

Diversity-sensitive imagery

Suggestions for a diversity-sensitive imagery in communication
at the Technical University of Munich (TUM)

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Preface

With the guidelines for a diversity-sensitive visual language, the Staff Unit Diversity & Inclusion offers suggestions for gender- and diversity-sensitive communication for all members of TUM. This includes the selection and design of images as well as the considered use of AI-supported tools such as image generation through prompting. The aim is to make diversity visible, avoid stereotypical representations and promote inclusive representation – including in digital contexts. These are internal university recommendations that are not binding. Compliance with or rejection of diversity-sensitive visual language in teaching or examinations has no influence on assessment criteria or decisions.

1. Why use diversity-sensitive imagery?

Diversity-sensitive imagery means choosing visuals that reflect the variety of people, identities, and perspectives that exist in real life. It avoids stereotypes and tokenism and instead promotes inclusion and authentic representation. By doing so, it helps break down biases and ensures that visual communication acknowledges and values the diversity of our societies, making everyone feel seen and respected.

For TUM, a diversity-sensitive visual language underlines a diverse and inclusive university culture:

- Gender equality is enshrined in law¹ and required in TUM's mission² statement. Expressing this in imagery language signals appreciation and shows that the topic has been addressed.
- TUM recognizes gender equality as one of its fundamental pillars and is committed to focusing on diversity and talent management in its Diversity & Gender Equality Plan.
- When your visuals are inclusive, people are more likely to feel represented and respected. This fosters trust in you as a speaker, your organization, or your brand.
- Unconscious bias in images can reinforce harmful clichés (e.g., always showing men as leaders³, or using tokenistic diversity). Thoughtful image choices challenge stereotypes instead of perpetuating them.
- For organizations with international or multicultural audiences, inclusive visuals help avoid misunderstandings or offense, and respect cultural contexts.
- People engage more when they see themselves and their communities reflected. This strengthens emotional connection and makes your message more relatable and memorable.

2. Recommendations for action

The diversity of living environments at the TUM means that studying and living on campus characterize people's everyday lives in equal measure, regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation and identity, disabilities, religion and culture, among other things.

2.1 General recommendations

- ✓ **Bring diversity into your images:** Diversity can and should also be shown through a balanced selection of images. It is beneficial to include a real representation of people with different ethnic and national backgrounds, social situations, with and without disabilities, of different genders and age groups together in all contexts.
- ✓ **Emphasize commonalities:** Focus on faces and shared activities rather than, for example, aids for people with physical disabilities or different clothing.
- ✓ **Internal plurality:** Diversity can be made visually visible by using several images in one context (brochure, website, etc.). Several images can therefore be used to represent diversity so that a single image does not have to be overloaded.
- ✓ **Break stereotypes:** Try to show people of all genders equally in all activities.
 - In this context, it should be avoided to show young people only as representatives of a fun society or older people only as frail.
 - Women could be shown in higher positions and jobs, including a technical specialty and men could also be presented in doing tasks originally and culturally associated with women, such as taking care for children, nursery, teaching, etc.
 - Furthermore, pictures should consider different family constellations other than the traditional ones, such as rainbow families, same-sex couples with children, etc.
- ✓ **Gender Cliches should be avoided:** Women portrayed as passive, emotional, inferior, caring and adapted and men as active, cool, determining, directive and nonconform.
- ✓ **Break up topic-specific casting:** Try to avoid using photos of people of colour only for international topics or people with disabilities only for inclusion topics. Instead, one should be thoughtful about what makes sense for the specific content, its purpose, and the audience.
- ✓ **Consider accessibility:** Sufficient contrast, large font sizes and clear graphics improve readability for all recipients. For people with visual impairments, an alternative text, i.e. a description of the image in text form, should also be added. However, images consisting only of text should be avoided.
- ✓ **Involve diverse individuals in the overall creative process:** Implementing diverse creative teams to bring authentic perspectives to storytelling. By working directly with different target groups, it can be ensured that the visual representations reflect their experiences, needs, and perspectives.
- ✓ **Image composition and framing:** Critically assess arrangement (foreground/background), activity (active/passive), gaze (eye level), body posture, clothing, context, and role models. What power relations and positions are conveyed by the arrangement of people in the image? Which person is in the

foreground and active, which person is in the background and passive? Make sure that people with disabilities are part of the action and do not end up at the edge of the picture.

- ✓ **Use creative alternatives:** Using abstract colours, forms and objects instead of photos, and showcasing different behaviours and relationships other than the normative ones.
- ✓ **Connection with text:** What is the relationship between text and image? Does the image illustrate what the text describes, explains, or instructs?

