

# Making mobility programmes more inclusive

**Inclusive Mobility - Manual to provide  
information and promote mobilities  
in an inclusive way**



## Colophon

Authors: Valerie Mertens, Nadie Baudry and Valérie Van Hees (Support Centre Inclusive Higher Education, SIHO).

The project Peer Learning Activities and Resources for Social Inclusion in Mobility Programmes (PLAR-4-SIMP) is delivered by the Ministry of Education and Training (Flemish Community, Belgium) and the Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education in Flanders (SIHO), in cooperation with the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the Erasmus Student Network (ESN).

**PLAR-4-SIMP**  
[inclusivemobility.eu](http://inclusivemobility.eu)

The PLAR-4-SIMP project was co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission under Key Action 3, Support for the implementation of EHEA reforms.



Co-funded by  
the European Union

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of its contents, which reflect the views of the authors only, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

# Table of contents

---

<b>Context</b>	<b>5</b>
Inclusive language	7
Inclusive imagery	8
<b>Accessibility</b>	<b>9</b>
Textual content - documents	9
Visual media formats	14
Website	15
Survey	19
Events	20
<b>Glossary of inclusive communication</b>	<b>21</b>



# Context

---

In order to install an inclusive mobility strategy at institutional and/or national level, it is important to ensure the provided information about mobility opportunities is accessible and targeted towards all students, and specifically towards those who are disadvantaged, vulnerable and underrepresented.

This manual provides you with tips and tricks and an overview of inclusive actions you should take when planning and designing communications to ensure accessibility, and when organising inclusive promotional events either in person or online. The manual also includes some further options which you can provide for students with specific needs as an alternative or on request.

In order to make your mobility programmes more inclusive, it is important to maximise the accessibility of your information, and to ensure that as many students as possible can understand and relate to the content that is presented. This manual provides useful tips and tricks to accomplish that goal.

This communication manual acts as a reference guide to maximise inclusion when policies and documents are designed, and information and promotion methods and materials are created, targeting disadvantaged students. It consists of:

- A manual for inclusive communication
- A glossary of inclusive communication
- Inclusive templates

---

## Why aim for ‘Inclusive Communication’?

Before diving into the practical tips and tricks about inclusive communication, it is important to know what ‘Inclusive communication’ actually means.

‘Inclusive communication’ means **sharing information in a way that everybody can understand**. In inclusive communication, **accessibility, identification and understanding** are key.

You can communicate in an inclusive way by:

- using every available means of communication
- using a variety of communication formats and activities
- using inclusive language, words, images and processes by eliminating stereotypes and biases

In addition to knowing what inclusive communication is, it is also important to know **why inclusive communication is important**:

- Working on the topic of inclusive mobility and inclusive communication means **striving for equality and equity** in higher education and mobility programmes.
- Inclusive communication is a crucial element in **reaching all students, and specifically disadvantaged students**. Once you have established what key information you need to provide students to support them in making informed choices around a mobility programme, it is vital to ensure that this information is accessible and targeted to all students, including those who are disadvantaged, vulnerable and underrepresented.
- By using a **variety of channels** and **inclusive ways of communication** you show that you are aware of and value all different ways a student may use to communicate, to enable them to make and understand choices, express feelings and needs, and involve themselves in the world around them.
- It is important that students are able to **self-identify** with images, messages and language used in communication. To accomplish that, it is essential that a student can access the information in a format that suits their needs and feels represented in the messages that are created and the language that is used.

If all this is taken into account, you can lift barriers and make information about mobility, and mobility opportunities, more accessible to students from all backgrounds.

## Inclusive language and imagery

To communicate in an inclusive way also means to make the content, context, words and images that are used inclusive, by eliminating stereotypes and biases. It is crucial that all students **understand the content** and can **identify with the context** that the information provides.

Below you can find an **overview of actions, tips and tricks** that can help you to make your content more inclusive, so that the information can be understood by, and is relatable to, all students.

### Inclusive language

The language and words that you choose to communicate about mobility are vital to enabling everyone to feel like they belong. When you use words that disadvantaged students use to describe themselves, you are able to create a place where they feel valued and are welcome to be themselves. Inclusive language takes maximum account of minorities and how they want to be addressed so that no one has to feel excluded.

#### General

- **Keep it simple.** Make sure to keep your language simple, clear and at the right level for students' understanding.
- **Be empathetic** in your language. Make sure that your message does not offend your audience.
- Use **people-first** language. People-first language avoids defining a person in terms of their disadvantage. In most cases, this entails placing the reference to the disadvantage after a reference to a person, e.g. "a person with a disability," or "a person living with a disability," rather than "a disabled person." If you're unsure how to refer to someone, do not hesitate to ask them, in a respectful manner, how they would prefer to be referred to.
- Only refer to someone's identity if it is **relevant and necessary**. Do not define people based on their demographic characteristics or societal labels.
- Ensure to **write and pronounce** someone's name correctly.
- Ensure to give **equal attention** to every person in the room.
- **Context matters.** When communicating to and creating content for students, consider their living environment and corresponding context, especially those of disadvantaged students. By doing so, the students will more easily identify with the message that you are trying to send.

