

Equality, diversity and inclusion for speakers at BSAC events

BSAC works to be an inclusive and welcoming community to all and we would like to encourage those who speak to BSAC audiences or on behalf of the organisation to consider the language they use with regards to that inclusion.

While equality, diversity and inclusion covers a wide range of protected characteristics which we would like to highlight, we find the most notable of these to be gender. The diving community as a whole has a history of being male-centred and we would like to challenge this as an organisation, emphasising the need for gender-inclusive terminology to be used.

Often through little fault of our own, we have an engrained default of returning to male pronouns (he, him, his) and male-gendered titles (postmen, firemen, policemen). We would like to encourage our speakers to challenge their own defaults and focus on using both neutral terms and pronouns where possible.

Mary Tetley
BSAC CEO

Introduction

Language is one of the most powerful tools that we have to share knowledge. Normally our body language and tone of voice will supplement and enhance the words that we choose to use. Before the coronavirus pandemic, words were important and with the rise of online events, we lose some of the body language and tone of voice that helps us to convey and discover meaning.

These considerations for speakers are to help all speakers who are presenting to a BSAC audience or speaking on behalf of BSAC. We recognise the need for speakers to demonstrate an awareness of what is appropriate for their audience and an understanding of how the language we use can be more inclusive. Language is ever changing and needs, along with standard terminology, to be updated to remain appropriate and inclusive as well as comply with the Equality Act 2010.

Through strategic development, BSAC is moving towards an improved, more inclusive, open, respectful, and welcoming environment for all. Our immediate priority in the virtual world we find ourselves in are the speakers who represent us especially in the public domain.

When we define inclusive language, we aim for communication that avoids using words, expressions or assumptions that would unnecessarily exclude people. For the past few decades, there's been an increased awareness of language that excludes based on gender. Whereas past generations may have been taught to use "he" as the default for a person, the latter half of the 20th century saw people looking to alternate "he" and "she" or to re-write to avoid identifying gender at all. More recently, there's been more awareness of a spectrum of gender identities and gender expression.



A definition of inclusive language, though, goes beyond merely gender. With inclusive language, we aim for communication that includes people, regardless of gender, language, culture, religion, race, ability, family structure, marital status, sexuality, origin and so on.

The following are classed as protected characteristics and it is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of:

- age
- gender reassignment
- being married or in a civil partnership
- being pregnant or on maternity leave
- disability
- race including skin colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Language to consider

Rather than 'labelling', the language we use should be both respectful and fit for purpose. As speakers we advise that you not use the following terms and acknowledge that this list is by no means exhaustive. With each of these terms we explain why the language is to be avoided and offer alternative terms.

Terms to be avoided	Reasoning	Alternative terms
Girls, ladies or any gendered pet names (e.g. love, darling, dear)	When adult women are referred to by these terms, it can be seen as belittling or derogatory.	Ideally gender-neutral terms: folk, people, divers, snorkellers, teammates, colleagues, trainees, friends, members, community, everyone.
Ladies and gentlemen	This is an outdated terms of address that excludes people who are gender non-conforming (non-binary, genderfluid, bigender)	Try 'good evening and welcome everyone', or any other gender-neutral terms of address.

Guys	Often used as slang for a mixed gender group of people but can also assume male gender identity.	Use gender-neutral terms: folk, people, divers, snorkellers, etc.
Wife/Husband, Wives/Husbands	These are non-inclusive terms	Spouses/partners
She/her/hers, He/him/his	These gender-specific pronouns are not gender-neutral and unless you are aware of an individuals' preferred pronouns, it is better not to guess or prefer the use of one over the other.	They/them/theirs
Normal (when describing individuals)	This is a non-inclusive term that can be seen as stigmatising	Typical, common
Mentally handicapped	This is seen as a derogatory term.	Use polite language or if referring to someone with an impairment then define it, e.g. a person with learning difficulties
Elderly, old people, aged	These are not preferred terms	Older people/person/adult

What if I am unsure?

Ultimately, we simply need to ensure that we are being considerate of others when using language, regardless of whether we are speaking to people directly or referring to them. If you do make a mistake, simply apologise and move on – there is no need to dwell on it.