

# Action Potential #4

## Inclusive Language



ACTION  
POTENTIALS

How we use language can reinforce or counteract stereotypes about who is best suited to a field. Research shows that using masculine forms for mixed-gender groups (e.g. the German masculine “Wissenschaftler” to refer to all scientists) evokes a male bias in mental representations.<sup>1</sup> This mental bias influences, e.g. perceptions of women and non-binary individuals belonging in a field, their responsiveness to job ads, likelihood of their being suggested as candidates for positions, and evaluations. Thus, using gender-inclusive language can help reduce stereotyping and discrimination.<sup>1</sup>

Further, we can support greater inclusion of LGBTQ+ colleagues, e.g. by using people’s correct pronouns<sup>2</sup> (he/she/they or neo-pronouns) and symbols acknowledging a non-binary spectrum of gender identities (e.g. women\*, Wissenschaftler\*innen, Wissenschaftler:innen, etc.). Moreover, the symbol \*, while not completely barrier-free, is currently the most accepted gender-inclusive symbol among people who use screenreaders, including those with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

Below are some tools supporting use of inclusive language in German and English.

### Selected resources:

[Regelungen zur geschlechtergerechten Kommunikation an der Charité](#) (Charité, German)

[Geschlechtergerechte Sprache am Berlin Institute of Health](#) (BIH, German)

[United Nations Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English](#)

[Transgender Glossary: Terms You Can Learn](#) (Kathy Katella, Yale Medicine, 2022)

[Gender-Neutral Pronouns 101: Everything You’ve Always Wanted to Know](#) (Devin-Norelle, Them, 2022)

### Recommended reading:

1. Sczesny, S., Formanowicz, M., Moser, F. Can Gender-Fair Language Reduce Gender Stereotyping and Discrimination? *Front Psychol* 7(25): 1-11 (2016)
2. LGBTQ+ Scientists give their views on their workplaces. Interviews by K. Powell, R. Terry and S. Chen. *Nature* 586: 813-816 (2020)
3. Koehler, S. und M. Wahl. Empfehlung zu gendergerechter, digital barrierefreier Sprache. Eine repräsentative Studie der Überwachungsstelle des Bundes für Barrierefreiheit von Informationstechnik (2021)

**Contact:** kimberly.mason@charite.de