

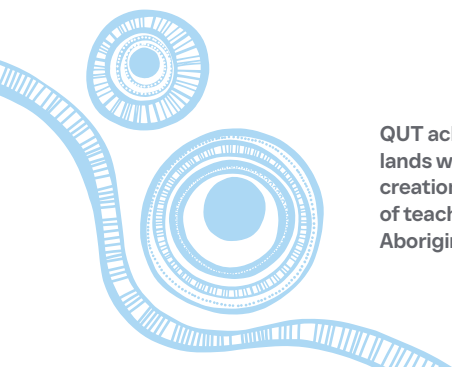


# A guide to inclusive language at QUT



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QUT acknowledges the Turrbal and Yugara, as the First Nations owners of the lands where QUT now stands. We pay respect to their Elders, lores, customs and creation spirits. We recognise that these lands have always been places of teaching, research and learning. QUT acknowledges the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play within the QUT community.

# Inclusive language at QUT

## Introduction

**QUT is a vibrant and diverse community, and any form of communication should respectfully promote acceptance and value of all people. Inclusiveness is one of the primary organisational values at QUT and is supported by our [Equal opportunity and diversity policy](#), which aims to promote:**

- promote respect and protect the rights of our students and staff
- promote a fair and inclusive educational and work environment
- ensure our graduates possess a sense of social and ethical responsibility
- contribute to the social wellbeing of the local community, Australia and other nations.

Inclusive language is respectful, accurate and relevant. It enables everyone in the QUT community to feel valued and respected. It creates a culture where people are empowered and able to fully participate and contribute to our work and study environments.

### About this guide

Language is constantly evolving, and we all have a responsibility to be aware of the nuances in our local and broader Australian context. While there are clear examples of inappropriate language, categorising language into 'inclusive' and 'non-inclusive' can be problematic. You should be guided by the principles below to ensure you are communicating in an inclusive way.

This guide is a starting point for learning about inclusive language and communication and references. Advice in this guide should not override the preferences of individuals. If you are unsure of how someone would like to be addressed, or what their pronouns or other identifiers are, you should always check.

## Five steps to inclusive language

- 1** Context is key. Language that may be appropriate outside of work can be non-inclusive at work, and a term that some communities use as a term of endearment may not be appropriate for others to use. For example, the term 'black' has both positive and negative connotations. While it can signify solidarity, unity and political activism against racism to various groups around the world, it has been used also to devalue and victimise people based on their skin colour.
- 2** Be people centric. Focus on the person first, rather than referring to a demographic or cohort they belong to. If you are referring to someone's age, cultural background, gender, disability or another attribute, ask yourself if it is relevant and necessary information in that context. Using stereotypes is also problematic, as they prioritise an often misguided belief about a group of people over the individual.
- 3** Keep an open mind. Language is constantly evolving and just because you've used particular terms or phrases before, it doesn't mean that it is appropriate now or will be in future. Be willing to learn, adapt and grow to ensure you are being respectful and appropriate.
- 4** If in doubt, ask. If you're not sure what terminology someone prefers, ask them. Check with the person or organisations that make up and represent our diverse cohorts. We have also linked to sources of further information throughout this guide, and you can always contact the Equity Department at QUT for guidance.
- 5** Keep calm and respond. Sometimes our unconscious biases mean we can say or do things that exclude others—even when we do not intend to. Responding with 'it was just a joke' or 'don't take it so seriously' is not helpful. If you have accidentally caused offence, try to understand how and why.

This guide was correct at time of publication however we recognise that language and best practice are constantly evolving. We welcome feedback from members of the QUT community and will revise content periodically.

This guide was inspired by and derived from *Words at Work, building inclusion through the power of language* from the Diversity Council Australia, the *PWDA Language Guide*, and *RMIT's Guide to Inclusive Language*, with permission from the original authors.

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## Responding to discriminatory and non-inclusive language

### Damage done through non-inclusive language

Non-inclusive, derogatory or discriminatory language undervalues individuals or groups and denigrates, humiliates and perpetuates stereotypes and inequality in society. Any comments that demean or are disparaging to specific cohorts of people or characteristics can be a form of harassment or discrimination, whether intended or not. It's important to remember the context you're in and that something you find funny may be offensive or upsetting to others.

