



**University of
Applied Sciences
St. Pölten**

Inclusive Communication Guidelines

As of: November 2025

Obligatory Part

Providers in the form of legal entities under private law must comply with the Act on Equal Treatment (Federal Equal Treatment Act – B-GBG), Federal Law Gazette I No. 66/2004. Following this, the definition of discrimination in Article 5 of the B-GBG applies.

In accordance with this, Section 12 (1) of the Statutes Part 3 – Equality, Promotion of Women – states: “The USTP commits itself to creating a respectful and positive environment to work and study, free from discrimination.”

Concerning this, the USTP Board passed the following resolution in its meeting on 4 October 2022:

All students as well as all part-time and full-time staff members of the USTP – University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten communicate in an anti-discriminatory manner by

- considering gender identity and gender as well as avoiding sexism in communication,
- consciously applying anti-racist forms of communication,
- respecting sexual orientation and through anti-ableism, which means, e.g., strictly avoiding sexual orientation and disability as a swearword,
- sensitively handling persons with visible or non-visible disabilities / chronic illness,
- deliberately avoiding discrimination due to origin,
- considering diversity in communication.

Gender identity and gender are taken into account in communication, among other things, by actively choosing gender-sensitive formulations. The USTP recommends neutralising the gender in German texts. If this is not possible, the use of the asterisk (*) is prioritised.

The USTP encourages all teachers to raise their students’ awareness to inclusive communication. Inclusive communication can be included in the assessment criteria when it comes to the students’ examination performance. If it is consistently disregarded, this can be included in the assessment as a formal error.

Furthermore, the USTP Board has adopted the German version of the Guidelines for Inclusive Communication as a recommendation for the teaching staff of the USTP. The Guidelines for Inclusive Communication are also recommended for all students of the USTP.

The resolution of the USTP Board is made in agreement with the Executive Board. The corporate wording of the USTP implements the guidelines for inclusive communication at an institutional level. All institutions and persons of the USTP support each other in the implementation and application of the guidelines.

Explanatory Part

Introduction

We, the USTP – University of Applied Sciences St. Pölten, want to be an inclusive place for all. The following guidelines form part of reaching this goal. With help of these guidelines, the various verbal and nonverbal, digital, analogue, and face-to-face communication channels should be designed in such a way that all people are addressed and represented in an appropriate manner.

As an organisation that wants to implement inclusive communication, the USTP recognises that this endeavour represents an ongoing gain in knowledge that everyone should actively shape according to their possibilities. Students as well as part-time and full-time staff members at the USTP should constantly reflect on their own communication and thus contribute to an environment that welcomes all people. The guiding principle at the USTP is a culture of trust that also recognises the freedom of science and teaching.

Inclusive Communication

Communication refers to the dissemination of content. On the one hand, there are different types of communication (e.g., “verbal”, “nonverbal”, “digital”, “analogue”), on the other hand, there are also different channels of communication (e.g., via speech, writing, gestures, facial expressions, proxemics¹). To shape communication in an inclusive manner means to include all groups of people addressed directly and indirectly and not to discriminate against any person on the basis of their identity. Inclusive communication as understood by the USTP refers to all types and ways of communication. It strives to

- include all
- not discriminate against anyone
- not perpetuate stereotypes or clichés

¹ Proxemics refers to the communication between people that occurs through the (non-)observance of a physical distance.

- consider different dimensions of diversity
- act in a respectful and constructive manner
- to be open-minded and continuously gain further knowledge.

Inclusive communication means being open towards the above-mentioned ongoing gain of knowledge, taking into account that mistakes can also happen unintentionally. What is important, however, is the willingness to develop further and to communicate as inclusively as possible to the best of one's knowledge.

The USTP actively recognises the challenges posed by digitalisation and, in particular, the use of digital tools in everyday teaching and research. Due to the increased possibility to retrace digitally shared content at a later point in time, everyone should pay special attention to inclusive communication in oral, written, and non-verbal digital interaction.

When it comes to full-time staff members, this concerns:

- Promotional materials, brochures, and corporate communication incl. photos and videos
- Official websites of the USTP and its organisational units
- Official social media channels of the USTP, its organisational units, and its staff members if their channels clearly and exclusively serve professional purposes in connection with the USTP
- Contracts, agreements, and other official correspondence created by the USTP
- Other ways of internal and external communication in the USTP context

When it comes to full-time and part-time teaching and research staff, this concerns:

- Lectures and lecture notes
- Recorded lectures, teaching videos
- (Digital) conference papers and other (digital) communication in research
- Research contracts, cooperation contracts, proposals, scientific publications, and project reports in research²
- Other ways of internal and external communication in the USTP context

² If, however, provisions by external bodies within the framework of proposals, publications, etc. contradict the language use laid down in the USTP Guidelines for Inclusive Communication, it is permissible to use these external guidelines.

