

Planning Teaching? Think DRAC!



Diverse Perspectives

Whose perspective are you giving? Who or what topics are neglected or silenced?

- Reflect on / discuss the inequalities, power imbalances, and the epistemic injustice in the knowledge presented, i.e. Who gets to determine what counts as knowledge? Or what evidence is most valued? Who can participate?
- Try to include different views, and where lacking facilitate discussion/reflection on these issues, i.e. What do students think? What other perspectives do they bring?

Representation

Deconstruct or question the “default” representation of people in science and society

- Include variety in authors/sources, occasionally highlighting authors from marginalised groups (e.g. women, people of colour...)
- Consider how content reflects what is assumed, or reinforced, as “default” or “normal”? e.g. youth, whiteness, heteronormativity, ableism, European, Christian...

Overgeneralisation and Homogenisation

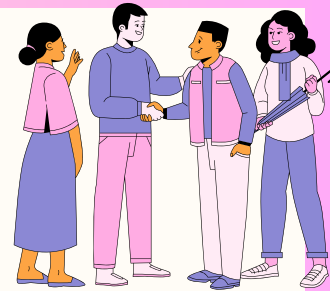
- Be cautious with implications and reflect on who’s assumed as a “default” individual (e.g. from certain subgroups to a larger group).
- Avoid defining groups relative to a “default” group (e.g. white vs non-white).

Examples

- Ensure variety in the examples used that could be relatable to different individuals – we can draw from our lives, but also ask others for suggestions, look up alternatives, ask students for ideas...
- Think twice how they could come across to people from other groups, or check with relevant individuals.

Stereotyping

- Does the portrayal of certain individuals/groups reinforce stereotypes? E.g. reproducing gender norms (men as doctors, women as housewives); or other inequalities (people of colour in low-status jobs).
- Avoid implied negative associations – repeatedly associating negative events/actions (war, crimes, poverty) with certain religions/countries/ethnicities (considering also current events and sensitive topics).



Accessibility

Follow D&N guidelines & check Ally, e.g.:

- Are visual materials clearly readable? (e.g. sans serif font, contrast, colours, font size, image captioning for screen readers).
- Use simple and direct language, favour short sentences.
- Break down content to avoid overcrowding slides.

Communication

Media

- Use different means of communication and interaction to play to different strengths in different individuals.
- Varied use of pictures, graphs, videos, links to tutorials, news articles, etc.
- Interactive tools like polls, activities, discussions.

Language

- Avoid binaries and gendering when possible (e.g. in examples, favouring gender-neutral language [person, they, them]).
- Favour gender terms (woman/man; nouns), and/or, when relevant, acknowledge distinction with biological sex (male/female; adjectives).
- Avoid heteronormative language/assumptions in roles, relationships, family constellations (e.g. partner, caregiver, parent, child...).

People- vs. identity-first language

- Consider/acknowledge different preferences for different groups and individuals. E.g. identity-first favoured by autistic and Deaf communities (i.e. “autistic person”); people-first might be favoured by those with other disabilities or mental health issues (favouring e.g. “people with schizophrenia”), but don’t assume. Explain your use.



Add content warnings when warranted

- How might content impact others? Enable choice on how/whether to engage (e.g. leave for a bit, close their eyes...).

Decolonising and Diversifying the Curriculum

A practical guide for staff

Background

Project and Guide Overview

The Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL) Department of Psychology's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and the Teaching in Higher Education: Supporting and Inspiring Students (THESIS) Teams have been working towards decolonising and diversifying our curriculum through a multiyear project consisting of multiple steps and sub-goals:

1. Literature review (Spring 2023):

Reviewed existing tools and literature on decolonising the curriculum and auditing materials, informing the development of a custom tool for auditing lecture slides across various dimensions (listed below).

2. Auditing materials (Summer 2023):

Employed 3 UG students as research assistants to inform a revision of the audit tool and conduct the audit of lecture slides. Selected slides aimed to cover our teaching across years and staff members, and gather a range of examples. A total of 99 lectures on Moodle for the 2022-23 academic year were audited, from undergraduate to postgraduate modules, with 1-3 lectures per module and staff member.

3. Review the audit findings (Autumn 2023):

Identified areas of strength and weakness, good practice examples, and priorities for action, that informed a draft of the practical guide for staff.

4. Student consultation (Spring 2024):

Student focus group discussions were held to consult students on a draft of this practical guide cover page, review identified priorities for action, and consider other ways to implement change. Discussions were focused around specific topics, gathering students from relevant backgrounds.

5. Practical guide for staff (Summer 2024):

Developed and disseminated a preliminary version of this guide to assist staff in reviewing and updating curriculum materials for the upcoming academic year.

6. Ongoing Monitoring and Improvement (2023-2027):

Staff are urged to continually revise and improve their teaching materials, drawing on this guidance and relevant resources. This guidance is itself a living document, to be gradually updated, and feedback is welcome. Additionally, an annual student survey aims to monitor student's views and experience (e.g. on sense of belonging, perception of diversity and inclusivity of materials, relatability of lectures). After a few years, another (perhaps adapted) audit of the curriculum and teaching materials will be conducted. Gathering such evidence enables the continuous monitoring of our practices, tracking change, and refining our recommendations.

This project considers diversity and inclusion across various dimensions, namely:

- Age;
- Disability, neurodiversity, and mental health;
- Gender and sexual diversity;
- Race, ethnicity, and nationality;
- Religion and belief.

This guide has been developed to help staff revise and update their curriculum materials, as we continuously work to improve our curriculum and monitor our student experience. Co-creation with students was embedded throughout, involving students as research assistants, in focus group consultations, and through annual surveys. The Background section explains motivations and key underlying concepts for this work. At the end, you can find a Glossary, References, and Further Resources. The core of the guide expands on issues listed in our initial one-page summary (and Appendix) along 4 key subareas, to help staff planning their teaching to **Think DRAC! Diverse Perspectives, Representation, Accessibility, and Communication**.

