The Inclusive Language Guide for Femtech and Sextech Leaders

HEALTH FOR

HUMANS
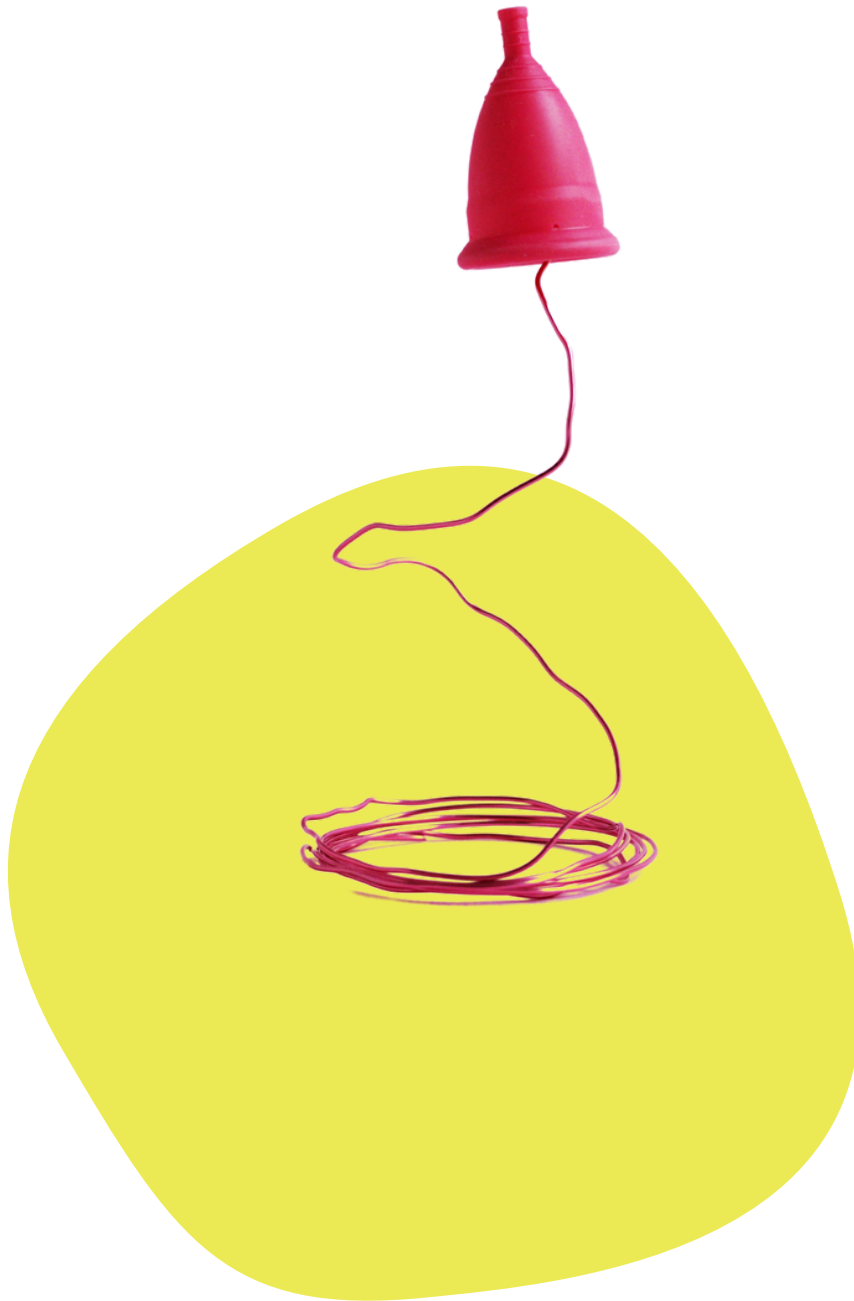
CONTENT

YOUR WORDS MATTER.

As a Femtech or Sextech leader, you might be struggling with how to incorporate inclusive language in your messaging.

How do you reach the full spectrum of your audience without further marginalizing people who need your products/services and don't identify with the term "women's health"?

This endeavor is confusing, nuanced, and ripe for mistakes in a very public setting.

The good news is: if you're reading this, you're already moving in the right direction.

This guide can be used as a resource to create a more inclusive business and understand the nuanced language that reflects your values.

