CODE OF
GENDER-SENSITIVE
COMMUNICATION
AT BUT

"Language doesn't just describe reality, it helps create it."

The recommendations in this manual are not binding, their application is left to the individual decision. However, the BUT recommends the use of these principles in documents, including presentations and speeches.

Content

Introduction

The Code of Gender Sensitive Communication at BUT defines the approach in the setting and implementation of communication reflecting all persons at Brno University of Technology (BUT) in an appropriate manner.

Why is this topic important?

– At the BUT, we strive for gender equality and a fair environment for all.

– Not only the content of the communication, but also its form is important to us.

– Language and visual communication are part of our institution's PR.

> Gender-sensitive language accurately and fairly describes the reality and reaches all the people for whom the message is intended. It is one that does not ridicule, objectify or discriminate against anyone on the basis of gender identity, expression, sexuality or any social or physical characteristics.

Who is the code for?

– Academic and non-academic community of the University.

– All those who communicate internally and externally.

– All those who are interested in this topic or want to better understand it.

Main objectives

– Identify the main communication bottlenecks (linguistic, visual, symbolic and situational).

– To become familiar with the principles of gender-sensitive communication and measures that can be taken to improve the communication culture at the BUT.

– Formulation of recommendations for the different forms of communication used in public meetings, speeches, conferences, meetings within academic bodies, in letters, e-mails, articles, publications and other presentations of the BUT, including scientific research results, etc.

> **We see the implementation of gender-sensitive communication at the BUT as part of a cultural change of the entire institution. The use of gender-balanced and inclusive language helps to combat gender stereotypes, encourages a change in social attitudes and contributes to achieving gender equality.**

Levels of communication

– Linguistic (written, spoken)

– Visual (social media, promotional materials)

– Symbolic (how the institution presents itself externally)

– Situational (style and conduct and communication in specific situations)

A recommended document to support gender-sensitive communication is the Toolkit on Gender-sensitive Communication. This toolkit provides guidelines for the use of gender-sensitive language. Although it provides tips and examples for the English language, the underlying principles for gender-sensitive writing are universal and remain relevant when using other languages.

Linguistic level of communication

Why do we talk about gender in language?

All languages change and evolve under the influence of many internal and external factors. These include political and social changes, even of an international scale, concerning the position of women and their role in society.

Women play an active role in society, but language is often used that ignores or downplays their contribution. Words matter in shaping our view of the world. For example, the prevalence of male words for general references can reflect assumptions about gender roles and influence readers.

Specificity of the generic masculine in some languages

For English speakers, the concept of generic masculinities may be somewhat unusual, as English does not use this linguistic phenomenon to such an extent. However, in addition to Czech, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Polish, Greek, Dutch, Serbian, Croatian and Russian also use the generic masculine.

A generic masculine is the name of a person in the masculine gender (masculinum), which is perceived as gender-neutral (generic) and thus performs a proxy function for both genders. Typical examples are designations of occupations and professions (sociologist, lawyer, driver, doctor). In English, this phenomenon occurs less frequently. For example, "actor" is now often used to refer to both sexes, instead of distinguishing between "actor" and "actress".

The advantage of a generic masculine is the simplification of communication. The disadvantage is the fundamental invisibility of women. Its use is considered discriminatory. Generic masculinities have a major impact on life choices and the division of labour. Up to 25% fewer women apply for an advertisement in generic masculine. We are introduced to its use at an early age, most of us find it normal and okay. This is evidenced, for example, by a test asking children to 'draw a scientist'. In languages without gender variants, children draw both male and female scientists. In languages for which genders are essential, children draw scientists who look almost exclusively like men.

Link to video: <u>A Class That Turned Around Kids' Assumptions of Gender Roles!</u> (Youtube.com)

If our aim is to address all the people to whom our message is addressed – women not excluded – the use of a generic masculine in the above languages does not seem to be an appropriate strategy.