A key idea is that each of us has a unique context and history which influences how we understand and navigate the world (even as scientists). It can often be difficult to imagine what things are like for others, or how what we say or do may come across to them. Therefore, working towards creating a curriculum and learning environment that is inclusive of all people requires ongoing reflection, questioning, humility, and openly inviting others to share their perspectives and experience. This can be challenging, uncomfortable, and we can all make mistakes – you are not expected to get everything right at once. By explicitly recognising this challenge, we facilitate the exchange of knowledge and open space to get feedback, so we can all learn and grow. For example, we acknowledge that our use of language may sometimes not align with everyone's preferences, or fall short of recognising appropriate nuance or range of perspectives. Namely, we use *race* here to refer to a socially constructed concept, reflective of a history and a continued lived experience of racialisation of some people(s), not as reflective of a "natural" or "biological fact" (even if used here without quotes)¹. We must start somewhere, and we have sometimes explained our usage in the text or in the Glossary section (words listed there will be marked in italic when first used in the main text). This may be revised in the future, as we are open to feedback and changing perspectives.

As captured by the slogan "all different, all equal"², it is by recognising, and valuing, our differences that we can best work towards a more inclusive and equitable society (whereas "being blind" to differences can hinder that goal). As teachers or supervisors this includes having to recognise asymmetries in power, and sometimes in knowledge, while still inviting and valuing students' contributions. At the same time, we should be conscious of our potential biases in what type of contributions and knowledge we value (see ensuing sub-sections).

This project has been led by Dr Nura Sidarus and Dr Sam Fairlamb, with Dr Adnan Levent, Dr Francesco Scaramozzino, Dr Ryan Jefferies, Dr Sarah Sampson, Prof Victoria Bourne, and UG research assistants Tiffany Dashtizadeh (June-July 2023), Sana Rehman and Sevitika Sharma (June 2023 - July 2024). We are also grateful to feedback and contributions from other colleagues, namely Dr James Ravenhill, and Dr Nuno Nodin.

We welcome feedback from everyone on this document, as well as interest in being involved in this ongoing work – contact Nura.Sidarus@rhul.ac.uk.

Colonialism

Colonialism is a harmful and exploitative process where a foreign power reshapes a country's economic, political, cultural, environmental, social, and educational institutions to serve the interests of the coloniser. This often results in a colonial curriculum that is:

- **Unrepresentative:** It selectively constructs teachings that exclude crucial perspectives, particularly those of the colonised populations.
- **Inaccessible:** By excluding diverse narratives, the curriculum becomes alienating to many of its recipients. It appeals mainly to a historically favoured demographic, typically reflecting the coloniser's culture and values, which can make it difficult for others to identify with and engage with the content.
- **Privileged:** The curriculum ensures the continued participation, comfort, and success of a select group—usually those who belong to or align with the coloniser's demographic.

Decolonising the Curriculum

Decolonising the curriculum involves recognising and challenging the systems, structures, and power relations that maintain the dominance of some people (white, Western, male, abled, elite) over others in education and knowledge production. This process includes:

- **Recognising Exclusion:** Acknowledging how the current curriculum marginalises the perspectives of those who don't belong to dominant groups.
- **Challenging Dominant Narratives:** Questioning and contesting the supremacy of Western-centric narratives and knowledge systems.
- **Embracing Diverse Knowledge Systems:** Including and valuing knowledge systems outside of typical Western understanding.
- **Reconstructing Knowledge Collaboratively:** Engaging in a collaborative process with diverse cultures to reconstruct the curriculum.
- **Ongoing Evaluation and Adaptation:** Understanding that decolonisation is not a one-time effort but a continuous process of regular evaluation and adaptation to ensure the curriculum remains inclusive and representative of diverse perspectives.

Diversifying the Curriculum

Our current project has favoured breadth, covering various dimensions of identity at the same time, while recognising that comes at a cost to depth, and risks not delving into each enough. Our choice to add "diversifying" to our title aims to emphasise this broad scope of our project. Yet, the above definitions of decolonisation should clarify that the process entails diversifying the people, narratives, and ideas that are valued and included. Some have argued *"Decolonisation is crucial because, unlike diversification, it specifically acknowledges the inherent power relations in the production and dissemination of knowledge, and seeks to destabilise these, allowing new forms of knowledge which represent marginalised groups – women, working classes, ethnic minorities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) to propagate."*³ This is indeed the project we seek to undertake. Questioning when, and how, power relations operate to privilege some over others is further supported by considering *intersectionality: "a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem*

*here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there"*⁴. This lens enables understanding that some people may be affected by overlapping marginalisation across different characteristics (e.g. experience of discrimination for a "black woman" isn't the same as for a "white woman"). At the same time, it reminds us that we're not one-dimensional, our identity has multiple aspects, resulting in different power differentials in different contexts. While we may be marginalised in some contexts (or ways), we may benefit from some privilege in others. Although privilege may be "*hard to give up*"⁵, acknowledging it hold us accountable to "*no longer be complicit*".

Epistemic Injustice

Epistemic injustice is a term coined by philosopher Prof Miranda Fricker, which refers to a wrong done to someone in their capacity as a knower⁶ ([short blog](#), [podcast](#)). Epistemic injustice can manifest as a lack of credibility and/or silencing of knowers belonging to marginalised groups (e.g. not believing in someone's testimony of their experience, not valuing their contributions to knowledge). Epistemic injustice in science and academia can engender biased or false representations of the world (e.g. if generalising from a limited sample), with harmful consequences on knowledge and technology development and policy making. Epistemic injustice also produces gaps in collective interpretative resources, putting under-privileged individuals at an unfair disadvantage when making sense of their social experiences. For instance, before the term "sexual harassment" was widely known, many women experienced such behaviour but lacked the conceptual tools to identify and describe it. Understanding different forms of epistemic injustice helps us recognise how certain groups are systematically marginalised within the academic discourse, and society, and reflect on the consequences of this marginalisation on knowledge production and education.