Using this guide may highlight areas within your copy, and business, that need further attention to promote inclusivity.

We're thankful you're here and that you're making inclusive language in the Femtech space a priority.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Your words have the power to affect someone's personal experience whether that interaction is face-to-face or virtual. The ripple effect of our language will shape future rhetoric, care, advocacy, and even legislation. So, it's important to use care with your words now.

Understanding inclusive language will give you better ways to meet with a broader audience and create a bigger impact—as long as inclusivity is at the heart of your brand's true values.

It will expand your ability to communicate with every body, and improve healthcare outcomes and wellness for more people.

"... give you better ways to meet with a broader audience and create a bigger impact."

WHAT'S INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE?

Inclusive language is just one way you can acknowledge and respect the wonderful diversity of bodies, genders, and relationships in this world.

It requires dialogue and openness to shift your perspective if you want to free yourself from words and phrases that deliberately or unintentionally exclude people based on aspects of their identity.

It's the acknowledgment of internalized bias and the conscious removal of words and phrases that continue to promote prejudice, stereotypes, and discriminatory views.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT THIS GUIDE?

Inclusivity goes beyond gender identities and sexual orientation to include culture, race, ethnicity, disabilities, and religious and spiritual beliefs.

We support and celebrate all forms of diversity, but this guide focuses solely on the complexities of sexuality and gender inclusivity for health-related technology and sexual wellness businesses.

WE'RE NOT PERFECT.

This guide is a living document and the authors will continue to update and make changes as our understanding of gender, sex, and sexuality evolve.

We hope this guide will help you make more thoughtful decisions with the language you use in your brand messaging, marketing, and internal communications for your Femtech or Sextech business.

We begin with an outline of the steps you need to take before writing a single word of copy. These steps are merely a starting point to align your mission and values with your words and actions.

For feedback please email hello@elizabethagordon.com.

CHANGE HAPPENS IN YOUR BELIEFS AND SHOWS UP IN YOUR ACTIONS.

It's your responsibility to gauge whether or not you and your business are authentically creating space for diverse or non-conforming sexualities and genders.

While you'll find style guidelines, word swaps, and ways that design can promote gender inclusivity in this guide, making these top-level changes won't ring true if you and your employees don't embrace inclusivity as a pillar of your values.

We've identified ten steps to take to make sure your business Isn't making surface-level changes to be more Inclusive.

10 STEPS TO WRITING MORE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Promoting sexuality and gender-inclusive values isn't just about knowing the right words.

First, you need to create the right foundation by incorporating inclusivity into your brand's values and culture. Then, consistently commit to person-first language in your communication.

1 Know the difference between gender identity, gender expression, sex, and sexual orientation

GENDER IDENTITY AND GENDER EXPRESSION ARE DIFFERENT.

Your **gender identity** is your internal sense of self whereas your **gender expression** is how you display your identity to the outside world.

A person may identify as cis, non-binary, trans, or gender fluid, but prefer to express themselves as female or male by cultural definitions. Or neither. Or both.

The words "trans" and "cis" are not gender identities by themselves, but describe someone's relationship to gender.

It's also important to remember that cultural definitions of what is considered masculine or feminine behavior and appearance have changed over time and continue to evolve.

Some people find that their gender or sexuality shifts and changes throughout their life, while others find that those aspects of their identity are constant.

Gender identity and **sexual orientation** can change independently and in relation to each other.

Non-binary is an umbrella term for identities other than "binary woman" and "binary man."

That can include people who don't identify with any gender at all or people who identify with multiple genders.

Some non-binary identities are completely separate from ideas of woman or man and some include elements of one or both.
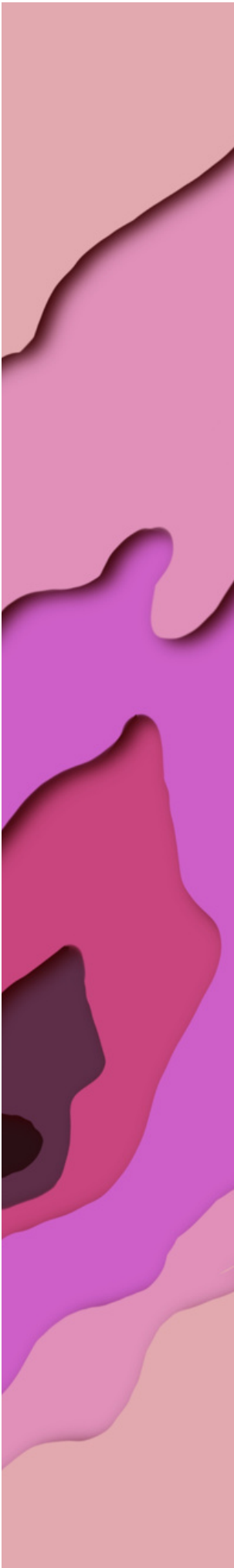
Examples of relevant words:

