

GENDER-SENSITIVE LANGUAGE

The use of gender-sensitive language in daily work – both internally and externally – is an essential and consistent component of gender equality and its promotion.

Texts are gender-sensitive when genders are made linguistically visible. Gender-sensitive formulations address all persons equally. This is fundamental for a modern and open administration.

In this context, the decision of the Constitutional Court of 15 June 2018 is relevant: With reference to the right to individual gender identity derived from Article 8 paragraph 1 ECHR, the Court held in its decision G77/2018 that the civil-status register must allow an entry for a variation of sex development other than male or female (“third option”).

A competent, correct and uniform appearance of state communication is equally fundamental. The rules of German orthography therefore serve to ensure uniform spelling in the German-speaking area. The authoritative body is the Council for German Orthography.

In its meeting on 26 March 2021, the Council for German Orthography reaffirmed its view that all people should be addressed with gender-sensitive language. However, this is a social and socio-political task that cannot be solved solely with orthographic rules and changes to spelling. The Official Rules apply to schools as well as to the administration and the judiciary.

Against this background, the Council has not recommended including the asterisk (“gender star”), underscore (“gender gap”), colon or other shortened forms used inside words to denote multiple genders in the Official Rules at this time.

Accordingly, the Council reaffirmed the criteria for gender-sensitive writing adopted in 2018. Gender-sensitive texts should:

- be factually correct,
- be comprehensible and readable,
- be suitable for being read aloud (with regard to demographic aging and the trend in the media to provide texts in a read-aloud form),
- ensure legal certainty and unambiguity,
- be transferable with regard to German-speaking countries with several official and minority languages (Switzerland, Bolzano-South Tyrol, Eastern Belgium; in Austria and Germany also for regional official and minority languages),
- ensure that readers or listeners can focus on essential facts and core information,
- and must not make learning the written German language more difficult (learnability).

As in the past, different groups and communities will use different spellings to represent different genders. The Council must take note of these and examine them; however, in the Council's view they cannot each claim general validity and binding force.

The social debate on how, in addition to male and female, a third gender or further genders can be appropriately designated proceeds in a highly controversial manner. Accordingly, the right of people who feel they belong to neither the male nor the female gender to an appropriate linguistic designation is a concern that should also be reflected in written language.

Observation of written language currently shows, besides various grammatical means (generic masculine, passive constructions etc.), several orthographic devices such as:

- underscore (gender gap),
- asterisk (gender star),
- colon², or
- the addition "male, female, diverse" (m, f, d) following the generic masculine.

These meet the criteria for gender-sensitive writing to varying degrees.

Ultimately, the form of gender-sensitive language used depends on the respective text. Always consider:

- appropriate address of the person or target group,
- compliance with grammatical rules,
- consistency within the continuous text.

In any case, the full pair form as well as gender-neutral formulations are in line with the Official Rules of German spelling.

Pair Form

The full pair form is the grammatically cleanest variant of linguistic equality when both genders are mentioned in the text. It should be used especially in letters addressed directly to employees.

Conjunctions (and/or) are used as connecting words, or the feminine and masculine forms are separated by a slash:

- employees, colleagues
- an employee / a colleague, the doctor / the physician

Gender-Neutral Formulations

Gender-neutral formulations refer to a collective or an individual without specifically addressing any gender. Rewordings such as staff members or employees (instead of female

and male employees), management (instead of female and male managers), everyone (instead of each and every one), nobody (instead of no one) are gender-neutral formulations. Note that some neuter terms in their root form cannot be put into a masculine or feminine form, e.g. “member – members” (there is no “memberess”).

Gender-neutral person designations or plural formations make it possible to address an individual person or a group specifically and equally.

Examples:

- the person, the persons; the member, the members
- students (instead of female and male students)
- responsible persons (instead of the responsible one (f/m))

Gender-sensitive language refers to people and not to organisations. Organisations are gender-neutral. This applies to functions, institutions and collective designations, e.g. the directorate, the team, the secretariat, the management. Therefore, one does not say: “The HR department is a service provider oriented towards female employees”.