Key points to consider when thinking about decolonising and diversifying the curriculum⁷

1. Recognise that knowledge is not owned by individuals, it is cumulatively and collectively produced.

While this may seem obvious, this is hidden by a long colonial history that systematically favours the intellectual contributions of some individuals (e.g. elite white men) over others. Whether through taking credit for other's intellectual work, minimising other's contributions, or dismissing and silencing other's perspectives^{6,8}. As a result, across disciplines, white men dominate, giving disproportionate significance to the experiences, histories, and achievements of this one group. Moreover, it means academia privileges masculine, rational, euro-centric forms of knowledge over other forms (e.g. knowledges of indigenous populations).

2. Challenge that history by reframing and recreating a more diverse and inclusive curriculum.

One where people of all ethnicities, races, classes, genders, sexual orientations, and (dis)abilities can understand what our roles and contributions have been in shaping intellectual achievements and shifting culture and progress. But also one in which we expand our thinking to consider "*how different frameworks, traditions and knowledge projects can inform each other, how multiple voices can be heard, and how new perspectives emerge from mutual learning*"⁷.

3. Acknowledge this is not easy and requires nuance.

Greater inclusion and showcasing of works by marginalised authors are steps towards diversifying the voices that can be heard. But to further diversify the narratives and knowledges systems that are included, we need to go beyond simply rethinking what (or who) is taught, to considering how it is critiqued, and even how it is taught.

4. Identify how universities reproduce colonial hierarchies.

For example, considering how ethnicity, race, gender, *disability*, class continue to impact how students experience university life, may experience marginalisation or exclusion, and how it demonstrably impacts their academic attainment. Or e.g. in international projects, namely with the global South, thinking about how (neo)colonial relations of power or exploitative practices may impact their design and operation⁹.

5. Challenge the problematic practices and structures operating in our institutions and create new alternatives.

We need to act individually, but also to create spaces to act collectively, as staff and/or students, to support each other in this work, and jointly reimagine and create new alternatives for institutional practices and our curriculum.

Planning Teaching? Think DRAC!

Diverse Perspectives

We have reviewed how knowledge production and transmission are very susceptible to societal power imbalances. Minimising the impact of these power asymmetries requires actively working towards including more diverse perspectives, while being considerate of how people and perspectives are represented. This is supported by an understanding that many changes in practices, and language, are underpinned by changing conceptual frameworks, thanks to ongoing social justice movements and knowledge production led by, and involving, those concerned, as captured by the slogan "Nothing about us without us"¹⁰.

Whose Perspective Are You Giving?

- Reflect on whose voices are being highlighted in your lectures. Are they predominantly from a specific demographic or cultural background? Ensure a balanced representation by including voices from various backgrounds, including those from underrepresented or marginalised backgrounds.
- Ask yourself *who* and *what topics* might be neglected or silenced in the current curriculum (or ask others, including students). Expand the range of what is included to provide a more comprehensive understanding of psychological concepts.

Addressing Inequalities and Power Imbalances

- Discuss the historical and contemporary inequalities and power imbalances within the field of psychology. For instance, explore how certain psychological theories and practices have marginalised specific groups.

- Question not only who are the authors, but also who are the "subjects" of studies, and what power dynamics are involved in the research. While much research continues to involve WEIRD (**W**estern, **E**ducated, **I**ndustrialized, **R**ich and **D**emocratic) participants, truly including and representing different perspectives requires engagement of those from other cultures as partners, not just "subjects", and avoiding other problematic power imbalances and (neo)colonial practices⁹.
- Highlight the role of epistemic injustice in knowledge production. Discuss who gets to determine what counts as knowledge and what evidence is most valued. Question the traditional hierarchies in the field and encourage critical thinking among students about these issues.
- Empower students to creatively reflect on and actively engage in constructing new alternatives for the future, making space for hope¹¹, despite the challenges.

Facilitating Inclusive Participation

- Facilitate discussions on the different perspectives that students bring. Create opportunities for students to share their experiences and viewpoints, enriching the learning environment for everyone.
- Foster an inclusive classroom environment where all students feel comfortable sharing their perspectives. This can be achieved by actively encouraging participation from diverse voices and being mindful of the dynamics that may silence certain individuals.
- Acknowledge (for yourself and others) that it can feel risky and uncomfortable to try new things, to open space for complex discussions, or to speak up – whether to share one's views, or to challenge problematic behaviour or practices. It can also be uncomfortable to have one's ideas or behaviour challenged. Whether as teachers, students, peers, we should be *"accepting, even embracing, discomfort as part of the learning experience [and see its] potential to bring benefits that reach far beyond an appreciation of the topic of focus"*¹² (see further guidance on creating "safe spaces" in the Content warnings subsection below, or in this [UCL guide](#)).

Representation

Questioning Default Representations

- Deconstruct or question the "default" representation of people in science and society. Examine how certain groups are often portrayed as the norm while others are seen as deviations from this norm.
- Avoid defining groups relative to a "default" group, such as contrasting "white" versus "non-white", as that can reinforce the construction of a "default".
- Depict an inclusive representation of the "legitimate knower" by including a variety of authors and sources in your readings and lectures. Highlight contributions by authors from typically marginalised groups, such as women, people of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, or from different cultural backgrounds. Besides expanding the perspective of all students, this can particularly help foster a sense of belonging in students of more marginalised backgrounds.

Reflecting on Assumptions and their Reinforcement

- Consider how your content reflects or reinforces what is assumed to be "default" or "normal". This includes examining biases related to youth, whiteness, heteronormativity, ableism, Eurocentrism, and other societal norms.
- Be cautious of overgeneralisations and homogenisations. Avoid implying that findings from specific subgroups apply universally to larger groups (e.g. from WEIRD participants to "all humans").
- Recognise the limitations of certain work or studies, but also how its presentation might reinforce certain views, and how that could be adjusted. For instance, many studies have investigated gender or sex differences in certain psychological traits or functions, presenting it as binary (man vs woman). Yet, frequently presenting such work can reinforce a view of gender/sex as binary (and as "biological" facts). We can thus question whether this analysis is relevant for the topic, e.g. was looking at gender/sex differences truly advancing our understanding; was it taken as a "proxy" for something else (e.g. hormones, social roles)¹³. That enables reconsidering what to include (remove; look for more inclusive sources), or how to present it (acknowledge limitations to generalisability; questioning apparent implications).