Gender identity: Genderqueer, non-binary, man, woman

Gender expression: Androgynous, feminine, masculine

Sex: Female, Intersex, male

Sexual Orientation: Asexual, bisexual, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, pansexual

For a full list and definitions of gender and sexuality terms please visit www.lgbtqiahealtheducation.org

YOUR SEX IS NOT BINARY

Your **sex** is related to the organs, hormones, and chromosomes found in your body, but is most often defined by outward appearance.

People are assigned their **sex** at birth based on their outward anatomical structures such as a penis or vulva.

There Is an incredible amount of variations in the way human beings are created ranging from organ structure, chromosomal differences, and varying levels of hormones. Diversity in biological creation is normal.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION IS NOT THE SAME AS GENDER IDENTITY

Your sexual orientation refers to physical and/or emotional attraction to others. A person's sexual orientation may be fluid or static.

For a better understanding of **gender**, **sex**, and **sexual orientation**, we highly encourage you to seek out additional courses or coaching resources and diverse personal stories via social media.

2 Learn about pronouns — and how to ask for them

Pronouns are the way gender is reflected to the world. If someone expresses their **pronouns** to you, ignoring who they are is disrespectful and hurtful.

Don't use the phrase "preferred pronouns." This implies that someone's gender is a preference when it's actually who someone *is*.

Simply ask: "What are your pronouns?"

Examples of relevant words for pronouns:

Ey/em, He/him, he/they, she/her, she/they, they/them, or xe/xir, though there are far more pronouns than that

3 Create sexuality and gender-diverse customer avatars

Creating customer avatars is a popular technique to help you write copy that speaks directly to your ideal customer.

DIVERSIFY YOUR AVATARS

You can create personas that represent the diverse spectrum of culture, race, ethnicity, disabilities, religious or spiritual beliefs, sexual orientation, and gender identities.

Decide whether creating gender-neutral or gender-diverse avatars will help you best explore the language you're using and how It relates to the experiences of the widest audience possible.

CREATE SEXUALITY-INCLUSIVE AVATARS

You should also create personas that are more inclusive to sexual orientation by focusing on how people experience your products or on life experiences:

Ex: Charlotte experiences pain when receiving penetrative sex from their partner and while doing certain physical exercises.

# 4 Build your products and services with diverse audiences in mind

If you incorporate a diverse range of experiences in your audience segments or customer avatars, you'll begin to develop better products and services that reach a wider audience.

Keep a relentless focus on the user- all potential users.

Increase the awareness of the assumptions you make about gender and sexual orientation in relation to your product or service.

Much of the gendered outcomes trace back to assumptions embedded in market research.

