

GUIDE TO GENDER-INCLUSIVE
ENGLISH, GERMAN AND FRENCH

Connecting with Language





EDITORIAL

Gender-inclusive writing

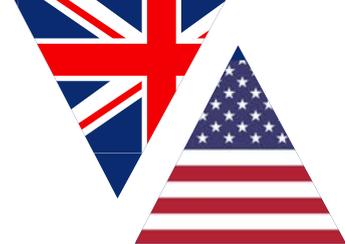
Five brands, lots of T-shirts and around 1,000 employees from 49 countries - that's Spread Group. Diversity is part of our corporate culture, just like an unprejudiced mindset and respectful interaction. And it all starts with language!

Language is much more than a means of exchanging information. It influences our perception and our thinking, it has the power to convince people, but also to hurt and exclude them. The latter sometimes happens through carelessness and outdated language conventions that no longer correspond to the realities of our society. Overcoming these is what we aim to do at Spread Group. Since 2020, we have been working on continuously making our websites and texts more inclusive.

And it doesn't take a lot! Here, we've put together some actionable advice on how to make texts both inclusive and easy to read. The guide comprises our best-practice tips for writing at Spread Group.

Have fun, and lots of success!

Felicitas & The Copywriters



Strategies for English

Use the gendered pronouns he/she for a subject when appropriate. Or simply use **they/them** to make it neutral and universally applicable.

Gender-inclusive writing is much easier in English than in German or French. There is only one article (“the”), and as such no differentiation in terms of male or female linguistic gendering. Also, for most nouns there is only one form or neutral versions have emerged, such as “mixologist” for bartender, or “police officer” for policeman.

However, English can sometimes have a masculine generalization for pronouns:

“You know your partner best.
Gift **him/her** something full of love”.

If it is unknown whether „the partner“ is male or female, the official rule is to use the masculine form. Another option we have chosen at Spread Group is the plural/neutral form „they“. In fact, „they“ was common as a gender-neutral pronoun in English until the 18th century.

“You know your partner best.
Gift **them** something full of love”.



Example: Newsletter Valentine's Day

This newsletter is an example of gender-inclusive copywriting.

The screenshot shows a newsletter layout for Spreadshirt. At the top is the Spreadshirt logo. Below it is a photograph of a man and a woman sitting together, surrounded by red heart-shaped balloons. The woman is wearing a white t-shirt with the text "all you need is love" and the man is wearing a white t-shirt with the alphabet "A-Z". Below the photo is the heading "Gifts for the Loveliest Day of the Year" and a paragraph of text: "You know your partner best! Gift them something classic, creative and full of love this year. Discover our favorite Valentine's Day designs!". A teal button labeled "Find Your Perfect Match" is positioned below the text. Further down, the heading "Designs they'll love more than red roses" is followed by a grid of six design examples: 1) A hand holding a white card that says "LOVE" with a red heart. 2) The text "BEMY valentine" in a stylized, bubbly font. 3) A couple wearing black baseball caps with "Hubby" and "Wifey" written on them. 4) A red background with the text "I LOVE IT WHEN MY WIFE LETS ME GO PLAY GOLF". 5) A woman wearing a black t-shirt with a rainbow and the text "LOVE LIPS" next to a red heart balloon. 6) A cartoon drawing of two cats with speech bubbles that say "I LOVE PIZZA" and "I LOVE ONLY YOU AND PIZZA". At the bottom of the grid is a teal button labeled "Falling in Love".

spreadshirt

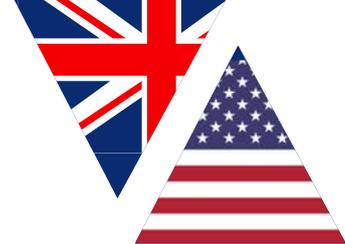
Gifts for the Loveliest Day of the Year

You know your partner best! Gift them something classic, creative and full of love this year. Discover our favorite Valentine's Day designs!

[Find Your Perfect Match](#)

Designs they'll love more than red roses

[Falling in Love](#)



Tips for gender-inclusive writing in English



Think globally

English content is read by people all over the world. But the whole world is not shaped by Western and Christian values. We think globally and keep the needs of a diverse audience in mind.