#### Gender and sexuality

- Use **gender-neutral pronouns** such as "they/them/their/ze/hir/hirs/ze/zir/zirs/xe/xem/xys" and gender-neutral titles such as "Mx"
- **Eliminate binary language** to be more inclusive of students of all genders (E.g. "everyone" or "all" instead of "ladies and gentlemen")
- Use "All genders" instead of "both genders" or "the opposite sex"

---

## Nationality and ethnicity

- Use **people-first** language, and only refer to someone's origin when it is relevant. If you do want to refer to someone's (ethnic) background or nationality, be as specific as possible.
- Do you not know the specific origin? Then use terminology that stigmatizes as little as possible and that does not reinforce the we/they mentality.

## Religion

- Use **words** that do **not refer to any specific religion**.  
E.g. Instead of saying "Merry Christmas", say "Happy Holidays", which is a more open and inclusive greeting for people who do not celebrate Christmas.

## Disability

- **Beware of ableism:** Ableism is the systematic exclusion and oppression of people with disabilities, often expressed and reinforced through language. Ableist language can be derogatory, abusive or negative about disability. People may not intend to be hurtful when they unknowingly use an ableist term, so educating ourselves is a powerful way to avoid this.
- **Use people-first language.** People-first language avoids defining a person in terms of their disability. For example, you should talk about "a person with a disability," or "a person living with a disability," rather than "a disabled person."  
If you're unsure how to refer to someone, do not hesitate to ask them, in a respectful manner, how they would prefer to be referred to.
- When referring to people with disabilities in your communication, also acknowledge "invisible" disabilities, such as learning disabilities, mental conditions or chronic pain.

## Inclusive imagery

Not only language can provide information; images send a message as well, and sometimes even speak louder than words. Working on inclusive imagery is therefore crucial in inclusive communication. Students should **recognise themselves** in the images that you send into the world in order to **feel addressed** by the message you are sending. When it comes to using images to promote inclusion and inclusive mobility, the aim is thus to create a connection with students that helps them think, "I can see myself in that position".

- Use images that depict all students in the student population
- Use real people in real settings
- Avoid clichés, stereotypes and biases
- Keep it balanced and avoid tokenism
- Make sure images match the message you are sending to avoid mixed signals

---

## Accessibility

Not only are language, content, context and images important; the variety of forms of communication is too. Accessibility in the context of inclusive communication refers to **equal access and opportunities to consult information** for all students. Information and communication that is accessible is easy to approach, reach, enter, speak with, use or understand.

If you want to make your communication more accessible for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is recommended to **use a variety of communication formats**.

Below is an overview of different formats of communication, with tips and tricks for each to make them more accessible and inclusive.

### Textual content - documents

#### PowerPoint

A good PowerPoint contains images, sounds, videos, text and graphs that are accessible to everyone, making it an interactive presentation.

#### Settings, structure and layout

- **Meaningful name:** give the document a meaningful name (e.g. lesson\_subject\_date).
- **Language file:** set the primary language of the document via file > options > language (needed for reading software). Even if the language of only one text fragment differs from the language of the rest of the document, it is still necessary to indicate this language change.
- **Template:** use the design templates that are available in PowerPoint.
- **Slide titles:** provide a unique title for each slide (via start > arrange > selection pane you can make it invisible on the slide, but make it detectable for reading software).
- **Structural elements:** use the offered structural elements (e.g. numbering, tables, etc.).
- **Tab order:** set the tab order via the start screen > arrange > selection pane.
- **Structure and multimedia:** structure information and offer it in multimedia formats (e.g. text, video, audio).
- **Course of presentation:** show the course of the presentation (e.g. the number of the current slide at the bottom).
- **Hyperlinks:** always give hyperlinks a meaningful description (e.g. not just “click here” but “click here to view the presentation”).
- **Notes:** Use notes with the slides.
- **Check accessibility:** check accessibility via check > check accessibility.
- **Export / convert:** keep the accessibility characteristics when exporting /converting. Check the following boxes when creating a PDF file: “convert document information” and “labels for document structure for accessibility”.



---

## Text

- **Font:** use a font size of at least 24 point in a sans serif font (e.g. Arial or Calibri) and ensure a contrast between the text and the (simple) background.
- **Emphasize text:** emphasize elements by using bold text. Do not use all caps, italics or underlined text. Avoid using only colour.
- **Language:** use simple language.
- **1-6-6 rule:** dose information on the slides, and use only key concepts in direct writing style. Use the 1-6-6 rule: 1 idea per slide, 6 words per line and 6 lines per slide.