Recognize exclusion and identify the processes that lead to it. Hire diverse team members from day one to expand your perspective and goals.
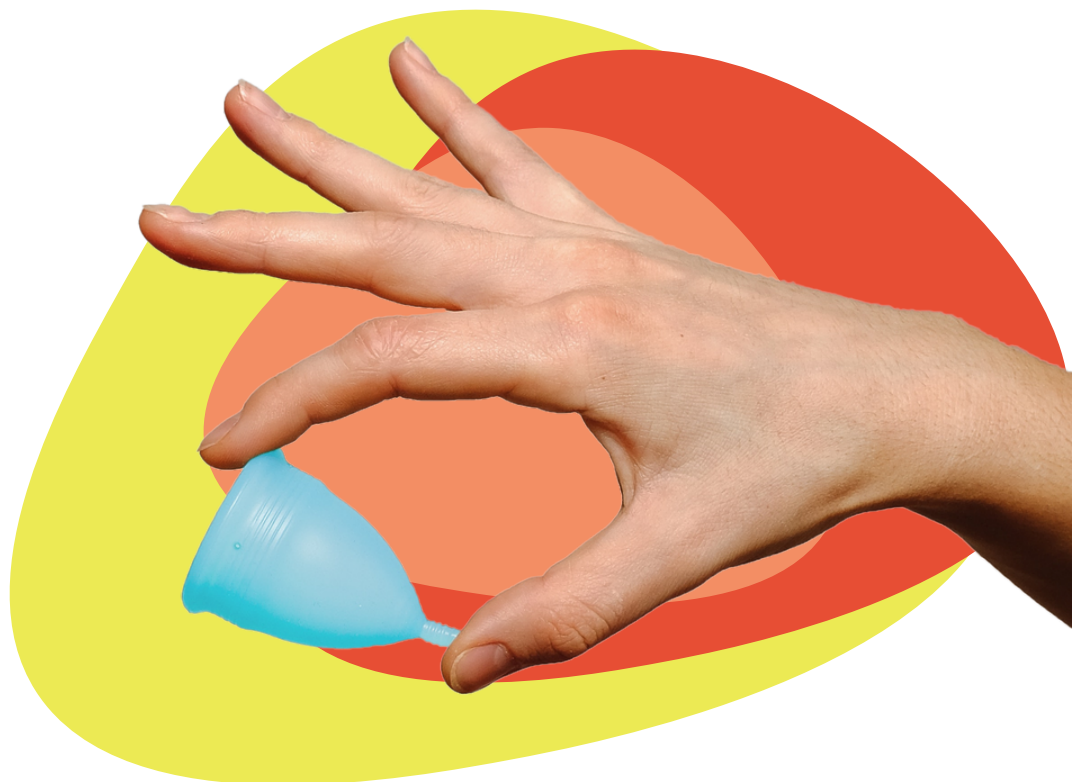
5 Learn about your audience and customers

Understanding your audience makes it possible for you to create a deeper connection with your customers.

That way you can write copy that makes your customers feel seen, heard, and understood by moving past surface-level thoughts and feelings to the root causes of a person's health challenges.

COLLECT YOUR OWN FIRST-PARTY AND ZERO-PARTY DATA

Much of the demographic information we rely on from Google and other sites Is heavily binary. At the base level, get to know your audience by giving them the option to self-segment with more options than the binary "male" or "female."
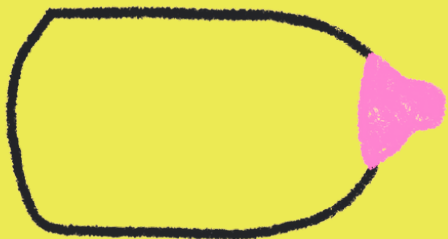
Create a dialogue with your audience. Ask questions about who they are, how they identify, what words they would like to hear, and where they are in their journey.

This will help your brand evolve not only in messaging but in response to the developing needs of your community.
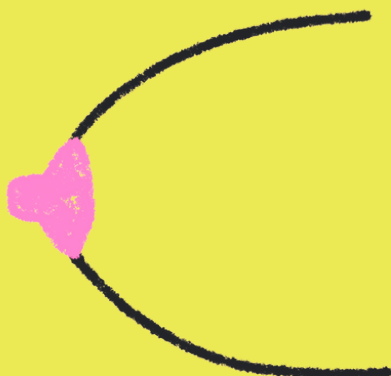
If you are a healthcare or sexual wellness provider, ask what anatomical terms your patients prefer to create an inclusive space on medical forms and in communications.

6   Create a culture of inclusivity in your business

DEVELOP AN INTERNAL INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE FOR YOUR SPECIFIC BUSINESS.

Help your team identify exclusive language and create inclusive guidelines. Share your guide as part of your onboarding process and frequently remind team members about where to access it.

INCORPORATE SAFE-SPACE DISCUSSIONS IN YOUR WORKPLACE WHERE PEOPLE CAN ASK QUESTIONS AND DIALOGUE TOGETHER.

Engage an inclusion training coach or moderator for these discussions.

Do not ask specific staff members to volunteer their experience, time, or to educate in this setting. Allow them to self-volunteer if they'd like.

PROVIDE A DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION CURRICULUM OR TRAINING FOR ALL EMPLOYEES.

Go beyond demographics to personalize your strategy

Psychographic information is far more effective than demographic information for your marketing strategy.