Avoiding Stereotyping

- Analyse the portrayal of certain individuals or groups in your content. Ensure that it does not reinforce stereotypes or harmful norms (e.g. gender norms), being conscious also of the current social and political contexts. For example, avoid replicating common examples linking conflict with certain religions or regions (e.g. Islam or Middle East), through images or examples.
- Challenge stereotypes by presenting diverse examples and highlighting the complexity and variability within groups.

Varying Examples

- Vary the type of examples used and who may relate more to them across instances. This will reduce the chances that some people will systematically feel othered or like outsiders, even if each example may not speak to everyone.
- You can invite students to offer other examples that they relate to, and hence extend your range of examples to use.
- Try to use examples that are inclusive, being considerate of how they might be perceived by people from various backgrounds.
- For example, using imagery like that of a "missing puzzle piece" in relation to neurodevelopmental conditions could be interpreted as implying that there is something missing, or "faulty", in individuals with that condition. That could be jarring to individuals with those conditions, and those embracing the *neurodiversity*¹⁴ movement, which emphasises natural variation across people in how they function, questioning what is "normal" or "healthy" (hence what is "missing").
- Our audit showed that religion and belief are rarely discussed in lectures. Although religion, belief, or religious identities, may not be relevant to many topics, consider rethinking when might they be? How to bring in different perspectives? Or how/when to include images, people, mentions, that relate to different religions?

Accessibility

It is important that resources and materials are designed in a way that are accessible to students from various backgrounds. The Disability and Neurodiversity Service have a whole separate guide on advice for how to create accessible resources for students which can be found [here](#). A summary of key points can also be found below.

Universal Design and General Principles

- **Direct Language:** Use straightforward language and short sentences. Avoid unnecessary complex language.
- **Follow Grammar Rules:** Ensure clear, grammatically correct content to enhance readability and understanding.
- **Illustrations and Text:** Keep them together for contextual understanding.
- **Limit Text Decoration:** Avoid excessive use of *italics*, underlining, and complex font styles. Use **bold** to emphasise words in a body of text.
- **Structured Content:** Use headings and styles to define a clear content hierarchy.
- **Avoid All Caps:** All capital letters are harder to read, especially for screen readers and individuals with print disabilities.
- **Sans Serif Fonts:** Prefer sans serif fonts like Calibri, Verdana, Arial, and Helvetica for better readability. For word documents, use font size 12-14.
- **Colours:** Ensure sufficient contrast between font colour selected and background colour. Avoid red/pink and green as these can be difficult to decipher for students with colour blindness.
- **Consistency:** Ensure a consistent design.
- **Hyperlinks:** Use descriptive text for hyperlinks instead of raw URLs.
- **Metadata:** Always include document metadata such as title, author, and tags.

Specific Design Considerations

- **Low Vision:** High contrast, large print, and easy-to-read sans serif fonts.
- **Dyslexia:** Simple language, clear structure, and reduced complexity.

Digital Accessibility

It is important that resources are digitally accessible so that they can be used by everybody including those who may need to use assistive technology such as screen readers, magnifiers, reading software etc.

- **Semantic Structure:** Screen readers must identify the document's semantic structure for navigation.
- **Proper Heading Structure:** Use a proper heading structure to support navigation and understanding (e.g. using Word's "Styles" for formatting).
- **Language Identification:** Screen readers must determine the language of the document and recognize any changes in natural language throughout the document.
- **Punctuation:** Use semi-colons, commas, or full stops after bullet points for pauses.
- **Text Descriptions for Pictures:** Provide textual descriptions of illustrations to convey meaning. Any text in images should be repeated in the main text.

- **Symbols, Equations and Abbreviations:** Minimize use of symbols and ensure abbreviations are clear. Use equations embedded as real math objects, not in images or plain text.

Tools and Checks

There are also various tools that can be used to check for the accessibility of resources, though it is still important to personally check resources for accessibility issues.

- **Accessibility Checker:** Utilize built-in [accessibility checkers](#) in software like Microsoft Word to identify issues.
- **Ally Plugin:** This is a plugin to Moodle that provides a learning material an accessibility rating and provides advice on how to make a resource more accessible. It also provides a score at module level to gauge how accessible it is.
- **SensusAccess:** can [convert documents](#) into alternative formats, e.g. Braille, mp3 etc.

Communication

Language can build relationships and connections, but it can also create barriers and affect someone's sense of belonging. It's easy to unintentionally signal assumptions about others and reinforce dominant ideas about mental health, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, class, ability, disability, religion, and age in your communications without even knowing it. Using inclusive language isn't about limiting free speech or political correctness; it's about being respectful, accessible, and empowering everyone. This means choosing words and phrases carefully, so everyone can feel represented and valued, acknowledging diverse identities and experiences, and avoiding marginalisation or discrimination.

Language is constantly evolving, and the meanings of words change along with it. Different people may also have different preferences. Therefore, it may not always be possible to use universally inclusive language, and there are no definitive rules. But understanding the following key principles can help you adopt an inclusive approach on a day-to-day basis:

- Only reference personal attributes or characteristics when it is relevant to the context.
- Consider a strengths-based approach, which recognises individuals' resilience and focuses on their abilities, knowledge, and capacities, rather than a deficit approach, which highlights deficits of a person or group.
- Avoid making assumptions about people or their characteristics based on stereotypes or limited information.
- Use language that focuses on the person and reflects their individuality, rather than generalising from/to groups.
- Be mindful of the implications of your language. Avoid excluding others or making them feel invisible with your word choices. Refrain from using language and expressions that disparage or trivialise others.
- Be mindful of the context in which language is used. Some terms are acceptable when used by individuals to claim their own identity but can be seen as offensive when used by others.

