



**Te Kawa Mataaho**  
Public Service Commission

(PSC, 2022)

Te Puka Ārahi i te Reo Tuwhera mō te Ranga Aniwaniwa

## Rainbow inclusive language guide

**11 March 2022**

Using inclusive language for Rainbow communities, including in the Public Service, ensures our rainbow colleagues, and the Rainbow communities we serve, feel they are treated respectfully and inclusively.



5th

Te Take e whakamahi nei I te tapanga āniwaniwa me te tapanga ranga āniwaniwa

## Why we use the terms rainbow and Rainbow communities

'Rainbow' is a broad umbrella term that covers a diversity of sexual orientations as well as gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics. Rainbow communities, rather than Rainbow community, indicates that there is not a homogenous group and that there are multiple communities woven into the rainbow umbrella term. Most of the time we use the terms 'rainbow' and 'Rainbow communities', but we also use other common umbrella terms in the Public Service when it is appropriate, such as LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, ace identities and more) or SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics).

He aha te reo tuwhera mō te ranga āniwaniwa

## What is rainbow inclusive language

Rainbow inclusive language embraces the spectrum of sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and sex characteristics that we see in society. Inclusive language respectfully acknowledges and values all people as they are and the words that they use to describe themselves. It also helps to increase the visibility of diversity and to prevent bias or discrimination from occurring.

Check our glossary to get to know, understand and use common rainbow terms.

[Glossary — Diversity and inclusion, common rainbow terms](#)

Te whakamahi I te reo ira-kore

## Using gender-neutral language

We encourage the use of gender-neutral language whenever possible as this makes communications more inclusive for all people and has a positive impact on gender equality.

When speaking or writing in English, a number of approaches can be applied to be more gender inclusive. Examples of gender-neutral language:

- 👤 spouse or partner — not husband, wife
- 👤 parent — not mother, father
- 👤 police officer — not policeman, policewoman
- 👤 they, them or their — not he or she.



It is grammatically correct to use ‘they’ to refer to a singular person. We naturally do this when we don’t know a person’s gender. For example, if we’re behind someone who is wearing a hoodie in the supermarket queue and the checkout operator called, “Next!” we would say, “They were next,” referring to one person.

[Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English — United Nations](#)

Me whai kia kaua e matapae

## **Try not to make assumptions**

Social and cultural norms mean that we often make assumptions about who people are and who they’re attracted to based on the way they look. This is because we assume that being heterosexual and cisgender is the ‘norm’ or the default; known as heteronormativity and cisnormativity. By avoiding these assumptions, we can be more inclusive of all people and all relationships.

Kāore e hāngai ana ki te kōwhiri, ki ngā mariu rānei

## **It’s not about choices or preferences**

This is about recognising people as they are. A person’s sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics are not preferences or choices. This means instead of saying, “Jo’s preferred pronouns are they/them,” we should say “Jo’s pronouns are they/them”. It’s also a good idea to make sure you’re not using qualifiers in your language such as phrases like ‘self-identified’ or ‘sexual preference’.

He mahi mēnā ka taka ki te hē

## **What to do if you get it wrong**

If you make a mistake with someone’s pronouns, simply correct yourself in the next sentence or the next time you refer to the person using a pronoun. It’s more important to make the good faith effort in the future, rather than focusing on how difficult it is to remember to use the correct pronoun.

He rite tonu te whanake te reo āniwaniwa me ngā tapanga

## **Rainbow language and terminology are constantly evolving**

Language used in Rainbow communities is continually changing and as we learn more, some of the terminology or definitions we have listed here will also need updating. There are many cultural and gender identities that do not have a translation in the English language or an equivalent in Western culture.

It's also important to remember that everyone is different and how we use language is up to us as individuals. Some people do not use labels to describe themselves.

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[READ MORE](#)

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