

Information sheet on gender-inclusive forms of address

When we send emails, write letters or meet someone, we use certain forms of address. When we communicate, we're constantly making assumptions about people's **gender identity**. We base these assumptions on elements like their name, appearance, voice, **legal gender**, or the gender of their partner. If we don't know who we're writing to, or when we address a diverse group, we tend to refer to only two gender identities, masculine and feminine. We write 'Dear Sir or Madam', we say 'Ladies and gentlemen', and so on.

Sometimes our assumptions are correct, and sometimes they're not. For example, think about people with gender-neutral names such as Chris, Ilham, Sam, Bobbie and Rio. **Trans people** are often **misgendered** on the basis of their name, appearance, legal gender, and so on. And then there are people who identify as neither male nor female. These people have what we call a **non-binary gender identity**. They often prefer to be addressed neither as 'sir' nor as 'madam'. So unless you're 100% sure of someone's gender identity and how they wish to be addressed (e.g. when they've included their pronouns in their email signature), it's best to use gender-inclusive wording. Also, when writing or speaking to a diverse group, try to avoid the classic gender binary by using gender-inclusive language.

You'll find that addressing people in a gender-inclusive way is really not that difficult. You can choose from the following options, but no doubt you can think of a few others yourself.

- **General opening line:**
Hello / Hi / Good morning / Good afternoon
(But make sure you don't use 'Dear' on its own without a name or other form of address)
- **Use the first name and/or surname:**
Dear Sam Smith / Hello Sam
- **Gender-neutral words referring to groups of people:**
Dear colleague(s) / participant(s) / student(s) / attendee(s) / stakeholder(s) / recipient(s)
- **Gender-neutral title or job title, either with or without the surname:**
Dear professor / director / chairperson
Dear Professor Smith / Doctor Smith