When the language is sexist

It isn't only in Czech that we often find expressions or phrases that are stereotypical or sexist. Examples are **'fair sex'**, **'breadwinner'**. Expressions such as **'typical guy'** or **'don't be a chick'** denigrate the other sex or so **"Don't call me baby"**.

> **Language affects not only how we speak or write, but also how we think.**

> **Visibility in language leads to greater representation in reality.**

If we refer to women in the context of their professions in the masculine or neutral gender, women remain invisible in them. For BUT, this fact is many times truer, because we are talking about fields where historically there have not been many women and their entry into the "male" sphere started relatively recently.

Gender-blind language

– The use of masculine and neutral genders in languages where the genders
  are used in grammar

– Overlooking the diversity of groups

– Not using feminine forms for occupations, functions and titles

– Promoting stereotypes

Generic Masculinities in the Environment of Universities and Research Institutions in the Czech Republic

– The generic masculine often appears in internal regulations (e.g. **applicant**, **student**,
  supervisor, **research and development worker etc**.)

– Generic masculinities are also included in the provisions of the Higher Education Act
  relating to the awarding of degrees. The titles awarded are **bachelor**, **engineer**, **master**
  and **doctor**. There is, however, no legal provision that stipulates the exclusive use of
  the masculine gender. This is a so-called narrowness rather than a prescribed form of
  communication.

– However, the BUT subscribes to anti-discrimination standards and the human rights
  tradition of both Czech and foreign universities based on principals of democracy and
  wants to be competitive internationally, as well as ensuring all of the incomers, regardless
  whether students or employees, in a safe and non-discriminatory working and study
  conditions. That is why it promotes gender-sensitive language even in the university forms
  and internal documents, even though it is not required to do so by any legal regulation.

Overview of other problematic aspects

– In case of singular, indicate all genders (**he/she/it**).

– Use both genders (**male and female students**, **male and female members
  of the Academic Senate**).

– Alternating the order of genders (**mentors and mentees/mentees and mentors**).

– Use of collective nouns (**students**, **readers**, **teachers**, **learners**, **athletes**, **team members**).

– Use of neutral gender (**chairperson**, **chair** – no **"chairman"**, **police officer** – no **"policeman"**,
  flight attendant – no **"stewardess"**).

– When addressing **"Ladies and Gentlemen"** use **"Everyone"** or **"Distinguished guests"**.

– If there are only women in a given group, refer to them exclusively in the feminine gender (**female worker of department**, **female students project**).

– Possibility of using neutral descriptors (**academia**, **professional college**, **team**).

– When writing – use of slash (splitting) – e.g. instead of **"students"** write **"male/female students"**, ideal for use on forms.

– Deictic wording (reference to person, situation, place, time, etc. – addressing in 2nd person) e.g.: **your signature** instead of **the applicant's signature**.

– The appropriate way to address **"people"** is basic.

Others problematic aspects

– **Avoid** gender-stereotypical phrases and adjectives when describing women and men (e.g., **members of the fairer sex**, **girls from the study department**, **strong men** etc.).

– **Do not label** as exceptions women/men who act in less typical roles (don't use **female doctor**, **male nurse** but only **doctor**, **nurse**).

– **Names and titles.** We list both in the same mode for all appointees: for example, instead of **"Eng. Petr Novák and his wife"** we use **"Eng. Petr Novák and MUDr. Hana Nováková"**.

– **We do not use the term "Miss"**, which gives the impression of immaturity, inexperience and inferior competence (the male equivalent of which is also not used, and we do not usually look for marital status in the case of men). In connection with an academic title we use exclusively **"Ms"**, never **"Miss Master"** etc.

– In order to make women's contributions more visible, foreign female names that do not signal gender may be given (for example, in journal articles) by their full name.

– **Reconcile written and oral expression.** It is desirable to use gender-corresponding names of persons in both written and oral presentations.

Tips for email communication

It is important to use the correct format when emailing with your community, whether they are students, employees, colleagues. It is not always possible to know how to reach someone if you have not been in contact with them before.

