AWS re:Invent

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Drive change with inclusive language

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Agenda

Inclusive language defined

Communicating inclusively

Responding to non-inclusive language

Resources

Whiteboarding Q&A and FAQs

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Foundational definitions

Language

The principal method of human communication, consisting of words used in a structured and conventional way and conveyed by speech, writing, or gesture

Inclusive

Including/covering all identities, lived experiences, unique skills and perspectives, so that everyone may experience ownership and empowerment

Definitions from Oxford Languages

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Inclusive language

Inclusive language acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equitable opportunities.

Inclusive language creates environments where individuals feel confident in their abilities and have the psychological safety to represent themselves without fear of negative consequences for self-image, status, or career.

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Why communicate inclusively

When we communicate inclusively, we increase engagement and participation of all persons, resulting in richer conversations, better decisions, and products that better reflect customer needs.

Diversity increases innovation by gathering people with different experiences and ideas to build together. When we use non-inclusive language in meetings, documents, products, and even job descriptions, we send a signal that only certain people are welcome to share their ideas.

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Inclusive communication as a practice

S: Show your expertise and curiosity

P: Prioritize the audience's needs

E: Edit out non-inclusive language

E: Extend grace to yourself and others

C: Correct with quick kindness

H: Help with information and resources

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Show expertise and curiosity

> "Inclusive leaders use language that demonstrates subject matter expertise 21 percent more frequently than the average senior leader."

N. Zandan & L. Shalett
Harvard Business Review

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Prioritize the audience's needs

"Inclusive leaders use language that is personalized to their audience 36 percent more frequently than the average senior leader."

N. Zandan & L. Shalett

Harvard Business Review

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Edit out non-inclusive language

Non-inclusive language	How (and who) it can exclude	Inclusive alternative(s)
Blacklist/whitelist	Reinforces racial stereotypes and the “bad is black effect”	Allow list/deny list Approved/unapproved
Crazy/insane	Ableist language assuming a certain state of mind as superior to others	Unpredictable/unexpected
Man hours/manpower	Gendered language, where gender is not relevant, excludes those who do not identify as men	Work hours/workforce
Guys	Gendered language	Folks/people

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Exercise humility

"… humble leaders help to foster a culture of development with their employees by legitimizing learning and personal development. Humility also encourages cultures of openness, trust, and recognition, which are important precursors to success."

Robert Hogan, PhD
Talent Economy

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Correct with quick kindness

- When correcting oneself, be brief, be clear, and move on.
- When correcting others, consider the context, timing, and power dynamics.
- Speak from your perspective and amplify, not replace, the voices of others.

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Help with information and resources

THESE ARE GENERAL INDUSTRY RESOURCES AND ARE NOT ENDORSED BY AWS OR AMAZON

- Sum of Us' Progressive's Style Guide (PDF)

  H. Thomas & A. Hirsch
- What Inclusive Leaders Sound Like

  N. Zandan & L. Shalett
- The Bad Is Black Effect

  D. Grewal
- 11 Ways to Develop a More Inclusive Communication Style at Work

  Forbes Coaches Council
- Did You Really Just Say That?

  R. Clay
- Interrupting Bias: Calling Out vs. Calling In

  Tufts University

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SPEECH: A mnemonic for communicating effectively

Action	Why it works	Example
Show expertise and curiosity	Reinforces value of the issue and those affected	Conduct research and seek diverse input in advance
Prioritize the audience's needs	Audience will feel respected and heard	Use captioning or assistive technology
Edit out non-inclusive language	Review written materials and self-correct when speaking	Revise materials, codebase, etcetera
Exercise humility	Admitting mistakes and learning increases psychological safety	Calling out your own mistakes as a lesson for others
Correct with quick kindness	Correcting drives learning and demonstrates immediate support	"Actually I use they/them pronouns."
Help with information and resources	Teaching others expands your impact	Forward useful articles to your team and colleagues

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Inclusive language signals that all are welcome, valued, and have equitable access to opportunity.

It both honors and establishes an ongoing contract, a contract that we must further uphold with our actions and policies.

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Suggested questions and FAQs

1. What immediate steps can I take to begin communicating more inclusively?
2. What distinguishes inclusive communication from accessibility?
3. How is inclusive language relevant to understanding the intersection of ID&E and technology?
4. What are some best practices for incorporating inclusive communication into product design?
5. How does the increase in virtual and distributed work influence how we should approach inclusive communication?
6. How do micro-affirmations and micro-aggressions fit into our understanding of inclusive communication?

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Referencing individuals: Pronouns

Everyone has a way to be referred to—learning someone's pronouns is essential to communicating respectfully with one another

Ey/em/eir(s)/emself

He/him/his/himself

She/her(s)/herself

Sie/hir(s)/hirself

They/them/their(s)/themself

Xe/xem/xyr(s)/xyrself

Ze/zir/zir(s)/zirself

Ze/hir/hir(s)/hirself

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Knowing the right pronouns

The only assumption you can make is that you don’t know what pronouns someone uses without them explicitly telling you

People may have different pronouns they use in different spaces

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Thank you!

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