When it comes to students, this concerns:

- Seminar papers and theses, oral and written presentations in the context of teaching
- Other ways of internal and external communication in the USTP context

The USTP recognises that the use of social networks is increasing in importance as digitalisation progresses. The category “social networks” includes, among others:

- Professional networks such as LinkedIn and Xing
- Social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter
- Video-focused social media such as YouTube and TikTok

In order for the USTP to be perceived as an inclusive higher education institution by (potential) future applicants, students, teachers and researchers as well as by staff members and other external stakeholders, all students as well as part-time and full-time staff members should strive for inclusive communication in social networks.

In order to establish a common starting point for the ongoing knowledge gain mentioned in the introduction, some diversity dimensions are addressed below, including “gender identity and gender”, “anti-racism and origin discrimination”, “sexual orientation”, and “anti-ableism”. At the same time, the USTP also clearly positions itself strongly against any other types of discrimination, exclusion, or stereotypes.

Gender Identity & Gender

The members of the USTP are of diverse gender identities. At the USTP, we strive for an inclusive environment where all people are valued equally, regardless of their gender. Equality between women and men represents a central part of the inclusion work. Furthermore, the USTP sees itself as a place of acceptance for people of all gender identities, such as people whose gender identity differs from the gender assigned at birth (trans people), or people who do not feel they belong to the binary gender system (non-binary people), or have variations in gender characteristics, i.e., are neither exclusively male nor exclusively female (inter people). For gender-sensitive language use, MindOut's LGBTQ(+) Glossary can be helpful.

People are often confronted with certain attributions based on their gender. This process is also called “engendering” and ensures the perpetuation of stereotypes and clichés³. This can include attributions of interest (such as: “~~Men are interested in technology~~”), but also more profound insinuations (such as: “~~Women are weak~~”). The USTP rejects gender ascriptions and stereotypes. Students, part-time and full-time employees should avoid these.

The German language offers several possibilities in order to communicate inclusively and consider all genders. For gender-inclusive language instructions in German, please refer to the German guidelines.

Furthermore, in accordance with the self-conception of the USTP, all people should be consciously addressed with the names and pronouns they use for themselves. This concerns women, men, trans* persons, inter* persons, and persons who do not find themselves in the binary gender spectrum. Common pronouns are “she/her” or “he/him”, other persons use, for example, the pronouns “they/them” or even no pronouns at all, but only the (first) name (for example, when referring to something that has just been said: “As Maxi just said, ...”).

It is best to actively ask how to address someone or which pronouns are preferred, or – if the situation does not permit this – to neutralise them. Establishing a round of introductions, e.g., at the beginning of a new course, can create an inclusive space here. A reference to the pronoun used for oneself in the email signature or as an addition to one's own name in video conferencing tools is also a way of raising awareness.

If it is unclear how someone prefers to be addressed or if you are communicating with a number of unknown people (mass mailings), a neutral form of address such as “Good afternoon First name Last name” should be used.

Further information for inclusive language use can be found in the United Nations' Guidelines for gender-inclusive language and in the Gender and Diversity Toolbox from Freie Universität Berlin.

³ See additionally: Sielke S., Schäfer-Wünsche E. (2017) Gender. In: Kühnhardt L., Mayer T. (eds) Bonner Enzyklopädie der Globalität. Springer VS, Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-13819-6_14

Anti-Racism and Origin Discrimination

As a regionally anchored university with an international orientation, the USTP considers people who have diverse individual backgrounds and life realities to be an enrichment. Every person, regardless of their own origin, race, and history, can make an important contribution to everyday life at the university and is valued accordingly.

A constructed classification, demarcation, and hierarchisation of groups of people based on certain physical characteristics, including “skin colour”, forms the basis for racism. On the one hand, racism as an ideology legitimises a racist, privileged norm of being white and, on the other hand, devalues Black people and People of Colour⁴. Therefore, the USTP clearly positions itself against racism and racist statements. Terms and phrases that discriminate people based on their race are to be avoided.

People whose (presumed) origin differs from that of the country in question may experience origin discrimination. This can range from inappropriate comments (such as: ~~“Germans are fussy.”~~) to insulting attributions (such as: ~~“Polish people tend to steal”~~.) The USTP positions itself against any kind of stereotypes and discrimination and encourages students as well as part-time and full-time teachers to always communicate in a reflective manner and to avoid terms that discriminate against countries or regions as well as their inhabitants.

To include people at an international level, communication should always be provided in English as well. Here, too, the basic principles of gender-fair language must be observed. These guidelines should offer assistance in this regard.