## Non-textual elements

- **Tables:** make legible tables that can be understood without explanation
- **Graphs:** choose appropriate graphs based on the content, and add the message explicitly.
- **Images:** images speak louder than words, but only if they have educational value.
- **Alt text:** if images or figures are not given a caption or explanation, they are lost. Always add an Alt text and/or text equivalent in the text: format image > size and properties > alternative text.
- **Contrast:** provide sufficient contrast between the image and the background.
- **Clear image:** do not use scanned or unclear images.
- **Subtitles:** provide video or audio material with synchronized subtitles.
- **Text equivalent:** provide a text equivalent for audio clips.
- **Controls:** provide volume control and functions to quickly forward, pause and navigate (also via the keyboard!).

## Leaflets - Word texts

Microsoft Word is one of the most used word processors in the world. A Word file is the most accessible format for text files.

## Settings, structure and layout

- **Layout:** make sure that the layout supports the reading direction (e.g. from left to right).
- **Format styles:** use formatting styles in Word. This promotes consistency and structure and makes it possible to navigate the text for students who use reading software.
- **Check accessibility:** check the accessibility via Review > Check Accessibility.
- **Navigation:** enable navigation in online texts with just the keyboard or keyboard shortcuts.
- **Allow editing:** allow editing so that students can adapt to their own needs.
- **References:** add references as footnotes or endnotes so that they do not interrupt the flow of the text. Headers and footers can be slightly smaller (e.g. size 8 point) but in the same font as the main text.

---

## Text

- **Language:** use the simplest language that is suitable for the document.
- **Font:** use a sans serif font (e.g. Arial, Calibri, Helvetica) with a minimum size of 12 point, and use a line spacing of 1.5.
- **Align:** align the text to the left, as this increases legibility.
- **Abbreviations:** write abbreviations and acronyms in full, the first time they are used in the text.
- **Lists:** use the “bullets and numbering” function for lists.
- **Language file:** determine the primary natural language of your document and mark changes to another language in the text.
- **Highlight text:** accentuate elements by using bold text. Do not use all caps, italics or underlined text. Avoid using only colour.
- **Contrast:** make sure that the colour combinations of the text and background offer a very good contrast.
- **Text equivalents:** offer non-text equivalents, such as images, videos and pre-recorded audio of your text.
- **Data tables:** give a header to the rows and columns of textual data tables and describe their contents in a summary.

## Non-textual elements

- **Relevance:** ensure that the illustration or table is consistent with, and relevant to, the content.
- **Quantity:** use a maximum of one illustration or table per page.
- **Proximity:** Place the visual material as close as possible to the accompanying text, refer to the illustration or table in the text and orientate around the content.
- **Place:** Do not interrupt the text, but place the figure next to, below or above it.
- **Caption and title:** provide each figure or table with a comprehensive caption and/or appropriate title.
- **Clear:** keep the illustrations simple, well-arranged and of sufficient quality.
- **Tables:** make a table with the appropriate table function (not via tab keys or spaces) and avoid merged cells in a table.
- **Numbering:** provide the pages, figures and images with continuous numbering.
- **Columns:** create multiple columns with the appropriate column function.

---

## PDF

A PDF (Portable Document format) is a file format for formatted documents with text and image, whereby the layout always remains intact. A PDF remains legible on various devices (tablet, smartphone, laptop, etc.)

The source of a PDF is never a PDF itself but a document in a different format (e.g. Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Indesign). The accessibility of a PDF file depends on two factors: the accessibility of the source file and the software with which the source file was converted to a PDF. Making an inaccessible file accessible is often a lot of work. It is therefore important to pay attention to accessibility from the start of any new document:

- **Conversion to PDF:** for conversion to PDF, use Microsoft Office or Adobe Acrobat Pro. Accessibility is best guaranteed during the conversion. When converting a document to a PDF file, check the box “labels for document structure for accessibility”.
- **Check accessibility:** check the accessibility using the following methods: an inspection in Adobe Reader, converting the PDF to a text file, doing an accessibility check in Adobe Acrobat Pro or testing with a screen reader.
- **OCR function:** remember that some documents are totally inaccessible to people who are blind. Scanned documents or photos of texts that do not have OCR (Optical Character Recognition) are not legible to screen readers because no text is recognized. Adobe Acrobat Pro has a built-in OCR function.
- **See also:** PowerPoint

## Visual media formats

### Multimedia

Multimedia refers to the use of both words and images. The use of universal multimedia ensures that content is offered to every student through an appropriate information channel.