Avoiding “man” Sentences

The masculine syllable “man” should preferably be avoided in written texts:

Incorrect	Correct
Will man solche Sätze vermeiden, muss man grundlegend neu formulieren.	Sollen solche Sätze vermieden werden, muss grundsätzlich neu formuliert werden.
Man kann das auch so sehen.	That can also be viewed that way. We can also view it that way.
Versucht man kostengünstig zu wirtschaften, muss man ein klares Marketing-Konzept haben.	If we try to operate cost-effectively, we need a clear marketing concept.

The consistent double mention with the pair form is perceived as tiring, especially in long texts, and disrupts the flow of reading. Avoid repeated pair forms, e.g. write “Representatives from science and politics ...” instead of “Scientists and scientists as well as politicians and politicians took part.” Similarly, “Teaching staff consulted with students ...” instead of “Professors consulted with students ...”.

Female designations should be used for titles and salutations: e.g. Ms Director-General, Ms Federal Minister, Ms Head of Department, Ms Magistra, Ms Doctor.

Examples of Gender-Sensitive Formulations

Incorrect	Correct
Our seminar has 20 participants.	Our seminar has 20 participants (gender-neutral). Our seminar has 20 participants (f/m). Twenty people took part in the seminar.

Everyone who needs a certificate ...	All those who need a certificate ... Anyone who needs a certificate ...
the boss, the leader	the manager, the leadership
Graduates of the course are entitled ...	Completing the course entitles ...
user- and customer-friendly	easy to use, user-friendly, practical
application-oriented	practice-oriented
IT experts, IT servicemen	IT specialists
Visitors must observe the following rules	Please observe the following rules
We are looking for an experienced, team-oriented employee (m/f)	If you have professional experience, are committed and a team player, please contact us.
Signature of the applicant (m/f)	Signature of the applicant. Please sign here.
Everyone is responsible for his own registration	Everyone is responsible for their own registration
The canteen offers inexpensive meals for everyone	The canteen offers inexpensive meals for all
Nobody may be disadvantaged because of his origin	No one may be disadvantaged because of their origin

Academic Titles, Official Titles and Function Titles

With regard to academic titles, official titles and function titles, attention must be paid to gender-specific formulation. In the abbreviations of the feminine forms, the endings are superscript.

Male form	Abbr. male	Female form	Abbr. female
Doctor	Dr.	Doctor	Dr.in
Magister	Mag.	Magistra	Mag.a
Diplom-Engineer	Dipl.-Ing./DI	Diplom-Engineer	Dipl.-Ing.in/DIin
Professor	Prof.	Professor	Prof.in
Section Chief	SC	Section Chief	SCin
Group Leader	GL	Group Leader	GLin
Department Head	AL	Department Head	ALin
Commissioner	Kmsr	Commissioner	Kmsrin
Ministerial Counsellor	MR	Ministerial Counsellor	MRin

Note: For titles of non-binary persons, an “x” superscript ending may be used analogously to the feminine form on request. The superscript ending can be created using the shortcut Ctrl + +.

In principle, the forms preferred by the respective person (pronouns, titles, etc.) are to be used, both when addressing the person directly and when writing about them.

Legal Texts

Directive 10 of the Legislative Guidelines 1990 of the Federal Chancellery reads as follows:

In legal provisions, inappropriate distinctions between women and men are to be avoided. Formulations must be chosen so that they concern women and men equally.

In regulations where differentiation between women and men is intended, it must be critically examined on a case-by-case basis whether the different treatment is justified for objective reasons.

Organs and function designations, rules on access to certain professions and activities, type designations, subjects and teaching objectives in school and vocational training law as well as legal provisions on matters relevant to civil status, the exercise of rights concerning a household, the representation of children and other household members and similar matters are to be formulated in a gender-neutral manner. Alternatively, or in cases where this is not possible, the feminine and masculine form should be given – provided this does not concern amendments and no problems of interpretation arise.

Impressum

Publisher and media owner: Federal Chancellery, Ballhausplatz 2, 1010 Vienna

Date: July 2021