Example:
You can use the following sentence at the end of emails to make everyone feel properly addressed: **"We want to address you respectfully. If you would like us to address you differently, you can let us know."**

Other examples of appropriate email and written communication:

– Instead of addressing **"Dear Sir/Madam"** use **"Dear Colleague"**, **"Dear Students"** or **"To whom it may concern"**.

– **"They/them"** as gender-neutral alternatives to **"he/she"**, e.g. **"Each student should bring their own lunch"** instead of **"Each student should bring his or her own lunch"**.

– Offer options **"Mx."** as a neutral alternative to **"Mr."** or **"Ms."**.

– Use **"Dr."** or **"Professor"** for everyone regardless of gender.

– Use gender-neutral terms when describing job positions, e.g. **"staffing"** instead of **"manpower"**.

– Academic texts to cite and refer to diverse authors regardless of gender.

This will reinforce an atmosphere of understanding and respect for everyone with whom you communicate electronically.

Language and gender non-binarity (asterisk or slash)

However, the descriptions of **"men and women"**, **"male and female students"** or **"male and female employees"** are not a full-fledged substitute, because gender is a non-binary category, i.e. it includes not only men and women, but also people who do not identify as such on the basis of gender (intersex people) or gender identity (trans people), including people who do not "see" themselves in any of these categories (agender, non-binary people etc.).

– Asterisk – e.g., **students* attended...**

– Whether we use an asterisk or a slash, we are showing respect for other selected groups.

– These forms should be used especially in texts that require it (e.g. forms, questionnaires, contracts, statistics).

- How to include in the language people who perceive themselves as gender non-binary and do not feel they are being addressed by the language as it is commonly used?

- Use of asterisks: **Marieke Lucas Rijneveld is a Dutch writer*. She/he/it (*) was born in 1991. This year he/she/it was awarded the International Booker Prize for her/his/it's (*) debut novel The Discomfort of Evening.**

- Pronoun writing options: adapting the English **"they/them"**: **this year they were awarded... for their novel.**

- In the Czech environment, people are gradually getting into the habit of writing the gender they want to be addressed with (e.g. **she/they**) on their business card or in an email. It may seem unusual, but it is one way of continuing to show the environment how one wants to be addressed.

Visual level of communication

Gender-sensitive communication is also important on pictorial, photographic, graphic materials such as pictograms, smileys etc. Here too, the aim is to have the widest possible range of depictions and to try to break down traditional ideas of what is typically "boyish/masculine" or "girly/feminine".

In any case, it is about:

- **colours** and their shades (blue for boys, pink for girls),

- **patterns**, e.g. on clothes, textiles (flowers × cars),

- **characteristics** ("diligent female student" × "action male student"),

- **types of activities and tools** (male student working with instruments, female student reading a book),

- **professions** (female nurse, male technician),

- **pictograms, smileys** and other "placeholder" communicative figures.

The above list of visual communication is often cited in conjunction with gender stereotypical or insensitive language.

Presentations, promotional items and materials, campaigns, social networks

– Visual presentations, charts, pictograms should represent men and women in comparable numbers, sizes and positions (in terms of symbolic connotations).

– Visualizations should avoid stereotyping (male intellectually gifted vs. female object) and linguistic constructions such as the **more beautiful half of humanity**, etc.

– Let us avoid sexist and 'ticklish humour'.

– Let's support underrepresented groups.

– Visuals should **invite participation through text and image**.

Advertising and recruitment process

For legal reasons, do not use only the feminine gender, e.g. **"saleswoman"** or **"female assistant"**, not only in the job title but also in the rest of the advert. This would mean that no man has a chance of being hired, even if he has the necessary skills and work experience, which means discrimination. Use the feminine gender if the job title is an official job title, for example nurse (general, station, head, etc.), nanny or seamstress.

You can also get away with using a **neutral job title**, such as **"teacher/man/woman/it"**, **"salesperson"**, etc.