- Group interactions should be applied with care and consideration, with an awareness of the diversity within and between groups, and always be framed in inclusive terms.
- Explicitly acknowledge the issue when you know people may differ on their language preferences, or ask, as that opens space for conversation and learning.

Below are examples of good practices for using inclusive language when referring to a person's characteristics or a group of people, as well as examples of language to avoid.

Age-neutral language

It is good practice to avoid terms that may be perceived as a manifestation of ageism which can be defined as the application of assumed age-based group characteristics to an individual, regardless of their actual personal characteristics, or that may imply value judgements. For example:

- Instead of using terms that imply a certain age group, like "young" or "old" or "elderly", use specific age ranges, such as "18-24" or "over 65", or more neutral (and relative) terms like "younger people" or "older adults".

Ableist language, and person- vs identity-first language

Ableist language is any language that assumes what is "normal" and suggests that differences like disabilities, mental health or neurodevelopmental conditions, are abnormal. This can perpetuate stereotypes of weakness, and can be offensive toward people with disabilities (as can be glorifying overcoming of disabilities). Be careful when using older materials to avoid terminology that could be deemed offensive today, such as the "[R slur](#)", or discuss the issue and changes from historical to current usage.

Language can also implicitly define a person by their disability status, and highlight an aspect of their identity. There are two approaches:

- **People-first language** prioritises the person over the disability, diagnosis, or chronic condition, such as in "a person with a substance use disorder" (rather than "addict"), or "person experiencing/living with schizophrenia" (rather than "schizophrenic").
- **Identity-first language** is used when individuals choose to reclaim a disability, chronic condition or diagnosis as a part of their identity, such as in "Deaf person" (rather than "person with hearing impairment"), or "autistic person" (rather "person with autism").

Preferences on which language approach is favoured vary by person and group. In general, it is best not to assume a default, and to favour addressing the individual based on their preferences. In the UK, the Deaf and autistic communities tend to prefer identity-first language so we suggest favouring that in lectures on those topics, and you can investigate the preferences of other relevant communities you will discuss (when in doubt, favour people-first). Either way, it's best to acknowledge there may be different preferences, at least briefly (you could say e.g. "I'll be using "autistic person" as I understand that's often preferred in this community, but want to acknowledge that may not be everyone's preference"). This allows recognising the issue and opens an opportunity for challenging that if students would like to. You can start with such acknowledgments on language use at the start of lectures, and explain if/when there may be different uses during the lecture (e.g. in published images/graphs, that might have more "outdated" language).

It is also best to favour neutral terms for describing "differences"¹⁵, and avoid pathologising, medicalising or deficit-based language ("disorder", "illness"). This is also relevant in the context of mental health. For example:

- Favour terms like "condition", rather than "disorder" (e.g. "Autism" or "Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)" rather than "Autistic Spectrum Disorder"; or "mental health condition" rather than "mental illness").
- Refer to specific strengths, needs, or traits of individuals or groups, rather than terms like "low/high functioning" or "low/high severity".
- Favour terms like "neurotypical" or "comparison group", rather than "healthy controls".

Gender and sexuality neutral language

Gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language acknowledges diversity by removing assumptions of a male-as-norm, implying gender binaries, or reinforcing gender stereotypes (see [ALBA Network recommendations](#) for surveys/research). You should instead favour the use of gender-neutral terms when possible, and gendering can be avoided (e.g. if speaking in general, and a person's gender isn't relevant). Likewise, sexuality-inclusive language avoids making heteronormative assumptions (assuming heterosexuality as norm), or assuming "traditional" relationship or family dynamics (i.e. not assuming monogamy, marriage, "nuclear" family). For example:

- Use gender-neutral language such as "they/them", or "person"/"people", instead of using gender-specific terms like "he" or "she" (or "he/she", which still implies a binary).
- Use gender-neutral terms for professions, such as favouring "firefighters" (instead of "firemen"), or "police officers" (instead of "policemen").
- Favour using gender terms (woman/man), over sex terms (female/male) where possible. Moreover, use "woman/man" as nouns (i.e. "Women participated..."), and use "female/male" as adjectives ("female participants", but not "females").
- Favour using "carer", "guardian", or "caregiver", to avoid assumptions about biological parents and accommodate diverse family structures (or "parent" to avoid gendering).
- Use terms that encompass a variety of relationship dynamics like "partner/spouse", rather than "husband/wife" or "boyfriend/girlfriend".
- Avoid terms that suggest a degree of voluntary choice when this is not necessarily the case. Use "sexual orientation", instead of "sexual preference".
- Use "trans" or "transgender" person/people (as an adjective, not a noun), rather than "transsexual" (see further details on terms to use and avoid in this [GLAAD guide](#)).
- Likewise, use "lesbian, gay, bisexual people" instead of "lesbians, gays, bisexuals".

Race, ethnicity, or nationality

It's recommended to only use a person's race, ethnicity, or nationality to identify or describe them if it is directly relevant to the point you are making.

- Avoid irrelevant ethnic descriptions, e.g. "the Asian doctor"; instead, use "the doctor".
- Avoid stereotyping by making positive or negative generalisations about members of a particular racial, ethnic, or national group, such as "Chinese people are really good at maths".

- Avoid outdated terms such as "BAME" (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic), "BME", or "coloured". Instead, use "person/people of colour", "Black", or "Indigenous". At RHUL, "Black and Global Majority" (BGM) has been favoured by the BGM staff network to define *"racialised minoritized populations in their own terms, not in reference to whiteness"*¹⁶.

Religion and belief

Being considerate of variety in religious practices and beliefs requires avoiding a Christian-centric perspective and language, or making assumptions about individuals based on their background or presentation.

