

Check-list for Norm-Creative Communication

Produced by the Make Equal foundation (www.makeequal.se)

REPRESENTATION

“You can’t be what you can’t see”

Count from the grounds of discrimination (in both images and other material), how many:

- Men/women?
- Transgender people or persons who break the cis-norm?
- Variations of skin colour? Cultural symbols? Non-Swedish-sounding names?
- People with a visible or expressed religious or spiritual belief?
- People with visible or expressed disabilities?
- People of different ages?
- People from different housing areas/parts of the town/city?

AVOID STEREOTYPES

Representation is not just about numbers, it is also about who does what. How are people represented? Is everyone allowed to be individuals, or are they portrayed on the basis of stereotypes and prejudices? Are those of us who are norm-breakers seen and heard in contexts other than those that concern our norm-breaking or issues related to it?

GENERAL:

- Are there norms that are linked to specific interests or occupational groups, for example concerning who should be doing what? Who is usually seen as the “typical” practitioner? Are you reproducing this or contributing to broadening the image?
- Which persons are recipients for different messages?
For example, is information about parenting aimed at all parents, regardless of gender, instead of just to mothers.
- Is there any possibility for self-identification in your communication? For who?
- Are there situations, relations or identities that are presented as more desirable or coveted?

IN IMAGES:

- Do you have a wide range of people in the images? Use the check-list above.
- What are the different people in the images doing?
- Which people are portrayed as professional, e.g. with their working equipment or in a situation where they are performing their profession, and which are photographed out of their professional context?
- Who is active and who is passive, does anyone look stronger or weaker than others?
- Who is smiling and looking into the camera? Who is not?
- How are the people dressed and at what angles are they photographed?

IN TEXTS:

- Who is addressed in the text? Are some people described as “them”?
Don’t just have one category that highlights, for example, those of us who are HBTQ, but keep in mind that there are those of us who are HBTQ with disabilities to be found in all groups and that language should be adapted accordingly.

- Is a gender-neutral and equitable language used as much as possible?
For example, use police officer instead of policeman, flight attendant instead of stewardess, chairperson instead of chairman, inhabitant instead of citizen (not everyone who lives in a country or a town has to be a citizen).
- Who is an expert and who is asked on the basis of their own experiences?
- Is anyone made invisible by the language?
For example, write “everyone regardless of gender” instead of “men and women”.
- Who is the norm in the text? Are there things which are not written?
For example, avoid writing “football and women’s football”, “entrepreneurs and female entrepreneurs”, “pre-school teachers and male pre-school teachers” or “people of another ethnicity”.
- Does the text contain words based on stereotypes or prejudices?
For example, avoid writing “Swedish” about anything other than a person with Swedish citizenship. Or writing “skin colour” for the colour beige, since not all skin colours are beige.
- What words are used in descriptions of different groups?
For example, in relation to gender we often use different words to describe the same behaviour in girls/women compared to boys/men. Who is dominant and has “a thick skin” in comparison to who is determined and self-assured?
- Can words function as value judgements? For example, consider if a descriptive word about a person can be seen as positive/negative, enhancing/diminishing.

ACCESSIBILITY AND CLARITY

- Are there difficult words that the user is expected to know about?
- Are there words that can be interpreted in several ways?
- Are there many abbreviations used? Write them in full instead.
- Are figurative expressions or synonyms used that may be difficult for some to understand?
- Write the most important things first.
- Use direct word order, that is to say with the subject coming before the verb.
- Avoid subordinate clauses. Write short sentences.
- Active verbs are better than passive. For example, “The management took the decision in 2017” rather than “The decision was taken by the management in 2017”.
- Avoid italic text that can be difficult to read.
- Make bullet points.
- Use format templates so that the same approach is used throughout the document.
- Avoid back-referencing words that can be vague, such as “this” and “that”.
- Give audio descriptions to images and video clips on social media.
- Follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 level AA (EU requirement applicable from 2019, link for more reading below)

KEEP IN MIND...

- **Who is seen as normal/ordinary?**
Are those of us who break norms portrayed in contexts that do not relate to our norm-breaking? For example, an ordinary report on house buying can be about a same-sex couple without questions being asked concerning their sexual orientation. Or those of us who are wheelchair users can comment as an expert in a field of research instead of being interviewed about our disability. Otherwise there is a risk that an “ordinary” person in an “ordinary” context will always be portrayed by the norm.
- **Avoid alibis!**
Avoid using just one of us who break norms to produce a wide representation in an image or a report. This can create a feeling that we are an alibi only included because of our norm-

breaking position. In the long term, this results those of us who are norm-breaking not being portrayed in a balanced way. Instead, work continuously to make visible a wide range of people in your material.

- **Make conscious choices of channels**
Reflect on the choice of channel(s) and do not just follow routines. Does any channel have advantages or disadvantages from an inclusion perspective? Variation is often good, because you then reach a wider audience. Don't just rely on your own channels – by definition, you only reach those who are already familiar with you.
- **Look at yourself!**
Who am I, the person producing the text/image? What are my frames of reference and what is my position; do I conform to the norm in the area in question? What can I do to see the material with other eyes? Do I have any prejudices that I need to work on? Test pretending to be someone else that is receiving the information, for example a parent to a compulsory school student or an inhabitant of a residential area that is going to be renovated. Then consider what feels relevant and understandable.
- **Check with our common basic values!**
Does the communication produced follow your common basic values?
- **Read up!**
If you are unsure of for example which term you should use – read up on it or ask the professionals. Many stakeholder organisations in the field, for example, have good word lists on their websites.

Read more:

The Swedish Communication Association – accessible communication

<https://sverigeskommunikatorer.se/nyheter/infografik-tillganglig-kommunikation/>

Infographic with 12 tips on how you can make your communication more accessible (in Swedish).

Cool!

<http://www.regionvarmland.se/utveckling-tillvaxt/jamstalldhet/schyst/schyst-webbversion/>

A handbook with tips and examples that helps you communicate more equitably in both image and text (in Swedish).

Pictures that change the world

http://old.gavle.se/PageFiles/272392/Bildhandboken_Gavlekommun_Genusfotografen_webb.pdf

A handbook that helps you take and choose pictures that are gender-aware and inclusive (in Swedish).

Writing rules of the authorities

<https://www.sprakochfolkminnen.se/download/18.41318b851483519095290e/1411629869129/Myndskrivreg2014-1.pdf>

A guide including tips on how you can write simply, easy-to-read, gender-neutral, etc. (in Swedish)

EU directive on website accessibility

<https://webbriktlinjer.se/lagkrav/webbdirektivet/>

Guidelines that are expected to become requirements from the EU in a few years on accessible websites and apps (in Swedish).