- **Personalisation principle:** use a communicative writing style (me and you form) and a friendly voice.
- **Signalling principle:** focus on essential aspects of the learning material through additional markings.
- **Spatial proximity principle:** make the distance between corresponding words and images as small as possible.
- **Temporary proximity principle:** get corresponding words and images to appear at the same time.
- **Coherence principle:** avoid unnecessary and unrelated words, images and sounds.
- **Voicing principle:** choose a human voice over a computer voice.
- **Image principle:** only show the images that are essential.
- **Operation:** choose software which has control buttons for starting, stopping and pausing the medium (preferably via the keyboard: hot keys).
- **Do not play automatically:** do not let video and sound start automatically, as it is disturbing when using reading software.
- **Flickering images:** avoid flickering images, as they may trigger epilepsy.
- **Closed captions:** provide audio clips with subtitles. Choose closed captions, so the student can choose whether or not to show these subtitles.
- **Sign language:** provide a sign language interpreter.
- **Subtitles:** provide audio clips with subtitles. Choose closed captions, so the student can choose whether or not to show these subtitles.
- **Description:** give a description of all visual images or actions that you show.
- **Limited capacity assumption:** ensure that the learning contents offered through word and image are related to each other (less pressure on working memory).
- **Ask for help:** if in doubt, consult your institution's ICT department or educational development department

### Table

- **Make legible tables** that can be understood without explanation
- **Do not interrupt the text:** place the figure next to, below or above the text.
- Provide each figure or table with a comprehensive **caption** and/or appropriate title.
- Make a table with the appropriate **table function** (not via tab keys or spaces) and avoid merged cells in a table.
- Keep the table **simple, well arranged** and of **sufficient quality**.

### Graphs

- Choose appropriate graphs **based on the content**, and add the message explicitly.
- **Do not interrupt the text:** place the figure next to, below or above the text.
- Provide each graph with a **comprehensive caption** and/or appropriate title.
- Keep the graph **simple, well arranged** and of **sufficient quality**.

---

## Images

- **Images speak louder than words**, but only if they have educational value.
- **Alt text**: if images or figures do not have a caption or explanation, they are lost. Always add an Alt text and/or text equivalent in the text.
- **Contrast**: provide sufficient contrast between the image and the background.
- **Clear image**: do not use scanned or unclear images.

## Social media

Students and professionals can use social media to communicate with each other through various channels, publish photos and/or videos, share information with each other, enter into a discussion, etc. In addition, social media is often used as a marketing tool.

- **Alt text**: if images or figures do not have a caption or explanation, they are lost. Always add an Alt text and/or text equivalent in the text.
- **Captions**: Add captions for videos
- **Write in plain language**: Avoid jargon, slang or technical terms unless they are appropriate.
- **Don't overuse caps**: Full caps can be difficult to read and misinterpreted by screen readers.
- **Capitalise** each word in hashtags for accessibility (e.g., #InclusiveMobility)
- **Put hashtags and mentions at the end**: punctuation marks are read aloud by screen readers. Be mindful of how hashtags or @ mentions can disrupt copy.
- **Limit emoji use**: emoji and emoticons (i.e. 😭) are read aloud by assistive tech. That means people will hear things like “loudly crying face” or “pile of poo.” Before using one, look up how it translates to text.
- **Use an adequate font size**: make sure text is legible, especially when used in images or areas that aren't modifiable.
- **Limit line length**: lines that are too long can interfere with readability and retention

## Website

An accessible website offers services and information that are usable and accessible to everyone. Everyone has simultaneous access to the same volume of identical information via an accessible website.

### Colour, contrast and fonts

- **Colour and text**: use colour in such a way that everything, such as plus or minus points or coloured bars in a graph, can still be understood in black and white or for people with colour-blindness. Add clarifying text in addition to the colour.
- **Colour blindness**: make sure that colour combinations do not cause problems for people with colour-blindness.
- **Fonts**: choose a sans serif font like Calibri or Verdana, at least in size 12 point. Avoid using all caps, italic and underlined words. Bold words can be used to emphasise something, but do not use bold words for titles – use headers/styles instead.
- **Contrast**: ensure a good contrast between the colour of the background and the text.

---

## Structure

- **Structure:** certain people with a disability cannot simply ‘freewheel’ or browse. The length and location of pieces of text determine readability. Ensure that websites have a logical structure and that text blocks are not too long, and take the reading order into account.
- **Navigation:** make sure someone can quickly find their way around the website, for example by having an overview bar at the top that makes clear in which layer / where in the website one is located. Only include useful items in the navigation bars.
- **Pop-up windows:** avoid having many pop-up windows.
- **Navigation blocks:** be consistent in the design of navigation blocks, use clear and unambiguous titles and headlines, and be consistent in the naming (for example, module 1: title, module 2: title or part 1: title, part 2: title; but not, for example, top frame, left frame).