- Avoid generalising or homogenising language based on religious practices (e.g. "Jewish people are...").
- Avoid stereotypes or implicit assumptions about religious practices in certain places, e.g. not assuming everyone in some country/region shares one religion or faith (e.g., a majority-Muslim country instead of a Muslim Country)?
- Avoid Christian-centric language (and perspectives), e.g. using the term "Christmas" to refer to the winter holidays.

Content warnings

And notes on creating safe spaces.

Content warnings (or advisories/forecasts) are encouraged when warranted by the content, and when it can help offer students a choice in whether or how to engage with the material.

- For instance, warnings might be offered in advance of a lecture, at the start, or before a specific stimulus.
- It's important to reflect on whether the content is optional, enabling choice to avoid a certain topic/session, leave the room at a certain time, close their eyes, etc. If the content is core to curriculum, it's worth thinking carefully about when/how to communicate to students what they could do with this information.
- There are no fixed rules on when is "warranted", but examples include presenting images or detailed descriptions of seriously violent or traumatic events; or likely distressing content that is not commonly encountered in the psychology curriculum.

These have also been called "trigger warnings", alluding to the potential to "trigger" traumatic memories and responses. In favouring the use of a more neutral term like "content" (rather than "trigger") warning, we aim to offer a more accurate description (as the impact on the audience will vary), and avoid emphasising the distress potential and putting the audience on edge. We also note that it is contested whether/when such warnings should be used, and whether they are effective. For instance, a recent study¹⁷ in trauma survivors found no evidence that "trigger warnings" helped mitigate distress, but suggest they may have negative consequences, namely by enhancing perceptions of the traumatic event as central to the individual's identity and life story (hence may be harmful particularly to trauma survivors). It is also noted that use of such warnings may have become more generalised over time, as different people may deem different things as distressing. Moreover, students may have certain expectations or requests for their use. Their views should be seriously considered, and

content adjusted or removed when possible, or it may be appropriate to discuss disagreements with the student or class.

This relates to the issue of creating a "safe space" at university and in the classroom, navigating the nuances that there are different types of "safety", and discomfort should not always be avoided. For a more detailed discussion of these issues, we include an extract (indented rather than italicised for readability) from our colleagues' recent article on the development of a third year module on the psychology of equality, diversity, and inclusion¹²:

"another issue of concern to the teaching team was the extent to which we could, or should, foster a "safe space" for students to learn about such EDI issues. We agree with Britzman's (2003) assertion that irrespective of the subject matter, what is educative is also likely disconcerting, especially when it disrupts previously taken-for-granted knowledge about the world. Therefore, learning can be conceptualised as a risky pursuit: The sharing of ideas, beliefs, attitudes, interpretations and experiences, with no guarantees regarding how they will be received, puts all involved in a vulnerable position. In a broader context of peer-policing on social media, where users risk public shaming or symbolic "cancelling" for transgressions, we were concerned that we and our students may feel vulnerable about not knowing the "correct" vernacular surrounding the sensitive topic under study, afraid of not recognising our own (perceived) "privilege", and uncertain as to the "appropriateness" of self-disclosure (see Barker & Reavey, 2009). It is often suggested that in order to mitigate these concerns and insecurities, it is down to the responsible educator to establish an educational safe space, a metaphor that describes a learning environment free of discriminatory practices, where students feel sufficiently comfortable to take educational risks (Hunter, 2008).

Safe space has become a common colloquialism among educators, and yet the meaning and consequences of creating so-called "safe" learning environments are not routinely interrogated (Barrett, 2010). Indeed, it has been argued that lack of safety might be pedagogically advantageous for the teaching of some sensitive topics, including those related to EDI: When students' existing understanding of the world is disrupted, with all the dissonance, frustration, and feelings of vulnerability this might cause, space is created for an emerging awareness of their rights and responsibilities to enact social change – an awareness that itself may feel uncomfortable (Allen, 2015). Perhaps the message to students might be that accepting, even embracing, discomfort as part of the learning experience has the potential to bring benefits that reach far beyond an appreciation of the topic of focus. Nevertheless, it was important to the teaching team that we employed pedagogical techniques to make an inherently "unsafe" environment safer, encouraging greater student engagement. In the first lecture, we discussed guidelines (though not "ground rules") for safer communication, including how to manage disagreement, causing and feeling offence, and the boundaries around self-disclosure (Coy, 2014). We reflected on how our own self-disclosures could facilitate feelings of safety, enabling students to be open about their own experiential knowledge (Barker & Reavey, 2007). To mitigate potential student distress, we provided "content forecasts" (or "trigger warnings") in advance of the module start date, and at the beginning of each class, affording time for students' "mental preparation", so they had agency over how they engaged with the lecture topics (Stringer, 2016).

As Flensner and Von de Lippe (2019) argue, educators should avoid prioritising safety in the classroom above allowing space for discussion of sensitive issues and problematising different perspectives. Otherwise, they may risk reproducing an educator-learner hierarchy, disempowering students, and relieving students of the responsibility to be concerned about and motivated to take action on inequalities and injustice. The authors offer a useful way of theorising how safety can be navigated in the teaching of sensitive topics: Though educators must strive to maintain an environment that is “dignity safe”, free from harassment, intimidation, prejudice, discrimination, and threats to physical health, they must not promise or pursue intellectual safety, because doing so is likely to undermine the very motivations for offering the topics for study (Flensner & Von de Lippe, 2019). Our EDI module offered a dignity safe, but not intellectually safe, environment where students were not merely taught about the existence of inequalities in particular domains, but were provided with genuine opportunities to realise their rights and responsibilities as engaged citizens, empowered to call for and enact social change." (p. 87-88)

Glossary

Definitions and notes on language use (some repeated for reference, others expanded).

Disability

The UK's [Equality Act 2010](#) defines a disability as "*a physical or mental impairment*" that "*has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [the] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities*".