Use pronouns correctly

We make sure to use appropriate pronouns: “she/her,” for people who identify as women, “he/him” for people who identify as men, and “they/them” for people who identify as non-binary or who prefer such pronouns. When not referring to a specific person, we use the neutral pronouns “they/them”.

Precise but alive

We formulate our messages in a simple and descriptive way so that non-native speakers can easily understand our content.

Pay attention to historical context

Certain metaphors and phrases represent oppression and discrimination in a historical context. For example, did you know that watermelons have been used as racist propaganda against African-Americans since slavery in the USA? We always try to keep the historical background in mind.

Avoid stereotypes

We do not want stereotypical behavior to be associated with our texts and images. More than 50% of the photo models on our website are “diversity models” of different stature, height, and skin color.

Reflecting on idioms

We strive to be sensitive in our use of idioms in texts and in our daily interactions. A question like “Are you feeling depressed?” might seem harmless, but can actually be hurtful to someone struggling with mental health. To ask “Do you find this frustrating?” will make all the difference.

Consider different holidays

Not everyone celebrates Christmas, not everyone is a Christian. Some celebrate Hanukkah, others Kwanza. Instead of Christmas, we prefer to talk about “holidays” on our American platform.



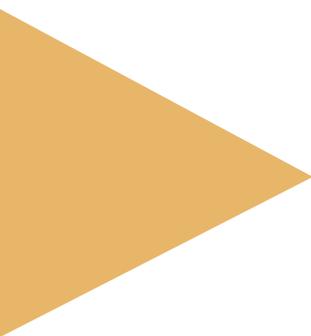
Exclusionary terms

We renamed the color from “nude” to “beige” as nude implies that a light skin tone is the default, which is not the case. We also replaced “boyfriend-style” with “loose-fitting” to include people with different sexual identities. There are always ways to replace terms that exclude people of a diverse orientation.



Strategies for German

The generic masculine form in German is a grammatical guise. It puts everyone under a masculine umbrella regardless of their gender identity. This makes everyone, except for men, invisible in the German language. Not only is this unfair, it also impacts how we see the world, as numerous studies have shown.



We want girls to realize their goal of becoming an „Ingenieur“ as well. And since this noun has a masculine form in German, we refer to „Ingenieur*in“ and avoid using the masculine form only.

Nobody likes Captain Obvious – texts should be clever and easy to read

Some people are bothered by too many gender asterisks. This is why we use them as sparingly as possible and rely on clever solutions such as paraphrases and gender-neutral alternatives. In some places, such as H1 headings in a marketing context, we do not use the gender asterisk at all. We want the headline's message to take center stage, and gender solutions may be bound to snarl up the headline's winning manner. But certainly as the perception of society will change, so will this rule.



Examples for German

In this example, we have replaced the masculine “Marktplatz-Designer” with circumlocutions (designs, target group).



Geld verdienen als *Marktplatz Designer*

Du hast eigene Designs und möchtest diese zu Geld machen? Dann bist Du bei Spreadshirt genau richtig. *Werde Marktplatz-Designer* und verdiene mit jedem verkauften Design bares Geld.



Geld verdienen *mit eigenen Designs*

Du bist kreativ und möchtest *mit Deinen Designs Geld verdienen*? Dann bist Du bei Spreadshirt genau richtig. Finde auf dem Marktplatz Deine Nische und verdiene mit jedem verkauften Design bares Geld.

In this example, we replaced the masculine “Kunden” with a circumlocution (target group).



Startseite

Shops mit Startseite verkaufen besser. *Kunden* können sich direkt ein Bild von Dir und Deinen Shop Highlights machen. Das schafft Vertrauen und Kaufanreize.



Startseite

Shops mit Startseite verkaufen besser. Zeig was Du zu bieten hast und präsentiere Deine Shop-Highlights all Deinen *Zielgruppen*. So schaffst Du Vertrauen und Kaufanreize.

