

AWARENESS GUIDELINES

in the context of academic events

CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction and Purpose _____ 2
- 2. Principles and Values _____ 2
- 3. Planning an Event _____ 3
 - 3.1 Code of Conduct _____ 3
 - 3.2 Things to Consider While Planning the Program _____ 3
 - 3.3 Accessibility Planning _____ 3
 - 3.4 Inclusive Language Guidelines _____ 4
 - 3.5 Guidelines for Discussions _____ 4
 - 3.6 Quiet Room and All-Gender Restrooms _____ 4
 - 3.7 Awareness Training or Briefing for Staff/Volunteers _____ 5
- 4. Awareness Structures During the Event _____ 5
 - 4.1 Communication _____ 5
 - 4.2 Awareness Team _____ 5
 - 4.3 Support Offers _____ 5
 - 4.4 Reporting Mechanisms _____ 6
 - 4.5 De-Escalation Strategies _____ 6
- 5. Post-Event Follow-up _____ 6
 - 5.1 Evaluation and Feedback Collection _____ 6
 - 5.2 Improvement Strategies for Future Events _____ 7
- 6. Conclusion and Appendices _____ 7

1. Introduction and Purpose

Academic events at Ruhr University Bochum – such as conferences, lectures, workshops, and colloquia – are central to the exchange of knowledge, critical engagement, and community-building within the university. They should therefore be designed in such a way that all participants feel safe, respected, and encouraged to contribute. Experiences of discrimination or marginalization can limit participation and access, especially those from structurally disadvantaged groups.

This Awareness Concept is intended to provide a framework for creating a safe and inclusive space at our university. It outlines the guiding values, responsibilities, and practical measures that should inform the planning and delivery of academic events at Ruhr University Bochum. Its aim is to prevent harm, amplify marginalized voices, and foster respectful and inclusive interactions.

The concept is relevant for all individuals involved in academic events, including those who organize, contribute to, and shape them. It serves as a guidance and support resource for the development of awareness measures in academic settings and provides a collection of different components that can be adapted and applied depending on the event's framework, context, and target audience. It should be considered an evolving document that can be further developed and adapted in response to specific requirements.

2. Principles and Values

The following principles and values should guide all academic events at Ruhr University Bochum:

- **Respect:** We treat all individuals with dignity and respect, regardless of their background, identity, (dis-)ability, age, or ideological or religious beliefs. This includes sensitivity in language and to different needs.
- **Inclusivity and Diversity:** We actively strive to create spaces in which all individuals, in their diversity and heterogeneity, can participate fully in events.
- **Anti-Discrimination:** We do not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment, or exclusionary behavior. All participants are expected to uphold these standards and contribute to an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- **Awareness:** Academic environments are shaped by hierarchies and power dynamics, whether formal (e.g., institutional positions) or informal (e.g., language fluency, social capital). These power dynamics should be critically reflected upon, particularly when they lead to the repression or marginalization of less privileged individuals. We encourage self-reflection and openness to feedback.
- **Transparency:** Our procedures and expectations are communicated clearly to all participants before and during events.

These principles are in accordance with the Anti-Discrimination Directive of Ruhr University Bochum.

3. Planning an Event

Designing inclusive events is not only a matter of responding appropriately to incidents but above all about preventing barriers to participation and exclusion in advance. In this sense, events require careful planning with regard to accessibility, internal and external communication, team preparation, and participant support. The following measures outline proactive steps to create a respectful and welcoming atmosphere for all participants at an event.

3.1 Code of Conduct

A clear and accessible Code of Conduct is a key preventive tool for clarifying the expectations regarding respectful behavior at academic events. It outlines the principles for interaction, defines unacceptable behavior (such as discrimination, harassment, and disruptive conduct), and explains the consequences of violations. The Code of Conduct is made available to all participants prior to the event and is also displayed prominently or included in the event materials. By registering or participating in the event, individuals agree to abide by these rules. The Code of Conduct should be written in inclusive and easily understandable language and include information on how to contact the Awareness Team or the event organizers in case of concerns. It serves both as a guideline for creating a respectful atmosphere and as a reference point for responding to misconduct if necessary.

3.2 Things to Consider While Planning the Program

When designing the program of an academic event, several aspects require careful consideration in order to create an inclusive and comfortable environment for participants.

It is important to reflect on how speakers are selected and to aim for a diverse range of contributors. Ideally, speakers should be invited based on the quality and relevance of their work rather than the prominence of their name. Well-known individuals are not always those producing the most innovative research or relevant research and thus, programs should include not only senior scholars but also early-career researchers and those offering innovative perspectives. Expanding the pool of invited contributors can help diversify perspectives and provide space for emerging voices.