For an overview of the basic terms of anti-racist language, the Racial Equity Tools can be consulted.

⁴ Black people and People of Colour are self-designations.

Considering Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is a very personal topic that many people do not want to disclose in the context of their studies or work. Therefore, everyone should reflect on their communication in this topic area and not make attributions based on sexual orientation either in general or in relation to an individual. At the same time, all students, part-time and full-time staff members should create a space in which people of all sexual orientations can live openly if they wish to do so for themselves. The USTP considers itself to be a place where people of all sexual orientations are valued.

In inclusive communication, terms that put the focus on a person's sexual orientation and imply the assignment of a certain sexual orientation should be avoided in particular. In addition, the imagery should not only depict families consisting of father, mother, and child, but should also consider more diverse life plans (such as adoptive and rainbow families).

Sources such as the [MindOut's LGBTQ\(+\) Glossary](#) and the [UK Government Glossary](#) give an insight into the broad spectrum of sexual orientations.

Anti-Ableism

Any discrimination against people with visible and non-visible disabilities, neurodivergence, and chronic illnesses is contrary to the self-perception of the USTP.

All students as well as part-time and full-time staff members should refrain from using hurtful language towards people with disabilities in general and in relation to individuals. An open approach to disabilities should be practiced, in which decisions are made together with those affected rather than about them. It is advisable to choose self-designations of people with disabilities, to avoid generalisations, and to not emphasise supposed deviations.

Disability is often not visible at first glance. All students as well as part-time and full-time staff members should therefore try to address non-visible disabilities, neurodivergence, and chronic illnesses in respectful dialogue with those affected. Further information on disability-inclusive language use can be found in the [Inclusive Language Guidelines of the UK Government](#) as well as in the [Guidelines of the UN Office at Geneva](#).

Consideration of Other Diversity Dimensions

Other diversity dimensions are equally important when focusing on inclusive communication. This concerns, for example, age discrimination, discrimination based on religious beliefs, or discrimination based on social status.

Age discrimination can affect both people who are considered too young or too old for certain tasks or subject areas. While younger people are often denied competence and experience, older people often have to struggle with the attribution of a lack of physical or cognitive capacities. Particularly in everyday university life, an inclusive environment should therefore also be created in this diversity dimension, in which older students, for example, but also younger staff members are not exposed to discrimination.

The USTP also sees itself as a secular place where religious views are left to everyone's own discretion and where, at the same time, people of all religious views are valued. Students as well as part-time and full-time staff members should reflect on their communication in this regard and not make any attributions based on religious views, neither in general nor in relation to a person.

Inclusive Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication refers to communication that does not use words. This includes in particular facial expressions, gestures, proxemics, but also, for example, the positioning of different people in photos or videos. Here, too, it is important to follow the principles of inclusive communication. Examples of actions to avoid are:

- Gestures or facial expressions that deliberately mimic one gender and its stereotyped behaviours
- Lack of distance between students, colleagues, and across different groups of people
- Disproportionate taking of space and gestures of dominance, for example in meetings
- Gestures or facial expressions that convey racist messages and impersonations
- Gestures or facial expressions that imitate or discriminate against people with disabilities
- Visual and video material that portrays members of marginalised groups negatively or as inferior

For inclusive image and video material, it is advisable to depict different people and make them visible. Persons should be depicted symmetrically in terms of size, perspective and positioning, line of vision, context, activity, and clothing, etc. In addition, care should be taken to mention the image rights and names of the persons depicted, as well as to present them at eye level, without focusing on supposed deviations and creating too great a distance. People should be portrayed in an active manner and, if possible, consciously contrary to stereotypical depictions.

Impulses for inclusive imagery are provided, among others, by the platform Gesellschaftsbilder.

Genesis

The present Guidelines for Inclusive Communication were decided on 04/10/2022 by the Board of the USTP in agreement with the Executive Board of the USTP. The presented draft is based on the participation of various USTP bodies as well as the USTP Students' Union (ÖH).

The first guidelines for gender-sensitive language were adopted by the USTP Board on 28/03/2006 in agreement with the Executive Board of the USTP. The binding nature of the guidelines was decided by these same parties in December 2008. The authors of the adopted draft were the Gender and Diversity Officers of the USTP.

These first guidelines were expanded in 2018 to include the contents x-Gender, Gender_Gap, and Asterisk. This change was made by the responsible diversity officers of the USTP and was accepted in this form by both the USTP Board and the USTP Executive Board.

The present guidelines are to be understood as a document that is in constant development and is intended to support and promote the respectful coexistence at the USTP. It pursues the goal of establishing inclusive communication in addition to gender-sensitive language, which goes beyond only gender sensitivity and language.