



A guide to

GENDER- INCLUSIVE GERMAN

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Ansprechpartner:innen

**Die Gleichstellungs-
beauftragten** der HfMT
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**Die Mitglieder der
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WHY

... is gender-inclusive language important?

Like many languages, German uses gendered articles for things and people: das Tier (the animal), der Baum (the tree), die Frau (the woman). Like all languages, German is evolving. Yet, it is still common to use male plurals in speech and in writing even when women or non-binary people are being addressed. Studies show (idw-online.de/de/news716587) that when a text only uses male plurals like die Studenten (the students), readers are more likely to think of male students.

Using exclusively male nouns leads to an unconscious bias. When non-binary people and women are invisible in language, it is harder for them to be recognized as normal parts of public life.

The Senate of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg began calling for gender-inclusive wording in 1995, and the Duden dictionary now designates gendered nouns and includes gender-inclusive plurals.

In October 2017, the Federal Constitutional Court issued a decision on a third gender option (1 BvR2019/16). Persons whose “gender expression has variants compared to a female or male gender expression and who cannot be permanently assigned to either the male or the female gender” should be allowed to have a legal gender identity that is not ‘female’ or ‘male’. In a letter dated March 12, 2019, the Federal Statistical Office requested that higher education institutions include the categories “other” (divers) and “not specified” in addition to “male” and “female” when registering students and staff. These options also affect the form of address in written and verbal communication.

ADDRESSING PEOPLE you don't know



USING GENDER-INCLUSIVE GERMAN:

IN SPEECH

Some people might use both terms, e.g. *Mitarbeiter* and *Mitarbeiterinnen* to increase the visibility of both women and men. However, this excludes people who do not fit into binary gender categories, and also impairs the flow of speech. For oral presentations, some people alternate between female and male nouns with a 50/50 ratio. This works well to expose role clichés, but does not recognize non-binary folks.

Some people use a glottal stop, as in the German words *ver|innerlichen* and *er|innern* to audibly mark the written gender asterisk or colon. For example, “*die Musiker|innen.*”



Remember:

all solutions have advantages and disadvantages. As the German language continues to evolve, you can expect to see more guidelines to be developed for the public sector and in administration in the near future.

IN WRITING

- 1. Verbs:** a verb + *de* can be used to describe what people do, rather than what people are. Example: *studieren + de = die Studierende* (those who study).
- 2. Participles or adjectives:** a participle or adjective + *en* is used to describe attributes. Example: *gewählt + en = die Gewählten* (those who are chosen).
- 3. Function nouns can replace personal nouns.** Example: *die Professur* (the professorship), *die Lehrkraft* (the faculty), *die Leitung* (the leadership), *das Team* (the team).
- 4. Gender punctuation can be used to mark the inclusion of all genders.** For example, “instructors” in German:

Some good options for gender punctuation are:

die Dozent*innen
Gender asterisks (*Sternchen*) are easy to read and include all genders.

die Dozent:innen
Gender colons (*Doppelpunkt*) are easy to type and read. They may also look more professional than the asterisk.

Please note:

Many of these suggestions do not comply with current Duden spelling rules. Therefore, you might not see them in German language books or lessons. That doesn't mean they are incorrect!

The HfMT recommends

that gender-inclusive plurals and/or gender colons should be used for all printed material.

You might also see:

die Dozent_innen
Gender gaps use an underscore, but might be more difficult to type and read.

die Dozent/in die DozentInnen
A slash, or the *Binnen-I* could make women seem like an add-on or an afterthought. It also does not clearly mark the inclusion of non-binary genders.

Avoid using

exclusively male nouns (generic masculine). Do not only add (m/d/w) or use a general note nor a footnote that explains that the female form is always included.

Formal address FOR LETTERS AND EMAILS:

1. Use the person's title and preferred pronouns that are used on their website or social media.
2. If you can't find this information, avoid adjectives like *lieber* or *geehrte*. Instead, use the person's full academic title for a formal greeting:

Guten Tag Prof. Dr. Müller

Less formal greetings:

Use the gender colon with their first and last names:

Liebe:r Kim Müller or **Hallo** Kim Müller

MULTIPLE RECIPIENTS:

If you are writing to multiple recipients, use non-gendered plurals or functional nouns, as in the following examples:

Sehr geehrte Studierende / Interessierte / Teilnehmende

Sehr geehrte Empfänger:innen des Newsletters XYZ

**Liebes Awareness Team
Liebes Kollegium**

Tips for using names and pronouns:

If you don't know how to address a person you meet, you can ask them. In German you might ask, “Wie möchten Sie angesprochen werden?” If you've already addressed a person incorrectly, simply apologize and change how you address them in the future.

At events, participants can write their name and the desired pronoun on the name tag, e.g. Gisela Müller (Sie) or Hans Müller (Er). Or they might also use other forms like *per, hen, er_sie* or *they*, etc., depending on which pronouns the person has chosen and which languages they speak, e.g. Kim Miller (they/them).