The social model of disability¹⁸, developed by disabled people, argues that people are disabled by barriers faced in society, and not their impairments or differences. This can be contrasted with a medical model that tends to pathologise differences or impairments, looking for "what's wrong" and how to "fix" it, not always centring the individual's needs and interests. Rather than as competing descriptions of the world, these models should be understood as lenses or frameworks that shift the focus on where to look to identify issues and solutions. Medicine might still have a place in supporting people. Yet, the social model has arisen from a socio-political movement for disability rights, by and for disabled people, that shifts the attention from the individual toward society. This perspective emphasises that individuals have different profiles of needs as well as strengths, and that creating a more just and equitable society means putting the onus on removing barriers and enabling individuals to have more choice, control, and independence.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is "*a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there*"⁴. This lens enables understanding that some people may be affected by overlapping marginalisation across different characteristics (e.g. experience of discrimination for a "black woman" isn't the same as for a "white woman"). At the same time, it reminds us that we're not one-dimensional, our identity has multiple aspects, resulting in different power differentials in different contexts. While we may be marginalised in some contexts (or ways), we may benefit from some privilege in others.

Mental Health

The World Health Organisation defines "*Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community*".¹⁹ In psychology, we often see terms like "abnormal psychology", "psychopathology", "mental disorders" or mental illness", "psychiatric disorders". A more recent recognition of different social and cultural perspectives on mental health²⁰, has led to a push to using less value-laden or pathologising language, favouring mental health conditions, or problems, to refer to mental states or conditions linked to significant distress, or impaired or altered functioning. This is partly related to a recognition of how colonial histories and power imbalances create cultural biases in what is considered "distress" (and for whom) or "impairment", and in creating poor living conditions for many. This has resulted in inequalities in incidence of mental health problems, access to care, and stark inequalities in the use of the Mental Health Act to forcefully detain people, for instance, where the rates "*for people who identify as 'Black or Black British' were three and a half times the rate for people who identify as 'white'*" in 2022-23.²¹ Some have argued for moving away

from diagnostic categories, towards transdiagnostic dimensions and interventions²². Others have proposed alternative, non-diagnostic systems for helping people make sense of their own experiences of distress or unusual experiences, like the Power Threat Meaning Framework²³.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity¹⁴ refers to the idea that there is natural variation across people in their neurocognitive functioning. It is also a socio-political movement, deriving from disability rights, scholarship and activism, and the social model of disability (see above under *Disability*). It arose particularly from autistic individuals, and seeing autism as being on a spectrum, itself with great variability across individuals. Other neurodevelopmental conditions, such as ADHD, dyslexia, or dyspraxia, are also included in this umbrella term. It questions what is "normal" or "healthy" (favouring neurotypical), as difference (neurodivergence) may not necessarily constitute an impairment. Still, society can create (and should remove) barriers that create difficulties, and disabilities. This perspective may help value difference and diversify the notion of what's "normal" or typical.

Nonetheless, some argue²⁴ that an overemphasis on "difference", that can downplay or ignore impairment and disability, and the siloing of related social movements, is hindering the political fight to secure disabled people's rights. Others²⁵ have critiqued some conceptual confusion and overemphasis on neurodivergence as an identity, and the challenges that can bring to clinical (psychological) practice.

Race

We use *race* here to refer to a socially constructed concept, reflective of a history and a continued lived experience of racialisation of some people(s), not as reflective of a "natural" or "biological fact" (even if used here without quotes)¹. "*The effects of racial ideology are all too real; race may lack scientific integrity but it is a lived experience, a lived relationship*"¹ (p. 283).

References

- ¹ Warmington, P. (2009). [Taking race out of scare quotes: Race-conscious social analysis in an ostensibly post-racial world](#). *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 12(3), 281–296.
- ² Council of Europe (2016) [Education pack "All Different, All Equal" - Ideas, resources, methods and activities for non-formal intercultural education with young people and adults](#).
- ³ p.189, Begum, N., & Saini, R. (2019). [Decolonising the Curriculum](#). *Political Studies Review*, 17(2), 196–201.
- ⁴ Columbia Law School [interview with Prof Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality](#); concept first defined in Crenshaw, K. (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989, Article 8.
- ⁵ Cherry, M. (2013). [Why privilege is so hard to give up](#). *Salon*.
- ⁶ Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. OUP Oxford.
- ⁷ Keele University Decolonising the Curriculum Network (2019). [What would it mean to decolonise the University curriculum](#).
- ⁸ Some examples of this can be found in the [LSE Women, academia and the unequal production of knowledge – An LSE Impact Blog review](#).
- ⁹ See Nature Reviews Psychology Editorial [Towards a global psychological science](#) and linked research; and [The TRUST Code: A Global Code of Conduct for Equitable Research Partnerships](#).
- ¹⁰ With a wider applicability and history, often used in disability rights activism, e.g. Charlton, J. I. (1998). [Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment](#) (1st ed.). University of California Press; [United Nations International Day of Disabled Persons](#), 2004.
- ¹¹ Bourn, D. (2021). [Pedagogy of hope: Global learning and the future of education](#). *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning*, 13(2), Article 2.; Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- ¹² p.87, Ravenhill et al. (2024). [Inclusive pedagogies for learning the psychology of equality, diversity, and inclusion](#). *Psychology Teaching Review*, 30(1), 84–95.
- ¹³ Kennis et al (2024). [Heed lessons from past studies involving transgender people: First, do no harm](#). *Nature*, 629(8014), 998–1000; Ritz, S. A., & Greaves, L. (2024). [We need more-nuanced approaches to exploring sex and gender in research](#). *Nature*, 629(8010), 34–36.
- ¹⁴ Coined by Judy Singer (1997-8) in her Honours Thesis (cited in her 2016 [NeuroDiversity: The Birth of an Idea](#) book), a summary of her current definitions in can be found in her [blog](#); term is said to have been popularised by Blume, H. (1998). [Neurodiversity](#). *The Atlantic*; see also Nick Walter's Neuroqueer blog on [Neurodiversity: Some Basic Terms & Definitions](#).
- ¹⁵ NHS Dorset [Neurodiversity Hub Language Guide](#).
- ¹⁶ RHUL's ["Get to know the BGM Staff Network"](#) article (intranet access required).