The structure of the program should allow participants to meet their basic needs without having to miss important parts of the event. This includes scheduling regular and sufficient breaks for meals, hydration, restroom use, and rest. Overly tight schedules that pressure attendees to remain in the room continuously or risk missing key sessions should be avoided.

Food provisions should be planned with a variety of dietary needs in mind. It is therefore recommendable to ask participants about their dietary needs during advance registration and share this information with the catering service and/or restaurant.

3.3 Accessibility Planning

Accessibility is fundamental to ensuring that all participants can fully engage in academic events. Physical accessibility includes, for example, providing barrier-free entrances, wheelchair-accessible restrooms, adequate signage, and reserved seating for people with disabilities. Digital accessibility

involves offering materials in accessible formats (e.g., screen-reader-friendly PDFs), live captions for online events, and ensuring technical support during digital sessions. Language accessibility should also be considered by using clear language, offering translations or interpretation where possible, and taking into account the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the participants. Accessibility must be considered from the earliest stages of event planning and should be clearly communicated to participants in advance, including information on contact points for individual accommodation requests.

3.4 Inclusive Language Guidelines

Language shapes our perceptions of who belongs and who is excluded. Inclusive language avoids assumptions about gender, race, class, ability, or other social identities and actively affirms diversity. At our events, all communication—whether spoken, written, or visual—should use gender-neutral terms. The identities of all individuals are respected, for example through the use of correct pronouns. Ableist, racist, sexist, or otherwise discriminatory expressions should be avoided. Event materials should model this standard, and speakers and moderators should be encouraged to pay attention to inclusive practices in their contributions and interactions.

- **A guideline on inclusive language can be found here:** <https://uni.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/en/node/649>

3.5 Guidelines for Discussions

In advance, it should be clarified how discussions will be structured to ensure that no single individual dominates the conversation and that others are not marginalized or prevented from contributing. Suggestions for structuring question-and-answer sessions can be found in the *Guidelines for an Inclusive, Respectful, and Constructive Discussion* at the end of this document. In addition, moderators should be consulted in advance about whether they prefer specific procedures for determining the order of contributions (for example, a hand or finger system [see below] or prioritizing speakers based on the order in which they indicate they wish to speak). These guidelines should be clearly communicated to all participants prior to the event.

3.6 Quiet Room and All-Gender Restrooms

Where possible, a designated quiet room should be provided to allow individuals to retreat if they need a break from social interaction or sensory stimuli. This space should be clearly marked, easily accessible, and set up with consideration for privacy and comfort. In addition, the nearest all-gender restrooms — alongside binary restrooms — should be clearly signposted in order to respect the needs of all people regardless of their identity or appearance. If there are no all-gender toilets nearby, toilets may be temporarily redesigned for the duration of the event. In such cases, it is recommended that both men's and women's restrooms are clearly labelled with a sign to indicate the available facilities (e.g., sitting or standing toilets). These facilities play an important role in ensuring that all participants feel respected, safe, and welcome during the event.

3.7 Awareness Training or Briefing for Staff/Volunteers

To create a respectful and inclusive atmosphere, all staff members, volunteers and event organizers should be appropriately prepared. Ideally, an awareness training or briefing session should be conducted before the event. This training should cover the principles of the Awareness Concept and the Code of Conduct to clearly define the responsibilities of the team members. Special attention should be given to practical skills, such as how to respond to reports of inappropriate behavior and how to handle conflict in a de-escalatory manner.

4. Awareness Structures During the Event

While careful planning significantly reduces risks, it is equally important to have clear structures in place during the event to ensure that any issues that may arise can be addressed appropriately. Awareness structures are intended to ensure that all participants know whom to contact if they experience or witness inappropriate behavior, feel uncomfortable, or need support. These structures should be visible and easily accessible, and they should be based on the principles of confidentiality, empowerment, and de-escalation.

4.1 Communication

Clear and transparent communication is essential for effective awareness work. At the beginning of the event, organizers should explicitly address the measures taken during the planning phase to create an inclusive environment, outline their expectations for participants, and highlight points of particular relevance. This includes referencing the Code of Conduct and general behavioral guidelines, clarifying whom to contact in case of different types of incidents, explaining any specific discussion rules, and indicating the locations of both binary and all-gender restrooms as well as Quiet Rooms, where available.