Right

– **Manager* (man/woman/it) wanted**

– **Manager (man/woman/it) wanted**

– **Are you smiling? Come work at our front desk**

Inappropriate

– **We are filling the position of HR Manager**

– **We are looking for a male computer technician**

– **We are looking for a pleasant young woman**

– **We are looking for a nice assistant**

– **Are you young and restless? We're hiring you!**

– **We are looking for a smiling receptionist**

A good example from practice – video

The aim of the BUT **"I Belong Here"** campaign was to break gender stereotypes, to show that "women do not have to be afraid of technical fields" and to attract more girls to study at the university.

Link to video: I Belong Here (Youtube.com)
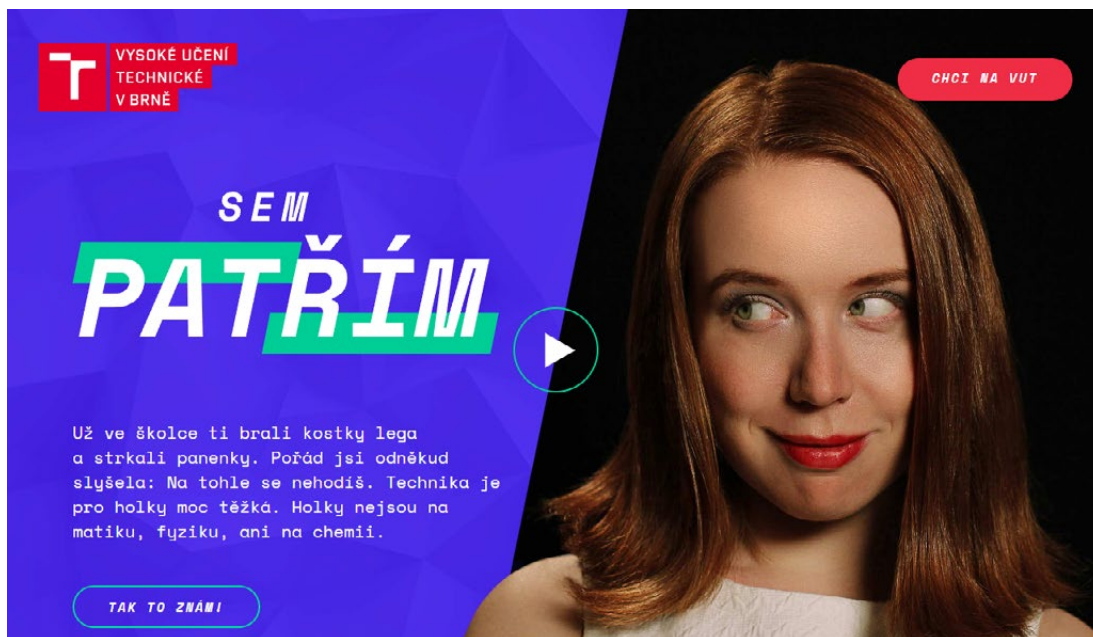
"A Class That Turned Around Kids' Assumptions of Gender Roles!"

Link to video: A Class That Turned Around Kids' Assumptions of Gender Roles! (Youtube.com)

Bad example from practice – video

The promo video Wolf from BUT (FEEC) is a prime example of gender-blind language. It promotes gender stereotypes, shows women as subordinate sex objects, and does not shy away from ticklish humour.

Link to video: <u>Vlk z VUT – Wolf from BUT.</u> Video is only Czech. (Youtube.com)

Symbolic level of communication

– How the institution speaks outwardly and inwardly, what linguistic and visual means it uses to do so.

– Creating an impression, mood and atmosphere in the workplace.

– Who speaks for the institution, who is its face.

– It is possible to choose different communication styles in relation to the target audience. If the message is aimed at learners, it is advisable to be consistent in the use of both gender expressions.

– The same applies to communication on social media.

– For communicating with the scientific community, it is possible to consider the trade-offs of inclusive language described above.

Basic rules of gender-sensitive symbolic communication

– The institution's subscription to the principles of fairness.