## Compatibility

- **Compatibility:** make your website compatible with different browsers.
- **Labels:** give buttons and frames a label of interest, so text-to-speech programs can follow them.
- **Mobile:** make sure that a smartphone and/or tablet clearly shows the content.
- **Software compatibility:** ensure compatibility with supporting software. Built-in reading software in the website can promote accessibility for specific target groups but is not a necessarily a complete accessibility solution:
  - anyone with a serious reading limitation will usually already have access to supporting software;
  - built-in reading software may not read certain content in whole, or in part (e.g. selection windows in the settings);
  - reading parts of the website requires selection with the mouse, which can also cause accessibility problems.

## Customer service

- **Languages:** make sure the website is accessible in different languages.
- **Latest updates:** provide a list of ‘latest updates’, which is easier than when a user has to go through everything again.
- **Operation and loading time:** this involves more than just technical accessibility; smooth operation and a fast loading time are important.
- **Personalisation:** allows the user to change the font or background of the website (e.g. more contrast, less detail, bigger, etc.) and integrate a zoom function.
- **Writing style:** write actively, clearly and simply. Avoid difficult technical terms and long sentences.
- **Fill-in forms:** for fill-in forms, mark the fields that are required. The same applies to incorrectly filled in fields: please indicate these using e.g. red colour, bold and the text ‘wrong’. Ensure that mistakes in a form can be corrected without having to re-enter everything.
- **Up to date:** check regularly that all links, documents and external URLs still work.
- **Clarity:** place yourself in the position of the student: is everything clear, are references clear, is everything easy to find, and is it obvious where you can go with questions and/or problems?

---

## (Multi)media

- **Alt text:** if images or figures do not have a caption or explanation, they are lost. Always add an Alt text and/or text equivalent in the text.
- **Audio description and subtitles:** ensure that the content is accessible to people who are deaf or have hearing impairments, as well as people who are blind or have visual impairments: insert audio descriptions for written text and subtitle audio content (preferably with closed captions) or provide a transcript.
- **Stop multimedia:** it must always be possible to pause or switch off animations.
- **Visual and auditory:** fill visual input with auditory input: for example, add a short sound when a page is fully loaded or choose different sounds for different types of links.

## Operation and referral

- **Navigation:** websites often require precise mouse movements: build in the possibility to enlarge text, and if possible, install voice navigation. Navigating should also be possible with a keyboard or with alternative input devices, not just with a mouse. Someone must be able to consult all parts of the website without having to click.
- **Hyperlink:** put a meaningful text with every link.
- **Click-throughs:** ensure that information is accessible quickly and easily, without the need for frequent click-throughs.
- **Hot keys:** build some hot keys such as, for example ctrl + F for searching.
- **Navigation links:** create navigation links, for example 'go to index' or 'go to the top of the page'.
- **Drop-down menus:** avoid drop-down menus and incorrect headers, as these make it difficult for screen readers.
- **Search bar:** Integrate a search bar.



---

## Survey

When you collect data, make sure it is relevant, and that the questions (and hence answers) are inclusive.

- **Only ask for information you really need:** Do you really need to know the students' gender? Do you really need to know their ethnicity?
- **Treat personal data anonymously where needed/possible:** Make sure your collected data is securely stored, and deleted when you no longer need it.
- **Answers:** allow for voluntary responses and allow each student to opt out of answering. Consider that some of the students might come from countries that impose certain legislations on what to say and what not to say. Make sure to include options to your questions such as "I prefer not to say" or "I am not allowed to answer this question due to my country's legislation".
- **Questions:** make sure that your questions are written in a respectful manner. Consult members of different communities throughout the process if you are unsure about how to address a specific group.
- **Allow for diversity and complexity in answers:** Make sure that students have the right to choose various and intersecting options where possible. Some people have multiple nationalities/ethnicities/names/surnames, and others might not identify with a specific category.

---

## Events

### Registration form

The most important thing is to ask your participants what they need. This is why your registration form is your best friend when organising an inclusive event. You can ask participants for their **access**, **communication** and **participation needs**. Here are some suggestions on what to include:

- What is your gender? Options: Male, Female, Other, Prefer not to disclose
- Do you have any medical conditions that may require urgent attention during the event, such as epilepsy, diabetes or allergies?
- Do you have any specific dietary requirements or food allergies?
- Do you need a sign language interpreter?
- Will you use International Sign Language (ISL) as your primary language during the event? If not, which language will you use?
- Do you require step-free access?
- Are you a wheelchair user?
- Tell us more about your access needs connected to your use of a wheelchair.
- Are you bringing a personal assistant?
- If you are bringing a personal assistant, are you able to share a room with them?
- Will your personal assistant attend all the parts of the event with you?
- Would you like an introduction to [topic of the event]?
- Is there anything else we can do to help you feel included (for example regular breaks, somebody to talk you through events in advance, etc.)?
- Is there anything else we should know or you would like to share with us?