Studies have shown that:

- non-inclusive language contributes to and continues stereotyping
- non-inclusive language harms people who witness it as well as the intended targets
- when used in job interviews, non-inclusive language results in applicants from excluded groups finding the position less attractive, and experiencing less motivation and identification with the position than those who are exposed to inclusive language
- non-inclusive comments in the workplace can have an insidious effect on individuals from the excluded groups, impeding their advancement at work by presenting them as incompetent and not suitable for leadership roles
- frequent non-inclusive experiences at work have just as harmful effects as more intense but less frequent experiences (e.g. sexual coercion and harassment)
- non-inclusive jokes can lead to toleration of hostile feelings and discrimination against people from excluded groups.

Source: *Why Language matters*, Diversity Council Australia, Sydney, 2016

### How to call it out

The best way to address non-inclusive language is to lead by example with your own practices and to address instances of non-inclusive language when it occurs. This can be challenging or confronting, particularly if you are addressing instances within your place of work or study.

Some tactics can include:

- **calling it out directly**—‘That sounds like you were slut-shaming them, did you really mean to say that?’
- **appealing to the person’s better nature**—‘It doesn’t sound like you to say something like that’
- **taking the person aside at a later moment** to explain why the language or behaviour was upsetting to you. Personal stories and anecdotes can be the most powerful way of influencing others.

If you do not feel comfortable with the approaches above, you can still signal that you are not comfortable with the language through indirect responses such as:

- ‘Wow... really?’
- ‘I didn’t know people still thought it was okay to say that.’
- ‘Okay, moving on now.’

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia have separate, diverse and distinctive cultures which span more than 65,000 years. The diversity of languages (including adaptations of English), communication and social customs and protocols may not be readily understood by people who do not belong to these cultures. However, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples share spiritual and religious ties to both land and sea, strong family networks and support systems.

QUT aspires to be the university of choice for Indigenous Australians, and we're embedding Indigenous Australian knowledges, cultures and perspectives into everything we do. Our [Campus to Country: Positioning Strategy](#) outlines the importance of connecting to Country and provides guidelines for planning and designing culturally sensitive buildings, spaces and places that reflect local context and respond to the current needs of the campus community.

QUT has [Recommended Guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Terminology](#) which provides comprehensive information about appropriate terminology when referring to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also have an Indigenous Australian visual identity as part of our commitment of engagement, success and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Further information and resources relating to Indigenous messaging is available to staff through the [QUT Brand Centre](#).

### Quick guide for respectful engagement

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples** is an inclusive term for all Indigenous Australian people. It should always be written in full, and never abbreviated (e.g. ATSI).
- **If you are introducing or referring to an individual** it is respectful to be as specific as possible about their cultural identity and/or language group. If you do not know, ask the person for guidance and/or consult with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Some Indigenous Australians may be connected with their culture but not know their specific language or cultural group due to being a child of, or related to a child of, the Stolen Generations and/or being displaced.

- **Welcome to Country** is a formal welcome onto Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander lands or waters given by an Indigenous Elder or person from that area. If you are hosting a high-profile or formal function where official guests and dignitaries are in attendance you should contact the QUT Elder in Residence via [elders@qut.edu.au](mailto:elders@qut.edu.au) for guidance or to invite participation at your event. For formal QUT meetings or events, Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country videos have been developed and can be used both on and off our campuses.
- **Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners** is a mark of respect to the Traditional Owners of the land and sea and can be given by anyone. On any occasion where you are responsible for opening QUT functions—lectures, training, workshops, conferences, seminars and meetings—you should open the occasion by acknowledging the Traditional Owners. You can access Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country videos on the [QUT Brand Centre](#) (staff access only).

### Further resources

If you would like more information, the resources and contacts below may be useful:

- [Deputy Vice-Chancellor \(Indigenous Australians\)](#)
- [Campus to Country at QUT](#)
- [Elder-in-Residence](#)
- [Embedding Indigenous knowledges in curriculum](#)
- [Oodgeroo Unit](#)
- [Carumba Institute](#)
- [Faculty of Indigenous Knowledges and Culture](#)
- [QUT Brand Centre](#)

## Cultural and linguistic diversity

QUT is a real-world university and our community is comprised of staff and students from 138 different countries ([QUT snapshot](#)), and hundreds of different language and faith groups. Everyone should be safe to study and work without experiencing racism, cultural stereotyping, or religious or other discrimination.

Generally, referencing an individual's cultural background and/or faith is not necessary within a work or study context. If it is appropriate or necessary to speak about an individual's cultural background, try to be as specific as possible. Using general terms such as 'Middle Eastern' to refer to an individual diminishes factors including language, country, culture and nuance. In general, avoid referring to the ethnic and racial background of a person or group unless there is a transparently valid or legal reason for doing so.