– Use of gender-sensitive language in internal communication.

– Making women scientists and their work visible within the institution. Presenting female role models, for example on the web, in teaching, in the building premises.

– Use of gender sensitive language in selection procedures. The possibility of explicitly stating that women are welcome in the advertisement of new positions.

– A commitment to balance could also be included in the rules for the composition of evaluation and selection panels.

– Representation of the institution by both men and women. Aim for balanced representation and do not settle for not to be satisfied that, for example, the women approached did not have time. The available database of female experts can be used.

– Gender-balanced expression alone will not change society, but it must accompany the changes taking place in society.

Situational level of communication

– How we communicate and act in certain situations (with colleagues, with superiors and subordinates).

– Who does whose job, who does "service" (making coffee, cleaning the lab, taking minutes of meetings, preparing materials), who jumps in, whose idea is appreciated etc.

– The existence of a double standard for women and men by which their reactions and actions are judged.

> **Language is a tool, let's not be afraid to use it.**

The language should make communication polite and pleasant to both women and men, also with a view to maintaining clarity of expression.

How to do it?

The way in which the principle of gender sensitivity in language is reflected in a text depends largely on the **type of text** and the stylistic layer of language used.

The text should reflect that the chosen solution is appropriate for the type of text and its future use, while ensuring sufficient visibility of all gender types for which the text is intended:

– The writing of **press releases** requires brevity, so we prefer descriptions or asterisks in view of the topic and we try to be as correct as possible.

– We recommend gender correctness when **writing projects**.

– When writing **emails**, we **address** the recipients appropriately (**Dear Ladies and Gentlemen**, not **Kind Ladies and Dear Gentlemen**, the order can be alternated). Addressing them as **ladybugs** etc. is **taboo**!

– With the utmost regard for the need for clarity, we should avoid using language that is not gender inclusive in **legislative acts** wherever possible.

> **Unbiased language is more likely to be accepted by users if it is natural and non-intrusive.**

Where to find information?

– Brno University of technology; website Equal Opportunities, https://www.vut.cz/en/but/employee-support/equal-opportunities

– European Institute for Gender Equality; website Gender-sensitive communication, Toolkit on Gender-sensitive Sommunication, https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/toolkits-guides/gender-sensitive-communication

– National Contact Centre for Gender & Science (originally "for women and science"), https://www.soc.cas.cz/en/department/national-contact-centre-gender-science

– The Gender Expert Chamber of the Czech Republic, www.gekcr.cz/en

– Czech Women's Lobby, czlobby.cz | Czech women's lobby

– GenPORT, https://www.genderportal.eu/

Videos

Youtube, Is English sexist? | Learn English | Canguro English, 2016.
Avaible from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dc3cWHCPFYw

Youtube, Gender Sensitivity in the Workplace, 2022.
Avaible from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsqGxFx9-QE

Resources

European Parliament, Gender pay gap in Europe: facts and figures, 2023.
Available from: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20200227STO73519/
gender-pay-gap-in-europe-facts-and-figures-infographic

Antidiscrimination Act; in the Czech Republic is governed by Law No. 198/2009 Sb. (Czech – Zákon o rovném
zacházení a o právních prostředcích ochrany před diskriminací a o změně některých zákonů, 1. 9. 2009.
Avaible from: https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2009-198 (only Czech)

GenderSAFE; 2024. Avaible from: https://gendersafe.eu/

Council of Europe; Gender-Sensitive Communication – prezentation, 2020.
Avaible from: https://rm.coe.int/training-gers-2020-gender-sensitive-communication/1680a06147

Center for Women's Economic Empowerment (CIPE40); Inclusive Communication: Gender-Sensitive,
Inclusive and Accessible Language, 2022. Avaible from: https://www.cipe.org/resources/
inclusive-communication-gender-sensitive-inclusive-and-accessible-language/

European Institute for Gender Equality; Toolkit on gender-sensitive communication, 2019.
Avaible from: https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/
toolkit-gender-sensitive-communication