### Speech

When using the spoken word, make sure to keep it simple, clear and at the right level for the students' understanding. Include the following:

- **Body language** that supports and matches the spoken word
- **Gestures** that support and match the spoken word
- **Signing** that is done at the same time as speaking and in the same word order
- **Pictures, photos, graphs and symbols** that support both the spoken and written word
- **Objects** to represent people, locations or activities
- **Interactive approaches** for those with profound learning disabilities and communication needs.

---

# Glossary of inclusive communication

## Accessible venue

An accessible venue is one in which a wheelchair user has easy access to the building entrance and the room, has space within the room to move around easily (wide passages) and can choose where to sit (e.g., avoid tiered lecture spaces and high pod tables). When selecting a venue, pick one close to a wheelchair accessible bathroom and select a room that is easy to find. If the room is not on the ground floor, ensure that there is a convenient elevator nearby. If students or staff with physical disabilities are involved in presenting the event, ensure the stage is wheelchair accessible too.

## Ageism

Ageism is implicit or explicit discrimination or stereotyping based on age.

## Ableism (or Validism)

Ableism (or Validism) is the discrimination, marginalization and stigmatization of people with disabilities on the basis of their physical, sensory, mental and/or intellectual condition by taking able-bodied persons as the norm. One also speaks of validism when disability is used as a metaphor or as a swear word, e.g. “deaf” and “spas(tic)”.

## Alternative text

Also known as alt text, alternative text is one method of presenting a text description of an image for use with screen reading technology. This allows users with visual impairments to access descriptions of photographs, illustrations and graphs. Alternative text can be applied to both images in documents and on the web. When adding alt text, it's important to focus on conveying the key information in graphs, illustrations and charts, and for photographs, the content, setting and tone of the image.

Adding alternative text is typically a simple process. To insert alternative text for an image in Word, for example, right click the image, then click ‘format picture’ or ‘format object’ (depending which version is being used), and select the ‘alternative text’ tab on the format window that pops up. Here, one can type in alternative text. Remember that alternative text will not appear in print format.

## Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

People with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have a different way of perceiving and processing information and making meaning. The consequences of this on behaviour can be very diverse (hence the term “spectrum”), but often appear strange. The two core problems are dealing and communicating with others, and flexible thinking and acting. An ASD is often not immediately visible, because people with this condition have learned to compensate for and camouflage it.

---

## Audio description

Audio description is a form of narration used to provide information surrounding key visual elements in media such as videos, television programmes and films to people who are blind or visually impaired. Typically, audio description will provide information to set the scene for actions taking place that is not evident from the dialogue.

## Braille

Braille is a form of written language for blind people, in which characters are represented by patterns of raised dots that are felt with the fingertips.

## Cisgender

For someone who is cisgender, their assigned birth sex matches their gender identity.

## Closed captions

Closed captions are subtitles for video/audio which can be switched on or off by the user as required – usually accessed on video streaming sites via the CC button. For your own videos, you can either pay a professional captioning service to provide an .SRT captioning file to add to the video, or staff can create them themselves using free online tools. When a video is uploaded to YouTube, for example, it will auto-generate closed captions which can be edited to correct for errors and add punctuation. Alternatively, if a script already exists for the institution's video, YouTube has a feature which can automatically sync the script to the video, creating accurate closed captions automatically.

## Disability

Disability is the collective term for a wide variety of functional limitations that occur among populations around the world. People can have a disability because of a physical, mental or sensory impairment, medical conditions or mental illness. These disorders, conditions or illnesses may be permanent or temporary.

## Disadvantaged students

Disadvantaged students often face specific challenges compared to their peers in higher education. This can take many forms (e.g., disability, low-income family, little or no family support, orphan, many school moves, mental health, pregnancy, having less time to study because one has to earn one's living by working or having care duties). The disadvantage may be permanent, may occur from time to time or only for a limited period. Disadvantaged students may be part of an underrepresented group, but they do not have to be. Therefore, 'disadvantaged' and 'underrepresented' are not synonyms.

## Diversity

Diversity is about individual differences (ability, learning styles, and life experiences) and group/social differences (race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations). Diversity needs to be embraced in the learning experience.

---

## Deadname

A deadname is the name someone was given at birth, or the name someone used to use, before they changed it to a new name. A deadname is most often used in the context of transgender persons. To “deadname” someone, i.e. to call them by the name they no longer use, is often considered hurtful and insulting.

## Easy read language

Easy read is a method of presenting written information to make it easier to understand. Easy read recommends using sentences of no more than ten to fifteen words, with each sentence having just one idea. Easy read materials express ideas/content in simple language and accompanying images.

