



Guideline

“Diversity-Sensitive Language”

RL A-PS 06

1 Aim / purpose

In the Code of Conduct, HZB commits itself to diversity, equal opportunity and mutual respect. These values should therefore be reflected in diversity-sensitive language in the work environment. This document provides a guideline to help employees to establish and use a unified form of language at HZB. It focuses in particular on gender-sensitive language.

2 Who and what is this guide for

The wordings presented in this guideline are to be used generally by HZB employees when authoring texts of an official nature, such as

- Decisions, (web) forms, guidelines, rules of procedure, etc.;
- Brochures, magazines and other printed materials;
- Intranet and website content;
- Press releases and news;
- Job advertisements;
- Personnel databases whenever gender is recorded;
- Auto-generated letters and emails, or standardised mails sent to a large circle of recipients with an auto-personalised greeting;
- Greeting at official events.

The guideline is effective from the date of signature by the HZB employees responsible for its authoring, review and release.

3 Responsibilities

Strategic Personnel Development A-PS is responsible for the authoring, compliance and updating of the guideline. GF-CM is responsible for its publication and archiving.

4 Basic principles of diversity-sensitive language

Diversity-sensitive language helps to create a welcoming atmosphere in which all employees feel comfortable. Diversity-sensitive language aims to be

- free of discrimination, by not using stereotypical or derogatory terms;¹
- inclusive, by addressing all people appropriately.

Beyond the content of this guideline, the communications department presents further explanations and examples on the Intranet, and will answer specific questions about the considerate use of diversity-sensitive language.

¹ Discrimination can relate, among other things, to ethnic or social origin, nationality, skin colour, gender, disability, illness, religion or belief, age, sexual orientation or identity.

5 Diversity-sensitive wordings

5.1 Gender-inclusive and gender-neutral wordings

Language is developing dynamically and is increasingly adopting gender-sensitive wordings that aim not only to reflect the equality of women, but also to equally include all gender identities beyond male and female. This document provides guidance on using commonly accepted wordings, especially for the aspect of gender sensitivity.

Gender-inclusive or gender-neutral formulations are to be used when referring to people or groups of people whose gender identity is unknown, as well as when employing general descriptions such as professions.

In German, particularly, use of the gender-asterisk (*) is becoming an increasingly accepted gender-inclusive formulation, which is therefore also recommended at HZB.

Examples: die Mitarbeiter*innen
der*die Techniker*in

Alternatively, gender-neutral wordings can be chosen instead.

Examples: die Mitarbeitenden
die Abteilungsleitung
die Führungskräfte

In English, it is also advisable to avoid formulations that are specific to any one gender.

Example: chairman → chairperson

5.2 Selection of gender options, greetings and pronouns

On (web) forms and in (personnel) databases that record the gender, selectable options are “male”, “female”, “diverse”, and “not applicable”. This conforms to the German law regarding civil status (Personenstand), where the equivalent German forms are “männlich”, “weiblich”, “divers”, and “keine Angabe”.

For (web) forms, it is also possible to combine “diverse/not applicable” (“divers/keine Angabe”) into one selectable option.

For letters and emails (in particular those automatically generated from databases or web forms), the following greetings are recommended:

	Male	Female	Diverse/not applicable
Gender-inclusive (German)	Sehr geehrter [Vorname Nachname]	Sehr geehrte [Vorname Nachname]	Sehr geehrte*r [Vorname Nachname]

Gender-neutral (German)	Guten Tag [<i>Vorname Nachname</i>]
English	Dear [<i>Vorname Nachname</i>]

Currently, no uniform formulation has evolved in the German language for pronouns that are neither male nor female. It is therefore recommended to avoid the use of pronouns when referring to people of unknown gender. Another alternative is to use the gender-asterisk (*) formulation.

Example: der Antrag *or* sein**ihr* Antrag

In English, the use of “singular they” – where “they” or “their” refers to a single person – is well established.

Example: Each participant should bring their own computer for the workshop.

Internationally, it is becoming increasingly common for people to include their preferred pronouns on business cards, mail signatures or name tags at conferences and workshops, for example. While HZB does not make it obligatory to specify pronouns, for example on web forms or in mail signatures, it is strongly recommended for everyone to do so. This facilitates communication in an international environment where it is easy to make mistakes when trying to assign genders to names.

5.3 Job advertisements

Job advertisements must be written both gender-neutral and non-discriminatory. Accordingly, either the gender-inclusive formulation with the gender-asterisk (*) or a gender-neutral formulation is to be used; this rule applies in particular to German job descriptions, given that English job titles tend to be gender-neutral already. Also, the heading of the ad must include “(w/m/d)” in German or “(f/m/d)” in English, but this need not be repeated in the body of the ad text.

Examples: wissenschaftliche*r Mitarbeiter*in (w/m/d)
 Teamleitung (w/m/d)
 Postdoc (w/m/d)

For terms where the root of the word changes for masculine or feminine forms, it is preferable to use the full term of both forms, so that the terms can be found by search engines.

Example: Koch*Köchin (w/m/d) *instead of* Köch*in (w/m/d)

Furthermore, formulations that could invoke ideas of (gender) stereotypes should be avoided in the ad text.

5.4 Greeting at official events

At official events at HZB, greetings should also be sensitive to diversity.

When speaking, the gender-asterisk can be implied by inserting a short, audible pause (a glottal stop like in “uh-oh”). Of course, gender-neutral formulations, such as “liebe Mitarbeitende” in German, are good options. Doubled greetings like “liebe

Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter“ may not give due consideration to gender diversity, but are still preferable to using the male form only.

5.5 Pictures

When using pictures showing people, stereotypical depictions should be avoided as a rule, and diversity given due representation when possible. This does not mean showing only equality between men and women; rather it means depicting all aspects of diversity.

Examples: Who is in the foreground or background of the picture?

What is the person in the picture doing?

Who are active explainers and who are passive listeners?

5.6 Bilingual internal communication

Work-related information that is addressed to all HZB employees and is communicated via the Intranet, by e-mail or at an event organised by management, for example, should be provided in both English and German. The standard for Intranet and web content is British English.

6 Supplementary documents

Fundamental values of HZB, including diversity and respect for one another, are laid out in the Code of Conduct (Verhaltenskodex).

7 Revision

Strategic Personnel Development A-PS is responsible for the ongoing revision of this guideline.

This guideline replaces the “Grundsätze der sprachlichen Gleichbehandlung am HZB” (principles of equal treatment in language) from April 2012.

8 Attachments

None