4.2 Awareness Team

Ideally – and especially for large conferences – a dedicated Awareness Team should be present throughout the event. Team members should be easily identifiable by badges, vests, or other visual markers, and their contact information should be provided in event materials and displayed at key locations. The Awareness Team's primary task is to offer low-threshold support to participants, listen to concerns, and mediate conflicts if necessary. Team members will have undergone a mandatory awareness training session before the event and will be familiar with basic de-escalation techniques, confidentiality standards, and reporting procedures. For smaller events, it is recommended to appoint at least one designated *Person of Trust* who can fulfill these responsibilities in an approachable and informed manner.

4.3 Support Offers

Participants who experience discrimination, harassment, or other transgressions must be able to obtain support quickly and without difficulty. The awareness team can offer direct emotional support to those affected, accompany them to a quiet area, or, if desired, assist them in filing a complaint. In doing so, the wishes of those affected and their autonomy are to be respected. In addition to the option of seeking out a low-stimulus room, it is also advisable to establish a general information point where one or more designated contact persons are available to provide information about counseling services and supportive resources such as glucose tablets, tissues, and stress balls.

- The *Unser Campus* project offers awareness consultation and awareness bag rental service. For more information and contact visit: <https://english.unser-campus.de/awareness>

4.4 Reporting Mechanisms

Reporting mechanisms must be simple, confidential, and clearly communicated. Participants should be able to contact the Awareness Team either in person during the event, via a dedicated phone number, or through a digital contact form (for hybrid or online events). Anonymous reporting options may also be provided where possible. All reports should be treated seriously and handled with care, focusing on the needs of those affected rather than on the reputation of the event or institution.

4.5 De-Escalation Strategies

De-escalation strategies focus on restoring a respectful and safe atmosphere rather than escalating tensions. If conflicts or problematic behavior arise, the Awareness Team and event organizers should prioritize de-escalation over confrontation. This includes calmly addressing inappropriate behavior, offering opportunities for reflection and correction, and, if necessary, implementing proportionate measures such as asking individuals to leave the space. In situations where immediate safety is a concern, a clear protocol for involving security personnel or external support (e.g., emergency services) should be in place.

5. Post-Event Follow-up

Awareness work does not end with the conclusion of an event. A careful and transparent post-event follow-up is essential to assess how well preventive and responsive measures worked, to learn from any challenges, and to strengthen inclusive practices for future events.

5.1 Evaluation and Feedback Collection

After the event, participants should be given the opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences with regard to safety, inclusion, and accessibility, anonymously where possible. Surveys should include specific questions on the effectiveness of the awareness structures and allow participants to share additional comments or suggestions. Where possible, different formats for providing feedback

(e.g., online forms, phone feedback, in-person debriefs) should be offered to increase accessibility.

5.2 Improvement Strategies for Future Events

Feedback and incident reports should be reviewed jointly by the organizing team, the Awareness Team, and, where applicable, relevant institutional bodies. Based on this review, concrete improvement strategies should be developed to enhance the effectiveness of future awareness work. These may include adjustments to the Awareness Concept, changes in venue or accessibility measures, new training elements for staff, or expanded support offers. Ongoing commitment to reflection and improvement are essential to making academic spaces more inclusive and respectful for all participants.

6. Conclusion and Appendices

By implementing this Awareness Concept, we affirm our commitment to creating academic spaces that are as accessible and inclusive and possible and that take into account the diverse needs and experiences of all those involved. Creating awareness is not a one-time task, but an ongoing process that requires attention, reflection, and active engagement from everyone involved. We invite all participants to join us in fostering a respectful, empowering environment in which critical dialogue, learning, and research can thrive without fear of discrimination or exclusion.

Awareness-Checklist for Academic Events

1. Planning & Prevention

- **Code of Conduct:** clear, inclusive, communicated in advance, contact information clearly stated.
- **Program:** invite diverse speakers, actively include early-career researchers, schedule sufficient breaks.
- **Ask during registration:** pronouns (always with the option of not specifying), dietary restrictions, individual support needs.
- **Accessibility:** accessible entrances, toilets and materials, subtitles/translations, communicate a contact for requirements, quiet room.
- **Language:** gender-neutral, respect pronouns, non-discriminatory.
- **Prepare name tags:** Ensure that names and pronouns are spelled correctly (alternatively, leave space for pronouns on name tags).
- **Team preparations:** awareness briefing/training for all staff and volunteers, especially for session chairs and moderators.