### Quick guide for respectful engagement

- **Do not use cultural or racial stereotypes.** Cultural stereotyping is common and can lead to misconceptions about people from different cultural backgrounds. If a person makes jokes or uses inappropriate terms to describe their own cultural background, this does not mean they will be comfortable with others using that language to or about them.
- If you are referring to or talking about someone, **do not mention their cultural heritage, ethnicity or religion if it is not relevant to the context.** If it is relevant to mention, check how the individual would like to be referred to. Mentioning someone's race or cultural heritage unnecessarily can imply that they are somehow different because of their heritage.

- **Do not make assumptions** about someone's religion, cultural beliefs, behaviours, or attitudes based on their appearance, where they were born or cultural heritage. Not all people who were born in the same country will necessarily speak the same language, have the same religion or share similar beliefs.
- **Representation and imagery should reflect the diversity of our QUT community.** While you should avoid unnecessarily referring to ethnicity, cultural heritage, and religion of individuals, it is important that people can see themselves represented in our marketing materials and other university documentation. For example, do not just use names common in a particular culture/country in examples. Ensure images contain people from a variety of ethnic/cultural backgrounds and ensure different ages and genders are represented too.

### Further resources

If you would like more information, the resources and contacts below may be useful:

- Contact the [QUT Equity Department](#)
- Counting Culture, Diversity Council Australia: [dca.org.au/research/project/counting-culture](http://dca.org.au/research/project/counting-culture) (QUT has an institutional subscription with the DCA, contact [equityeng@qut.edu.au](mailto:equityeng@qut.edu.au) for access).



## Gender, sexuality, and sex characteristics

The QUT community is continually evolving and becoming more diverse. Areas of study that were traditionally gendered are becoming rarer, and a range of gender identities beyond the male and female binaries are represented throughout our staff and student cohorts. All members of our staff and student cohorts deserve to be treated with respect and have their identity accurately represented within our systems and visual identity.

While less common than they were in the past, issues such as underrepresentation of particular genders in certain occupational areas and the gender wage gap still exists. Families are diverse and carer or parental responsibilities vary—including kinship and childcare, and/or elder care responsibilities. It is important not to stereotype or present unbalanced representations in materials or visual representation.

### Gender-inclusive language

It is best practice to move towards non-gendered language to ensure you are not continuing stereotypes, to ensure inclusion for those who identify as non-binary and gender diverse, and to recognise that families are not binary—that the roles individuals play may go against traditional gender roles.

Be mindful of using language that supports stereotypes or may often be used to describe individuals of one gender rather than another. For example, 'shrill' and 'nagging' are often used in relation to women, but rarely men.

### Sexuality and gender diversity

Sexuality, gender identity and sex characteristics are separate and distinct. Language that is not inclusive of all genders and relationships can marginalise and make people feel like they need to hide elements of their identity to ensure they don't experience discrimination.

For people who have trans, non-binary or gender-diverse gender identities, making sure you use their correct pronouns is respectful and signals that you are aware of and respect gender diversity. People may choose to use binary pronouns (she/her or he/him), or they may choose to use pronouns that do not reference gender at all (they/them or zie/zir). Some people may use a combination of pronouns that affirm their gender identity.

### A quick glossary of relevant terms

- **Sexuality** refers to who people are intimately attracted to. It can range from opposite-sex attracted (heterosexual or straight), same-sex attracted (gay, lesbian), attracted to all genders (bisexual, pansexual) or attracted to none (asexual, aromantic).
- **Gender identity** is a personal and social identity which underpins how we relate to others, and links into a range of assumptions about behaviour and norms.
  - **Cis or cisgender** describes a person whose gender identity aligns with the biological sex assigned to them at birth.
  - **Trans (or transgender)** describes a person whose gender identity does not align with the biological sex assigned to them at birth.
  - **Non-binary** describes a person whose gender identity does not align with binary female/male genders.
- **Sex characteristics** refers to a person's physical form, which can be female, male, or intersex. Sex characteristics do not impact a person's gender identity, or their sexuality.
- **LGBTIQA+** is the acronym that we use at QUT to describe communities encompassing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or questioning, asexual, agender or aromantic, and those with other diverse genders and sexualities (LGBTIQA+).

Sexuality, gender and sex characteristics are a spectrum, and we all fit somewhere along the spectrum. It is important to note that each of these characteristics are separate and unlinked. A person's biological sex does not determine their gender identity.