2.2 AI-Prompting

When using AI to generate images, it's essential to craft clear and thoughtful prompts, because AI systems can unintentionally learn and reproduce discrimination if used without reflection. For example, AI often generates images of white men for neutral search queries, while people with disabilities or other marginalized groups are frequently excluded or underrepresented. By being precise in your prompts, you can reduce this risk and help ensure that AI-generated visuals reflect real-world diversity, avoid harmful stereotypes and communicate inclusion, authenticity and social responsibility.

- 1) **State the subject (main focus) of the image**, such as a human, animal, car, couple etc.

Example	"Diverse group of university students"
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- 2) **Describe what is happening, what the subject is doing, and what is in the subject's background.**

Example	"The students are engaged in a collaborative study session, seated around a table with open books and laptops. They display a natural mix of ages, genders, nationalities and ethnicities, without highlighting any visible markers or stereotypes. Everyone is dressed casually. The background features modern bookshelves, contemporary furniture, and large windows letting in soft daylight, giving the space an open and welcoming feeling."
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- 3) **Specify the aesthetic and style the image should have.** Medium: photo, oil painting, fresco, 3D rendering, anime, digital art, drawing, etc. Art movements: gothic, impressionist, steampunk, cubism, art nouveau, etc. Artist inspirations: Picasso, Van Gogh, Dalí, Monet, etc. Framing: close-up, wide shot, medium shot, high angle, aerial shot, etc.

Example	"Realistic photo style, wide shot. Natural lighting from the windows. Clean and modern visual aesthetic, like a contemporary university marketing photo. Colours are soft and balanced. Framed to show the full group in context with the study environment."
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Inclusive AI prompts help ensure that generated visuals reflect the diversity of real people and contexts, avoiding stereotypes and promoting authentic representation. The table below provides practical **prompt templates** for different fields, showing how to include details about gender, age, ethnicity, ability, and realistic settings to create respectful, diversity-sensitive images.

Prompt Templates	Field
Create a vibrant digital illustration of a diverse leadership collaborating in a [type of workspace, e.g., modern office, coworking space]. Show individuals of varying [genders, ethnicities, and abilities] engaged in tasks like [brainstorming, coding, presenting ideas].	Workplace
Create a photorealistic 3D render of an inclusive workplace celebration. Depict employees of [different ages, body types, and cultural backgrounds] gathered around a table, sharing a [specific event, e.g., birthday, cultural festival]. Add realistic details such as [office decorations, diverse cuisine], with [add a description, like soft lighting to create a warm and joyful atmosphere].	Workplace
Illustrate [people from various socio-economic backgrounds] working together on impactful projects, such as [urban development, environmental clean-ups], in [specific settings like city streets, rural landscapes].	University
Create a digital illustration of [specify gender identity, e.g., cisgender and transgender employees] having lunch together [in a modern office cafeteria]. They are seated at tables, chatting and enjoying [specific foods, e.g., sandwiches, coffee].	Workplace/ University
A group of diverse female scientists in a modern university lab, wearing lab coats, discussing an experiment. Bright natural light, professional atmosphere without any powering positions, all are at the same level.	Women in STEM

The requirements for inclusive communication are constantly evolving – which is why we do not consider the information contained in this guide to be exhaustive. Do you have any further ideas, suggestions or thoughts for gender- and diversity-sensitive imagery? We look forward to your input so that we can continue to develop the recommendations together. Then please contact the Staff Unit Diversity & Inclusion at diversity@tum.de.

¹ The options “diverse” and “without” have been enshrined in civil status law alongside ‘male’ and “female” since 2018 and refer to intersex and transgender people. The Self-Determination Act (SBGG), which came into force on 01.11.2024, significantly simplified the adjustment of civil status for intersex and transgender people. The legal protection against discrimination (General Equal Treatment Act (AGG)) is in turn characterized by a more open concept of gender, which also includes gender identity (<https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/DE/ueber-diskriminierung/diskriminierungsmerkmale/geschlecht-und-geschlechtsidentitaet/dritte-option/dritte-option-node.html>, Accessed on 18.06.2024).

² “We actively promote equality of talent regardless of gender, nationality, religion, ideology, physical condition, age and sexual identity.” <https://www.tum.de/die-tum/die-universitaet/leitbild/>

³ Kollmayer, Marlene, Andreas Pfaffel, Barbara Schober, and Laura Brandt. 2018. „Breaking Away From the Male Stereotype of a Specialist: Gendered Language Affects Performance in a Thinking Task“. *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (June). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00985>; Lévy, Arik, Pascal Gyax, und Ute Gabriel. 2014. „Fostering the Generic Interpretation of Grammatically Masculine Forms: When My Aunt Could Be One of the Mechanics“. *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, January: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/20445911.2013.861467>; Keith, Nina, Kristine Hartwig, and Tobias Richter. 2022. „Ladies First or Ladies Last: Do Masculine Generics Evoke a Reduced and Later Retrieval of Female Exemplars?“ Published by Yoel Inbar. *Collabra: Psychology* 8 (1): 32964. <https://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.32964>.

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