This is information about your customer's activities, values, and attitudes, rather than standards like age or income-level.

Learn what your customer's challenges and desires are, what drives them, and what specific solutions they need.

Segment your messaging based on self-identified traits as well as the stage of the journey with your business or product.

Ask questions like: Are they educated about the problem this offer solves? Is this the first time they've tried something like this?

Educate your audience on your values

Create a space on your website to explain why sexuality and gender-inclusive language matters to your brand.

Help everyone get to know the terms you'll be using so that instead of having to meet everyone where they are, your audience can learn with and from you.

Examples of businesses that use their website to educate their audience on their values: Clue's post on inclusivity or the Midwives of North America statement.

9 Diversify your storytelling

Allow everyone who could benefit from your product or service to feel welcome by showing a diverse array of backgrounds and experiences in your storytelling.

Collect and use sexuality and gender-diverse stories, testimonials, and quotes on your website and marketing channels.

Make sure to include specified pronouns.

10 Be aware of who you're actually talking to

It can be easy to assume that broader terms like "women and non-binary people" or "women and gender non-conforming people" are more inclusive, but this can backfire if it means lumping groups together even when the product, service, or space doesn't really include everyone.

THINK ABOUT THIS:
Alex is a uni student. He's a transmasc non-binary man who uses he/him pronouns and feels most comfortable with a more masculine presentation.

Ella is a writer and a trans woman. They use she/they pronouns and their gender presentation varies day to day depending on what's safe and comfortable for them.

Jess is agender and uses they/them pronouns and always goes by gender-neutral terms.

When you say "women and non-binary people" that includes Alex, Ella, and Jess, as well as many many more people, even though your product/service may not actually be of use to all of them.

INCLUSIVITY IN ACTION

Reaching a broader audience by prioritizing accuracy

The best (and easiest) way to make sure your copy is inclusive is to write to the person who can relate to the challenges your product solves, regardless of how they identify.

The term "women's health" does not include all trans or non-binary people though they may need or benefit from your products or services.

FOCUS ON ANATOMY
Use "person with," "people with, "humans with," or "anyone with" instead of "women," or "female-bodied."
Ex: "People who receive penetrative sex."

HIGHLIGHT CONDITIONS
Focus on the end result rather than how something occurred.
Ex: "People who lactate" or "pregnancy may occur."

LEAD WITH CHALLENGES OR SYMPTOMS
Flag anyone who is suffering by calling out their symptoms.
Ex: "People experiencing frequent bladder leaks as a result of childbirth."

The Big Picture

Web copy, microcopy, forms, and internal documents

When you're talking to a group of people whose gender identity is unknown, use "people" "human" or "they/them" pronouns. You can also this Guide focusing on anatomy, conditions, or symptoms.
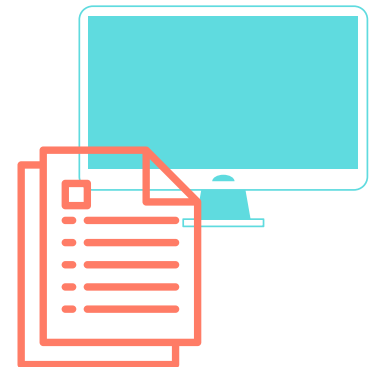
Email and social media

When you're talking to a specific segment of your audience use 2nd-person "you" instead of 3rd-person "he/she" to speak directly to your one reader. If you still want to use 3rd-person, use the singular "they."

Stories, testimonials, case studies, and reviews

When referring to an individual person, you don't have to remove the words "woman" or "she" entirely. Use that specific person's pronouns to respect their gender identity.
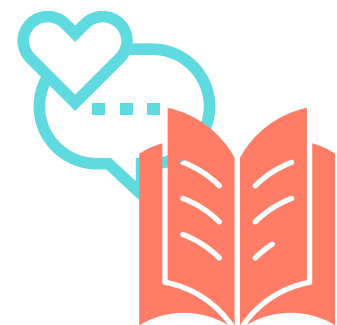
STYLE GUIDELINES

Use gender-neutral pronouns like they/them when referring to people, or more than one person, whose gender identity you may not know.

Ex: Gillian Morse is on Voxer- do you want to message them?

Avoid unnecessarily binary terms when a gender-neutral term would work.

