prospective applicants are the people who will make up Greiner in the future. In order to appeal to as many applicants as possible, it is important not to exclude anyone through language in general or specific wordings.

The following points can be used to check job advertisements for inclusiveness:

☐ Is gender-inclusive language used for the job title?

Female applicants often do not feel addressed when the generic male form is used and do not apply (for example "Supervisor" instead of "Foreman").

☐ Does the title of the job advertisement include the addition "(all genders)"?

This is our Group-wide recommended procedure. If local circumstances or laws require a different wording, you are welcome to use it.

☐ Are **stereotypically male words** such as "assertive" or "stressresistant" and **stereotypically female** words such as "reliable" or "team-oriented" balanced out in the job advertisement?

☐ Does the job ad contain an explicit reference to Greiner's commitment to equal opportunities?

("We provide equal opportunities for everyone and see diversity as our strength. Therefore, we welcome all applicants – regardless of characteristics such as gender, age, background, social status, sexual orientation, religion, or mental and physical abilities.")

☐ Does the job advertisement encourage applications also **if not all qualifications are met?**

Background: Women usually tend to apply only when they meet all qualifications, men already apply when they meet just over half of the qualifications.

☐ Does the job advertisement avoid images or words which suggest that **only people with certain identity characteristics** are wanted?

These can be photos of, for example, an exclusively white group of people. Phrases like "we are a young, dynamic team" may convey that older people are not wanted.

☐ Is the advertisement aimed at one or more protected groups, such as women or people with disabilities?

If so, is there a clear statement refering to this? ("We have set the goal of empowering women and increasing female leader representation. We foster an inclusive work environment and encourage all individuals to apply.")

↗ **Learn more**

Studies show that women do not feel addressed by advertisements with too many stereotypically male terms. Gender decoder tools can support you in checking your job ad for gender-coded words:

gender-decoder.katmatfield.com

Inclusive Meetings

To make meetings as inclusive as possible, several measures can be taken in the realm of communication.

The following questions can help in making sure that meetings are inclusive:

☐ Can the **agenda** be **sent out in advance** so that participants can prepare?

☐ Is the **reason for the meeting** communicated and the **agenda presented** at the beginning?

☐ Which **perspectives** are gathered in the room and which are missing? Is **every voice** heard **equally**?

☐ Is it ensured that all participants can actually grasp the content?

☐ Would it be better and more inclusive to conduct the meeting in a different language that everyone feels more comfortable with? Our common language at Greiner is English.

☐ In virtual meetings, are attendees allowed to contribute in the way they feel most comfortable, such as text-based contributions through the chat?

☐ Are there people with hearing disabilities in the room and do you therefore need to speak louder and more clearly?

☐ Are there people with visual disabilities and is the contrast of foils therefore particularly relevant?

☐ Are **the rules for communication** clarified in **advance**?
Common examples are:

- not interrupting others
- explicitly encouraging alternative perspectives
- muting oneself in virtual meetings when not speaking
- encouraging participants to share their preferred pronouns if they want

☐ Are **people who get interrupted** actively **given the floor** again (for example "Wait, I would still like to hear Rachel's thoughts")?

☐ Is it communicated **when questions are welcome**? Are participants allowed to ask questions at any time or is there a planned question and answer session?

☐ Is **space** created purposefully **for agreement** but also **for doubt**?

☐ Are **notes taken** and sent out after the meeting?

5. Inclusive Images

Images may unintentionally communicate role clichés or prejudices. At the same time, inclusive imagery offers the opportunity to break with these clichés. It is important to remember that **images used for external communication** should correspond to the **lived reality within the company**.

In most cases, the **context**, for example how and why an image is used, determines whether it has a discriminatory or exclusionary effect. That is why all images should be checked for the inclusiveness of their content before they are used.
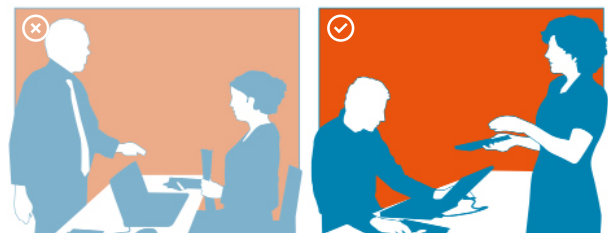
In the following illustrations, stereotypical images are contrasted with a gender-equitable alternatives.

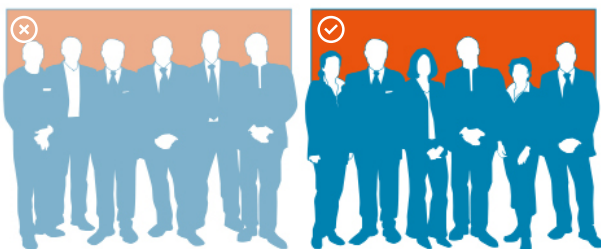**The following critical questions can help when it comes to inclusive images:**

☐ Are people depicted performing stereotypical activities and can this be avoided? (For example, is the man leading the meeting and the woman handing him the documents? Is a person of color shown in an assisting role and a white person as a manager?)

☐ Is it possible to swap the people depicted with others to ensure more diversity in the image? (Beware of tokenism, see next page)

☐ Are the people in the picture depicted in a way that would be acceptable to me or someone important to me?

☐ Are people who should be visible in the picture missing (representation)?

☐ What is in the foreground and what is in the background? What is in focus and what is out of focus?

☐ Does the picture depict a clichéd hierarchy or is everyone on "eye level"?

☐ Who has the most space in the picture and why?

Team

Situation

Representative group

Household

Illustration: © Tina Hochkogler

Images that represent the workforce should actually correspond to it. Homogeneous teams should not be artificially diversified through images. However, a diverse team should be recognizable as such.

Basically, it is important not to hide inequalities from the outside world with inclusive images. That would be **tokenism**.

+ A used image of a homogeneous team with 3 white men is **correct representation if** (context!) the team actually consists exclusively of white men.

× A picture of 3 white men used is **exclusionary** if (context!) there are also People of Color and/or women in the team.

+ An image used of a diverse team is **correct representation** if (context!) the team is actually diverse.

× An image used of a diverse team or individual people who visibly belong to a minority is **discriminatory** if (context!) the team is actually homogeneous.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tokenismus

6. Feedback and Contact

As already mentioned: **Language is dynamic and changes over time as it is used.** Our current understanding of non-discriminatory language will not remain valid and unchanged forever. We are aware of these changes and will update this guide as necessary.

In order to keep this guide up to date, we ask for feedback, suggestions and comments.

We would also be happy to hear from you if you would like to translate this guide into your own language.

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**Inclusive Communication
at Greiner**

January 2025

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