TIP: Lively mix

The most natural effect is a mix of different solutions:

- Neutral wording (“Beschäftigte” instead of “Mitarbeiter”)
- Alternate masculine and feminine forms (“Blogger und YouTuberinnen”)
- Also sometimes use the female form generically (won't lead to misunderstandings)
- Enumerate both genders (“Designerinnen und Designer”)
- Participles instead of noun (“entworfen von” instead of “Designer”)



Tips for inclusive German



Use gender asterisk consciously

In a lively mix, gender asterisks or colons (Designer*innen) can be used in a relaxed way. When speaking, we leave a pause before the suffix and emphasize the second "i".

Direct address

By addressing people directly with "Du", texts often automatically become gender-neutral. Instead of "Design-Liebhaber finden bei uns...", rather say, "Bei uns findest Du Designs, die..."

Using relative clauses

We sometimes replace nouns with relative clauses. These are often more descriptive and therefore more effective anyway. Instead of "Als Designer profitierst Du...", rather say, "Wer bei Spreadshirt Designs verkauft, profitiert."

Replace gender-specific pronouns

There are numerous inclusive alternatives in place of gendered pronouns. For example, for "keiner/keine" use "niemand" or for "jeder/jede" use "alle".

Salutation in e-mails and letters

We choose a neutral salutation in e-mails and letters if we don't know the gender identity: "Hallo Anna" or "Liebe Anna Schmitz" instead of "Liebe Frau Schmitz".

Look twice

Since we all have a mindset shaped by growing up in a patriarchal society, it's easy to overlook the generic masculine form. This is why we examine every text to extinguish this socio-linguistic faux pas, also in compound words ("Expertenrunde" becomes "Expert*innenrunde").



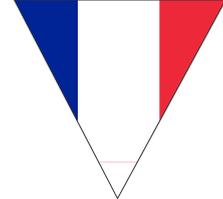
Nouns overloaded with gender asterisks

German offers a whole range of endings that allow inclusive wording without gender asterisks, for example -kraft, -person, -berechtigte, -schaft, -ung, and -hilfe. This way, "Kundenservice" becomes a "Service-Team" and "Kunden" becomes "Kundschaft".

Tip:

You can find lots of ideas for clever phrasing in the gender dictionary:

www.geschicktgendern.de



A brief background about French

French is a challenge for gender-inclusive texting. In the 17th century, language scholars decided that the masculine form was more distinguished and therefore always preferable to the feminine:

Le masculin l'emporte toujours sur le féminin.

The previously practiced, inclusive use of language disappeared completely in the 19th century with the introduction of compulsory education.

Since then, French has:

Nouns in the masculine form when the gender of a group is unknown or includes at least one male.

Adjectives and verbs adapted to the gender, while the masculine form takes precedence in mixed groups.

The most common solution for gender-inclusive writing in France is the so-called interpunct, a punctuation mark consisting of a vertically centered dot. It is used whenever clever solutions such as rewriting are not available.

The interpunct separates the feminine ending as well as the plural ending from the root of the word, indicating gender neutrality.

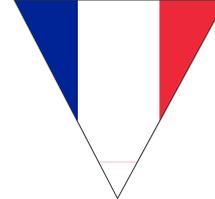
This is how we use the interpunct:

Un·e gérant·e de boutique peut
bénéficier d'offres exceptionnelles.

(Shop Owners benefit from exclusive offers)

Les créateurs et créatrices de talent sont
les bienvenu·e·s.

(Talented creatives are welcome)



Gender neutral terms - **mots épicènes**

French has words that include both genders, the so-called *mots épicènes*.
At Spread Group, we prefer to use these.



La clientèle

the clientele (grammatically the word is feminine, but includes both genders).



Un partenaire / Une partenaire

Partner (the article is interchangeable)



Mais que cherche le client ?

client (Kunde) - is the generic masculine form



Mais que cherche la clientèle ?

clientèle is gender-neutral

Rewrite

Another option is to rewrite using words that don't cause gender conflict in the first place, as in this example.



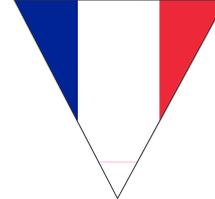
Vous êtes créatif ? Gagnez de l'argent avec vos idées.