### Quick guide for respectful engagement

- **Use titles and names that are not gendered.** Gender-inclusive language encompasses all genders, ensures no one is left out and does not assume the gender of the person in a particular role. For example, 'Parental leave' not 'maternity leave'; 'chair' not 'chairman'; 'firefighter' not 'fireman'; 'flight attendant' not 'air hostess'.
- **Don't mention gender unless it's relevant.** There are some situations where it is necessary to mention an individual's gender, but often it would not be relevant. Using non-gendered inclusive language such as 'partner' rather than 'wife/husband' and 'parent' or 'carer' rather than 'mum or dad' allows everyone to join the conversation without having to disclose their sexuality or gender identity, or that of their loved ones.
- **Use the right pronouns.** Using the correct pronouns is a basic mark of respect and signals that you understand and are inclusive of all genders. Sharing your own pronouns can create a safer space for others to share their pronouns as well. If you don't know someone's pronouns, check with them privately and in a respectful way.

### Quick guide for respectful engagement

If you would like more information, the resources and contacts below may be useful:

- [Out at work – from prejudice to pride](#), Diversity Council Australia.
- Victorian Government Inclusive Language guide [www.vic.gov.au/inclusive-language-guide](http://www.vic.gov.au/inclusive-language-guide)
- [Pride Inclusion Programs publications](#) via ACON
- Contact a QUT Ally, search 'Ally' on the Digital Workplace or ask a question via email [ally.network@qut.edu.au](mailto:ally.network@qut.edu.au)

# Inclusive language at QUT

## Disability and accessibility

Over 4.4 million people in Australia have some form of disability. That's one in five people. (*Australian Network on Disability, 2021*). People with disability are not defined by their condition. They are only 'disabled' to the degree that a physical, digital or social environment does not accommodate their disability, injury or health condition. Not all disabilities are visible, and not all people with a disability will be comfortable speaking openly about it.

Perceptions of people with disability can be shaped by language. Using disempowering and ableist language that frames a person with disability as a 'victim' or someone who is 'suffering' or 'confined' misrepresents them as somehow limited and can prevent people with disability from fully participating in activities or situations.

### Support for students and staff at QUT

All resources at QUT should be developed to be accessible to all users—providing resources that are not accessible is discrimination and can prevent people from studying or working successfully. Factors such as format, colour contrast, font size, document tags and captioning all impact how users will be able to interact with the information you are providing.

QUT students with a disability may have an *Access Equity Plan* created through [Disability and Accessibility Services](#).

Our Disability Advisers may recommend reasonable adjustments, including materials in alternative formats, access to assistive technology labs, or specific exam adjustments.

QUT staff with a disability can contact the university's [Health, Safety and Environment department](#) (staff access only) if they require adjustments to their physical space, are returning to work after a period of illness or injury or are managing an ongoing condition that impacts their ability to undertake their day-to-day duties.

### Quick guide for respectful engagement

- Person-first language (people with disability) and identity-first language (disabled people) are both used in Australia. **People with disability often have strong preferences for one term or the other, so it is best to follow the lead of the person or group you are talking about.** It's okay to ask. If that isn't possible, use person-first language and focus on the person, not their disability, injury or health condition, or refer to a person by their name. Do not refer to someone's disability, injury or health condition if it isn't relevant.
- **If you are referring to people in a context where it is relevant to mention their disability, be person centric.** For example, 'people with disability' not 'disabled people'; 'person who has lived experience of a mental health condition' not 'depressed person'; 'Auslan user' or 'person who is deaf' not 'deaf person'.
- **There is no 'normal'.** Implying that someone has, or referring to them as having, 'special' needs indicates that there is a 'normal' that they don't fit in to and excludes and marginalises people.
- **Avoid using language that implies people with disabilities are victims, or inspirational simply for living with disability.** For example, it is preferable to use words/phrases such as: 'has, 'lives with' or 'has a lived experience of' instead of 'suffers from' or 'confined to'.
- **Empower users.** Inclusive technology and physical spaces that accommodate users of all mobilities should be referred to as adaptive and accessible. For example, 'accessible toilets' not 'disabled toilets'; 'adaptive technology' not 'software for blind people'.
- **Check your body language.** Ensure you are speaking to/addressing the person, not someone who is assisting or accompanying them.
- **Be on the same level.** If you meet with or speak to a person whose eye level is not the same as your own, try to meet at a location where everyone is able to be comfortable and at the same height.

## Further resources

If you would like more information, the resources and contacts below may be useful:

- [People with Disability Australia language guide](#)
- [ADCET - Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training](#)
- [Vision Australia Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#)
- [Web accessibility at QUT](#) (staff only)
- [QUT Health, Safety and Environment Department](#) (staff only)
- [Disability and Accessibility Services](#)

## Contact

For advice on diversity and inclusion at QUT contact Equity at [equityenq@qut.edu.au](mailto:equityenq@qut.edu.au)