- ¹⁷ Jones, P. J., Bellet, B. W., & McNally, R. J. (2020). [Helping or Harming? The Effect of Trigger Warnings on Individuals With Trauma Histories](#). *Clinical Psychological Science*, 8(5), 905–917.
- ¹⁸ [Scope social model of disability](#).
- ¹⁹ World Health Organisation [Mental health](#).
- ²⁰ Mind [Mental health problems – an introduction](#).
- ²¹ Kings Fund [Mental Health 360 inequalities](#); or [Kam Bhui's Royal Institute of Philosophy lecture/podcast](#).
- ²² Cuthbert, B. N., & Insel, T. R. (2013). [Toward the future of psychiatric diagnosis: The seven pillars of RDoC](#). *BMC Medicine*, 11(1), 126; Kotov et al (2017). [The Hierarchical Taxonomy of Psychopathology \(HiTOP\): A dimensional alternative to traditional nosologies](#). *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 126(4), 454–477.
- ²³ Overview in Johnstone, L., & Boyle, M. (2018). [The Power Threat Meaning Framework: An Alternative Nondiagnostic Conceptual System](#). *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 0022167818793289; or the [authors' Royal Institute of Philosophy lecture/podcast](#).
- ²⁴ Oliver, M. (2013). [The social model of disability: Thirty years on](#). *Disability & Society*, 28(7), 1024–1026.
- ²⁵ Mad in the UK and Mad in America [Blogposts on Neurodiversity](#).

Further Resources

General

[ALBA Network](#) (promoting diversity and equity in Brain Sciences) has many [Resources](#).

Kingston University's [Inclusive Curriculum Framework](#).

THESIS Team [EDI Resources](#).

[UnMute Podcast with Myisha Cherry](#): "A Podcast where philosophy and real-world issues collide", many relevant to psychology and education, e.g. [on teaching race](#), [being active bystanders](#), "and much more".

UCL's [Resources to help close the awarding gap](#) or [Guide on creating safe spaces in the classroom](#).

Gender and sexual diversity

ALBA Network [guidelines for designing inclusive forms for gender and sexual diversity](#).

GLAAD [Media Reference Guides](#) includes guidance on LGBTQ+ terms and "in focus" guides on related issues.

University of Birmingham's [LGBTQ+ Inclusivity In the Higher Education Curriculum](#).

Mental Health

Royal Institute of Philosophy London Lectures 2023-4 on [Madness and Mental Health](#).

Racial and ethnic diversity

BPS Clinical Psychology Forum's Special Issue: [Anti-Racist action in Clinical psychology: Reflections from the training community](#).

[Intersectionality Matters](#) Podcast: "The podcast that brings intersectionality to life".

Leading Routes report on [The Broken Pipeline: Barriers to Black PhD Students Accessing Research Council Funding](#).

Nature's 2022 Feature article on [How UK science is failing Black researchers — in nine stark charts](#).

RHUL DClinPsy (Doctorate in Clinical Psychology) Team's padlet with [resources on Anti-Racism - Equity, Inclusion, Diversity](#).

Appendix – Text version of the One-page summary

Planning Teaching? Think DRAC!

Diverse Perspectives

Whose perspective are you giving? Who or what topics are neglected or silenced?

- Reflect on/discuss the inequalities, power imbalances, and the epistemic injustice in the knowledge presented, i.e. Who gets to determine what counts as knowledge? Or what evidence is most valued? Who can participate?
- Try to include different views, and where lacking facilitate discussion/reflection on these issues, i.e. What do students think? What other perspectives do they bring?

Representation

Deconstruct or question the "default" representation of people in science and society

- Include variety in authors/sources, occasionally highlighting authors from marginalised groups (e.g. women, people of colour...).
- Consider how content reflects what is assumed, or reinforced, as "default" or "normal"? e.g. youth, whiteness, heteronormativity, ableism, European, Christian...

Overgeneralisation and Homogenisation

- Be cautious with implications and reflect on who's assumed as a "default" individual (e.g. from certain subgroups to a larger group).
- Avoid defining groups relative to a "default" group (e.g. white vs non-white).

Stereotyping

- Does the portrayal of certain individuals/groups reinforce stereotypes? E.g. reproducing gender norms (men as doctors, women as housewives); or other inequalities (people of colour in low-status jobs).
- Avoid implied negative associations – repeatedly associating negative events/actions (war, crimes, poverty) with certain religions/countries/ethnicities (considering also current events and sensitive topics).

Examples

- Ensure variety in the examples used that could be relatable to different individuals - we can draw from our lives, but also ask others for suggestions, look up alternatives, ask students for ideas...
- Think twice how they could come across to people from other groups, or check with relevant individuals.

Accessibility

Follow D&N guidelines & check Ally, e.g.:

- Are visual materials clearly readable? (e.g. sans serif font, contrast, colours, font size, image captioning for screen readers).
- Use simple and direct language, favour short sentences.
- Break down content to avoid overcrowding slides.

Communication

Media

- Use different means of communication and interaction to play to different strengths in different individuals.
- Varied use of pictures, graphs, videos, links to tutorials, news articles, etc.
- Interactive tools like polls, activities, discussions.

Language

- Avoid binaries and gendering when possible (e.g. in examples, favouring gender-neutral language [person, they, them]).
- Favour gender terms (woman/man; nouns), and/or, when relevant, acknowledge distinction with biological sex (male/female; adjectives).
- Avoid heteronormative language/assumptions in roles, relationships, family constellations (e.g. partner, caregiver, parent, child...).

People- vs. identity-first language

- Consider/acknowledge different preferences for different groups and individuals. E.g. identity-first favoured by autistic and Deaf communities (i.e. "autistic person"); people-first might be favoured by those with other disabilities or mental health issues (favouring e.g. "people with schizophrenia"), but don't assume. Explain your use.

Add content warnings when warranted

- How might content impact others? Enable choice on how/whether to engage (e.g. leave for a bit, close their eyes...).