Vous avez l'esprit créatif ? Gagnez de l'argent avec vos idées.

Vous êtes créatif (Are you creative?) is in the generic masculine.

Vous avez l'esprit créatif (rephrased: Are you creative?),
on the other hand, is not.



Tips for inclusive writing in French



Think globally

We choose a gender-neutral alternative for adjectives and nouns whenever possible (*esprit créatif* instead of *créateur/créatrice*, *la clientèle* instead of *le client*).

Change order

If both are mentioned, we arrange terms alphabetically (*acheteurs et acheteuses, lycéennes et lycéens*).

Skillful rephrasing

It is often possible to rephrase sentences in a gender-inclusive way (*les fans de vos produits* instead of *les acheteurs de vos produits*).

Use „femme“ in the plural

When we speak of women, we use the term in the plural or specifically to make a distinction from the female myth („*la femme*“). Women are real persons with multiple identities and representatives of heterogeneous groups.

Use personal salutation

We prefer the personal form of address. This not only makes the text gender inclusive, it also makes it sound more personal and approachable.

(*Nous voulons aider les gérants* becomes *Nous voulons vous aider*).

Breaking stereotypes

We break stereotypes by calling attention to the stereotype by choosing its counterpart (*un secrétaire, une designeuse, une livreuse*).

Pay attention to clarity

Clarity and understandability come first. This is why we refrain from creating new words that are gender-inclusive, but can lead to misunderstandings among certain groups (such as *danceureuse* instead of *danseur/danseuse*).

Neutral spelling with x



Neutral spellings such as „*allemanx*“ for „*allemand, allemande*“ are not yet very common. For the time being we'll stick to the tips described here.

The power of images

A particularly powerful form of communication is imagery. Images are generally grasped more quickly and remembered better than text. They evoke associations and trigger emotions – sometimes even those that were unintended.



Are we inclusive?

- Are all gender identities equally represented?
- Is their presentation balanced in terms of size, facial expressions, and positioning?
- How do we deal with gender stereotypes?
- Have we overlooked blind spots (e.g. cultural)?
- Do we represent diversity?

Checklist: Is my text inclusive?



Have I used the appropriate gender for my subject?



Are there any stereotypical depictions or clichéd phrases?

Is everything presented clearly enough so people with different needs or native languages can understand it?



Could anyone feel offended or excluded? (because of humor, metaphors, historical or religious allusions, sexual orientation).

GOOD LUCK!

Amenable content

Language is complex and the introduction of inclusive corporate language is a comprehensive work in progress. You will still find terms on our website that are not gender-neutral. We need to agree on gender-appropriate alternatives that continue to say exactly what they are supposed to, but also realize overriding goals such as clarity or brevity. The latter could make the generic masculine the better choice, which is okay.

We're not concerned with perfection or trying to regulate everything. But a sensitive and fair use of language can make a real difference. Our obvious goal is to be as clear as possible while showing respect and appreciation of the differences people have.

This guide is meant to inspire you to write readable texts while adhering to a few clever ruses that avoid gender conflicts. In this way, you can also add a few compound nouns, asterisks, or punctuation marks in a relaxed and unobtrusive way – and nobody will get annoyed. It's all in the mix!

Have fun, and good luck!

Felicitas & The Copywriters

Our reading tips

Tips for non-discriminatory English:

www.linguisticsociety.org

Tips and tools for using discrimination-free German:

www.genderleicht.de

Tips for a discrimination-free French:

[Guide pratique](#) des Haut Conseil à l'Égalité entre les femmes et les hommes

Online dictionary of gender-inclusive German:

www.geschicktgendern.de

Digital solution for text evaluation in German:

www.app.fairlanguage.com

On the gender debate in France:

<https://theconversation.com/ecriture-inclusive-un-premier-bilan-de-la-controverse-147630>



Let's stay in touch!

 [linkedin.com/company/spreadgroup](https://www.linkedin.com/company/spreadgroup)

 [xing.com/pages/sprd-netag](https://www.xing.com/pages/sprd-netag)

 twitter.com/spread_group

 [instagram.com/insightspreadgroup](https://www.instagram.com/insightspreadgroup)