2. Implementation

- Explicitly refer to the **Code of Conduct and general rules** at the beginning of the event.
- Clearly communicate and/or signpost the **location of the quiet room and toilets** (with references to binary and all-gender toilets).
- **Awareness team and/or person(s) of trust:** recognizable (badge/vest), contact information clearly visible.
- **Reporting processes:** should be communicated clearly, maintain confidentiality and offer anonymous reporting options where possible.
- **De-escalation:** remain calm, address issues respectfully, clear emergency protocols.
- **Discussions:** communicate discussion rules clearly, prioritize contributions from underrepresented groups and early-career participants, balanced speaking time, consider short breaks between presentations and questions.

3. Follow-up

- **Feedback:** enable and clearly communicate anonymous (online) feedback).
- **Transparency:** prepare anonymized reports about incidents and the measures taken.
- **Improvement:** Team evaluation, improvements for future events.

Guidelines for an Inclusive, Respectful and Constructive Discussion

Guidelines for Moderation:

- At the beginning the **Code of Conduct** should be pointed out — especially at events without prior registration.
- **Take a break before starting the discussion, if necessary.** Before starting the discussion, it may be useful to take a one-minute break after a presentation — this gives participants time to gather their thoughts, move around, or talk to their neighbors. Only start collecting questions for the question list after this break.
- **Use the hand/finger system.** A raised hand indicates a new question, while a raised finger signals a direct follow-up to the current discussion.
- **Think about who gets to go first and make space for diverse voices.** For example, try to give the first question to someone from the group of students or doctoral candidates – or to a person who belongs to a group that is underrepresented in the department. Also, give preference to participants who have not yet spoken.
- **Ensure balanced participation.** We value a lively culture of discussion at Ruhr University Bochum, and controversial, equal debates are part of critical scholarship. However, if you feel that lengthy verbal exchanges are straying from the topic at hand or that certain individuals are dominating the discussion, do not hesitate to interrupt such exchanges or limit repeated follow-up questions from the same person in order to create space for equal participation in the discussion.

How to participate:

- **General behavior:** Remain friendly and respectful. Rolling your eyes, making faces, or laughing at participants is unacceptable. In addition, there should be no side conversations. Do not interrupt others and do not try to dominate the discussion.
- **Objections:** These should be communicated constructively—emphasize positive findings wherever possible. Criticism should be factual and not personal. Avoid raising the same point multiple times.
- **Asking questions:** It is perfectly fine to ask questions that may seem simple or trivial to you. Keep your questions focused and concise and limit yourself to one question at a time if possible. Avoid offensive examples.

Code Of Conduct

We hereby commit to providing all participants with a safe and respectful environment throughout the entire duration of the conference and all associated social activities. We aim to offer equal treatment to everyone regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, disability, physical appearance, socio-economic background, age or religion. Any form of discrimination or harassment will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Verbal, written, or physical behavior and language that is welcome or acceptable to one individual may be unwelcome or offensive to another. It is therefore important to take extra care to ensure that your words and/or actions are consensual. If a participant engages in any form of discriminatory or harassing behavior, the organizers may take appropriate action, which can range from a warning to exclusion from the event. If you experience harassment, feel uncomfortable with the way you are being treated, observe someone else being harassed, or have any other concerns or support needs, please contact a member of the Awareness Team or the organizing team.. All reports will be treated with strict confidentiality. No action will be taken without your explicit consent. If you are not comfortable contacting the Organizing Committee yourself, you may also talk to a friend or colleague and approach the organizers together. The organizers are committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of all participants.

By participating in the event, you agree to abide by this Code of Conduct. We appreciate your participation and wish you a safe and positive conference experience.

Impulses for Sensitive Communication Regarding Personal Pronouns

For many people, the personal pronouns they are addressed with and use for themselves are an everyday given that they rarely reflect upon. However, a growing section of society is becoming more aware of the pronouns that represent them. This guide aims to explain some of the concepts surrounding the use of pronouns and help develop practices that contribute to creating an inclusive environment for all members of Ruhr University Bochum.

What does it mean...

- **cis / cisgender:** A term used to describe people whose gender identity corresponds to the sex assigned to them at birth.
- **inter* / intersex:** A term used to describe people whose sex characteristics at birth did not fit typical definitions of "male" or "female." The gender identity of intersex people may be inter*. Intersex people can also have a female, male, or other gender identity, and should be addressed accordingly.
- **trans* / transgender:** An umbrella term used to describe anyone whose gender does not correspond, or only partially corresponds, to the gender assigned to them at birth. Transgender people include, for example, trans* women (women who were assigned the gender "male" at birth), but also people who do not identify as binary in terms of gender. The asterisk (*) leaves room for different identities.
- **non-binary / enby:** A term for people who identify outside the binary gender system. Non-binary people are therefore neither (only) female nor (only) male; they can be both or in between, for example, or have a different gender. Physical characteristics do not allow conclusions to be drawn about gender identity.
- **Queer:** Umbrella term for people who identify outside the binary gender system and/or heterosexual norm.
- **LGBTIQ+:** A combination of letters (which also exists in other variations) to represent different identities outside the cis-heterosexual norm. The '+' at the end stands for "and more," and the letters stand for lesbian, gay, bi, trans, inter*, and queer people.