Ex: Use "they" or "students" rather than "men" or "women."

Use the pronoun "one."

Ex: A writer in New York earns more than one would in Kansas City.

Restructure your sentence to remove the need for pronouns.

Ex: Change "He'll print it over there" to "Printing is over there."

Use gender-neutral nouns like humankind or human-caused instead of mankind or man-made.

Ex: Use "That's one giant leap for humankind" rather than "That's one giant leap for mankind."

Don't equate gender and anatomy.

Ex: Use "reproductive health" instead of "women's health."

Remove gender identities where it isn't necessary or excludes people who have similar experiences.

Ex: Use "Menstruators have a basic right to free access to hygiene resources…" rather than "Women have a basic right to…"

STYLE GUIDELINES

Unlink sex organs from genders. Not everyone who has a uterus or vagina identifies as a woman.

Ex: "People suffering from painful uterine cramps."

Don't separate trans people from the gender they identify with. Trans women are women. Full stop. Trans men are men. Full stop.

Ex: Instead of "women and transgender women" say "women."

Use gender-neutral job titles or life stages.

Ex: First-year college student instead of Freshman.

Don't use gender or anatomy as a substitute for a trait.

Ex: "She's ballsy" to reference her masculine qualities.

Avoid phrases with ladies, gentlemen, ma'am, sir, girls, guys, etc, and consider using: friends, folks, everyone, teammates, you, ya'll, or all.

Ex: "Hey, team" instead of "Hey, guys."

Never refer to genderqueer people as non-cisgender.

Don't force gendered terms on non-binary people — regardless of the pronouns they identify with.

How inclusive is your website?

◯ Is your navigation bar gender-neutral? If not, is there a reason?

◯ Are your products or experiences categorized by gender? Why?

◯ Is your visual design (choices of color, typography, etc.) gender-stereotypical?

◯ Do your photos/illustrations represent diverse genders or do you have gender-neutral imagery?

◯ Are the images you use for your user's avatars feminine or masculine-presenting based on the gender they selected?

◯ Are your icons gender-neutral?

◯ Are the emojis you use gender-neutral?

◯ Is your microcopy gender-neutral?

◯ Are pronouns listed for all testimonials, case studies, reviews, and on your about or staff pages?

◯ Are your testimonials, case studies, and/or reviews diversified?

Use this checklist to view your website through the lens of inclusivity.

Forms/data collection:

◯ Do you ask for your customer's pronouns separately from their gender?

◯ Do you allow users to select their gender identity, sex assigned at birth, and a "chosen name" rather than "nickname"?

◯ Do you give more than two options or multi-select for gender- as well as an option not to disclose that information? *Remember that the most inclusive and accurate way to ask about gender on a form is to have an open text field that users can fill in however they identify.*

◯ Do you specify the need for requesting someone's sex? Do you explain what you mean: sex assigned at birth or legally?

◯ Are you transparent about why collecting gender data is necessary and how it will be shared?

◯ Have you included inclusive salutation options (Mr, Ms, Mrs, Mx, no salutation)

Gender–inclusive Femtech word swaps
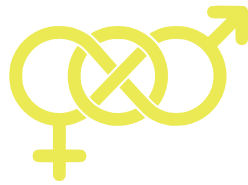
Instead of	Try this
Women's health rights	Reproductive rights
Feminine hygiene products	Menstrual products
Women with periods	Menstruators
Biological female / Biological male	Assigned female at birth (AFAB) Assigned male at birth (AMAB)
Regular / Normal / Correct	Common
Pelvic exam Well woman/man exam	Sexual health screening Internal exam Cervical screening
Erection	Physical arousal
Male condom / female condom	External /Internal condom
Vaginal sex	Receptive/Insertive intercourse Person receiving penetrative sex Person giving penetrative sex
Pregnant woman	Pregnant person
Motherhood / Fatherhood	Parenthood
Breastfeeding	Baby-feeding parent Lactating parent Chestfeeding
Mother/father	Parent
Wife/Husband	Spouse Partner
Gender non-binary	Non-binary
She Is a transgender	She Is a transgender woman

Would you like help to incorporate more inclusive language into your Femtech or Sextech business?

Make your business and language more inclusive immediately. Get edits to your copy and actionable steps for larger changes— all In one day.

Book an Inclusive Copy Intensive with Elizabeth Gordon

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