## Eurocentrism

This is a worldview in which the European (ergo: Western) perspective is considered the dominant worldview, with the rest of the world being interpreted from this (cultural, geographical, historical, etc.) perspective.

## Gender

Gender is a social construct that helps determine the position of individuals within society. In many societies there is traditionally a binary division of gender, i.e. the classic dichotomy of men and women. Certain expectations and roles are linked to this. Nowadays this binary gender norm is being questioned more, and gender is considered as a spectrum.

## Gender expression

Gender expression is the way a person expresses themselves to the outside world, for example in the form of clothing and makeup, but also by a certain body posture, speech or way of moving. A person's gender identity does not have to match their gender expression.

## Gender Identity

Gender identity is the inner sense of gender that people experience. There are different binary and non-binary gender identities. Thus, there are not only male and female gender identities, but also variations of both, or neither. Examples include bigender, genderfluid and non-binary (see: non-binary). A person's gender identity need not be fixed, and can change over time.

## Gender-inclusive

Those who work gender-inclusively pursue the inclusion of all biological genders, gender identities, gender expressions, gender roles, and anyone who in any way transcends a binary framework of thought.

---

## Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming means that, in policy development, there is attention for the impact that policies have on equal opportunities for women and men, and a gender perspective is integrated into these policies. Gender mainstreaming ideally leads to systematically taking into account the possible differences in life patterns, situations and conditions of men and women in every policy domain.

## Gender norms

Gender norms are the social conventions and expectations that a society attaches to a gender or gender identity. Current Western gender norms are binary. They assume a dichotomy of men and women, and say that these two groups should behave in two different and clearly defined ways.

## Heading tags and styles

Headings and styles are formatting instructions which provide information about document structures in webpages and digital documents, which make them more accessible for a variety of users. For example, using headings and styles in documents are particularly useful for people who are visually impaired and use screen readers (see below), as they act as signposts which assist with navigating through digital documents and webpages, so allowing them to easily locate the content they require. Microsoft Word, for example, has a set of built-in styles which one can apply to denote create structure, e.g., applying the heading 1 style/tag to main chapter titles, applying the heading 2 style to titles of subsections of the main chapters, etc.

## Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is the societal assumption that heterosexuality is the standard, preferred, or normal sexual orientation and that everyone conforms to the accompanying (unwritten) social rules and expectations.

## Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the phenomenon whereby social inequality occurs along multiple axes that intersect. This means that people experience discrimination, marginalization or exclusion on multiple fronts (or identity layers) simultaneously. For example, a black, lesbian transgender woman may experience exclusion or discrimination because of her colour, sex, orientation and gender or a combination of these identity characteristics.

## Integral Accessibility

The starting point of integral accessibility is that a learning and working environment must be accessible and usable by everyone in an equal way, and independently (i.e. without assistance). The realization of an accessible living environment starts from the principle of 'designing for everyone' (= universal design).



---

## Intersex

Intersex persons are born with physical sex characteristics that do not fully fit within the (binary) standards set by the medical community and/or the prevailing socio-cultural view of the environment in which the child is born. 1 in 60 children are born this way. Those children are said to have an intersex condition. Usually, medical intervention is not necessary, but it often happens. The majority of the surgeries are purely cosmetic and have no effect on the quality of life. The United Nations labels this practice as “(intersex) genital mutilation” and has equated such procedures with “torture” because there is a lasting traumatic impact on the child. An intersex condition is not a gender identity, but a physical condition. Of course, there are those for whom their intersex condition is a part of their (gender) identity. They often call themselves inter\*.

## Legal gender designation

Your legal gender designation, also called your “official gender” or “legal sex”, is your gender registration with the government. It is displayed, for example, on your identity card.

## LGBTQ+

The acronym LGBTQ+ denotes sexual, gender and sexuality diversity: L = lesbian, G = gay (homosexual), B = bi+, T = trans(gender), and Q = queer or questioning. The plus sign sometimes used after this and similar abbreviations refers to all persons and groups that fall outside the (cis)gender and heterosexual norms, and also outside of the categories denoted by the letters listed.

## Misgendering

If Person A makes a false assumption about Person B’s gender identity, Person A is misgendering Person B.

## Non-binary

A non-binary person is someone who does not feel at home in the binary gender categories of male or female and feels more comfortable with another, non-binary gender identity. Thus, a person is gender non-binary when they combine masculine and feminine identity characteristics, feel like both male and female, or neither male nor female, or place themselves outside these pigeonholes altogether. Non-binary is an umbrella term. There are various terms for gender identities that place themselves outside the binary gender model, including ‘gender queer’, ‘gender non-conforming’, ‘agender’, ‘gender fluid’ and ‘bigender’.