When we talk about personal pronouns and gender identities, we mean...

Personal pronouns replace a previously mentioned noun or name and are used to refer to a specific person. The most commonly used personal pronouns, which are traditionally linked to gender, are "she/her" and "he/him". However, some people also use gender-neutral pronouns like "they/them", a mixture of pronouns, or do not want any pronouns to be used for them, in which case the person's

name is simply used instead of a pronoun. In German, there are proposals for gender-neutral pronouns such as *dey*, *xier*, or *sier*, which have not yet become widely established. More commonly, the singular *they/them* from English is used.

It is important to recognize that each person determines their own pronouns, that these may change, and that this should be respected. In addition, care should be taken not to draw hasty conclusions about a person's gender identity from their pronouns. For example, not every person who uses "he" pronouns is a man; they may also be non-binary.

It is important to explicitly address personal pronouns because...

it is not possible to reliably deduce the pronouns a person uses from their appearance or name. Addressing a person with the wrong personal pronoun is referred to as *misgendering*. If this is done intentionally, it can be considered a discriminatory act. This is also stated in Ruhr University's Anti-Discrimination Directive and the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG). Unintentional misgendering (e.g., due to carelessness or ignorance) can also be hurtful. Discrimination-sensitive and inclusive communication can help to avoid this.

How can I personally contribute to creating a more inclusive environment at Ruhr University Bochum through sensitive communication regarding pronouns?

There are many ways how one can create a positive and inclusive environment. Here are a few examples:

In general:

- By explicitly stating your own pronouns in appropriate places (email signature, websites, Zoom name, name tags, etc.), you normalize this practice.
- In emails, you can prevent misgendering by simply writing "Dear [first name] [last name]".
- If you are unsure which pronouns a particular person uses for themselves, it is advisable to ask. In general, it is better to address such uncertainty in a calm and respectful manner rather than avoiding the person or acting with excessive caution. Most people prefer to be asked about their pronouns rather than feeling avoided.
- If you have misgendered someone, you should offer a brief and sincere apology, without drawing too much attention to the situation or making the affected person the focus of the conversation.
- Appropriate forms of interaction often vary depending on the context. It is therefore important to recognize the individual person and to act in a manner appropriate to the specific situation.

In teaching:

- Lecturers may share their pronouns at the beginning of classes and point out that students are likewise welcome to do so. The same also applies to the use of names that differ from those listed on the official enrollment records.

- It may also be helpful to use lists of names that only include the last name and/or the student-ID-number, so that students could add their first names and pronouns themselves.

Before/at academic events:

- When preparing name tags, participants may be asked in advance which names and, if applicable, which pronouns they would like to have displayed. Providing one's pronouns should be voluntary.
- Name tags may be left blank and completed by participants themselves.

Further Reading:

- **Guideline for gender-inclusive language:**
<https://uni.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/en/node/649>
- **Gender-inclusive language at the Faculty of Social Sciences:**
<https://www.sowi.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/ze/gleichstellung.html.en>
- **„Guidance Manual for Dealing with Sensitive Content in Educational Settings“:**
<https://www.inhaltshinweise.blogs.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/handreichungen>
- **Information on Accessibility at RUB:**
<https://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/en/accessibility>
- **Information on website accessibility:**
<https://services.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/en/node/380>
- **RUB Anti-Discrimination Office:**
<https://einrichtungen.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/en/rub-anti-discrimination-office>
- **Unser Campus – against Sexism at RUB:**
<https://english.unser-campus.de>
- **Decentralized diversity officers at RUB:**
<https://einrichtungen.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/en/decentralized-diversity-officer>

Legal Notice

Project „Awareness-Konzept für wissenschaftliche Veranstaltungen an der RUB“
supported by funds from the Lore Agnes Vision Program

February 2026

Ruhr-University Bochum

Universitätsstraße 150

44801 Bochum

Tel.: 0234 32-201

Fax: 0234 32-14201

E-Mail: webmaster@ruhr-uni-bochum.de