## Othering

Othering involves defining one’s own position and moral superiority over the perceived ‘other’, either a person or group, based on certain cultural and/or religious practices. The ‘other’ is thereby dismissed as foreign, conservative, outdated.

## People of colour

‘People of colour’ is a term one can use for people for whom skin colour is a defining factor in their experiences and identity formation.

---

## **Pronouns**

Personal pronouns are words that refer to someone. She, her, hers and he, him, his are the most commonly used pronouns. Gender-neutral options include they, them, theirs, ze or hir.

## **Queer**

Queer is a term for a wide range of gender and/or sexual identities. It is also used by individuals who do not wish to conform to a specific term or label. The term “genderqueer” is usually used when referring to a non-binary gender identity.

## **Racism**

Racism is discrimination because of one’s skin colour and/or origin based on an assumed superiority of one group over another.

## **Reasonable accommodation**

‘Reasonable accommodation’ means measures to accommodate persons with disabilities, in order to overcome the barriers of the environment as much as possible. It is also a legal term: a lack of ‘reasonable accommodation’ can be interpreted by the courts as discrimination.

## **Screen reading software and text to speech**

A screen reader is a form of assistive technology that renders text and image content as speech or braille output and allows users to navigate software and documents without the use of a screen. Screen readers are often essential for people who are blind/visually impaired to engage with digital content. Text to speech software is useful for other users with print-based disabilities, such as dyslexia, to digest written content. This type of software reads documents aloud or converts them into MP3s so users can listen to them instead of reading them.

## **Sexism**

Sexism is discrimination based on gender, a set of beliefs about the sexes and about the relationship between the sexes. In these beliefs, an objective hierarchical relationship between the sexes exists and is considered desirable.

## **Sexual/Romantic Orientation**

Sexual orientation is about sexual or romantic attraction – in other words, the people someone is sexually and/or romantically attracted to.

## **Sign language**

Sign language is a language that employs signs made with the hands and other movements, including facial expressions and body postures, used primarily by people who are deaf. Sign language is often

---

the first language of people who are deaf or have hearing impairments so remember that if they also speak the native verbal language, it may be their second language. Like with verbal languages, countries typically have their sign languages which are completely different to each other so bare this in mind when dealing with students with hearing impairments.

### **Students with fewer opportunities**

Students with fewer opportunities refers to students with physical, mental and health-related conditions, students with children, students who work or are professional athletes and students from all study fields underrepresented in mobility.

### **Transition**

‘Being in transition’ in a broad sense is getting to know and discover one’s gender identity (one’s own identification of masculinity or femininity) or, in a narrow sense, undergoing medical interventions and treatments (hormone therapy, gender reassignment treatments, laser therapy, voice training) to feminize or masculinize the body to make it more in line with one’s gender identity. A transition does not necessarily involve surgery. A person can also be in gender transition through a change of expression (clothing), mental transition and process, and/or telling those around them, without necessarily undergoing medical procedures or treatments.

### **Trans person or transgender person**

A transgender person is someone whose gender assigned at birth does not match their gender identity. For example, if you were assigned the female gender at birth, but you do not feel like a woman, then you are transgender. If it does match then you are cisgender. Transgender is thus an umbrella term for trans women/men, cross dressers, people who identify as gender non-binary or queer and anyone else who can relate to the term.

### **Unconscious bias**

Unconscious bias is learned stereotypes and prejudices that are automatic, unintentional, deeply ingrained, universal and able to influence behaviour.

### **Underrepresented students**

Underrepresented students refers to a group of learners underrepresented in relation to certain characteristics (e.g., gender, age, nationality, geographic origin, socio-economic background) if its share among the students is lower than the share of a comparable group in the total population. This can be documented at the time of admission, during the course of studies or at graduation. Individuals usually have several underrepresented characteristics, which is why combinations of underrepresented characteristics (‘intersectionality’) should always be considered.

### **Universal Design/Design for All**

Universal Design is, in short, designing the everyday things around us (products, services, buildings) to be user-friendly (flexible, simple, understandable) and accessible to the largest possible group of users. It thus transcends attention for specific target groups, such as exclusive facilities for wheelchair users.

---

## Vulnerable students

Vulnerable students may be at risk of disadvantage (see above) and in addition have special (protection) needs. For example, because they suffer from an illness (including mental health issues) or have a disability, because they are minors, because their residence permit depends on the success of their studies (and thus also on decisions made by individual lecturers), because they are at risk of being discriminated against. These learners are vulnerable in the sense that they may not be able to ensure their personal well-being, or that they may not be able to protect themselves from harm or exploitation and need additional support or attention.

## WCAG

WCAG is the acronym for the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines which are an international standard defining how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. WCAG provides a common definition and benchmark for accessible web content globally and your institution's web designer/ICT team will likely be able to confirm that the institution's website meets the standard.

