

# Promoting DEIAA through Language in Nursing Education

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## Background

In any classroom in the United States, people from different countries, regions, cultures, and backgrounds exist. As higher education becomes more intentional about promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism, and accessibility, surely inclusive language practices should also be considered. Educators must actively eliminate linguistic and identity bias (biases based on one's identity not limited to race and ethnicity but also gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) in learning resources and exams. While these biases may be unintended, they can negatively impact the performance of those students from non-dominant cultural backgrounds whose primary language is not English. Using a 'Universal Type Language' (UTL) approach in lectures, presentations, textbooks, handouts, and test items free of biases, sayings or slang terms so that all learners understand the intended meaning. Failure to implement a UTL can contribute to identity exclusion and linguistic bias, hindering the success of learners from diverse races, cultures, and ethnicities in nursing programs.

### Impact on Practice

The language used in learning resources (textbooks, presentations, handouts, etc.) designed to help prepare students for high-stakes exams can contribute to the prevalent equity performance gaps between the majority and the minority cultural groups in that region. Using a UTL can promote learners' success from culturally diverse backgrounds while creating a pipeline of nursing graduates who reflect the diverse population they serve. The long-term outcome of implementing UTL is the creation of a diverse workforce of nurses who understand the barriers of underserved communities and can directly impact the healthcare disparities that have prevailed for decades.

### What is Universal Type Language?

Universal Type Language (UTL) is a deliberate effort by the educator to use language in which the intended meaning of a message is conveyed even if translated into the readers' primary language and is free of biases, sayings, or slang terms only identified in the dominant culture (Berchie-Gialamas, Meade, 2023).

## Objectives

1. At the end of the session, participants will be able to:
2. Identify how to modify learning resources and test items using a UTL
3. Demonstrate an understanding of inclusive language for item writing
4. Create a dialogue to improve students comprehension through using a UTL

## Recommendations

Recognizing bias in our own language is difficult. It is recommended that the following checklist be used with multiple faculty members from diverse backgrounds (non-dominant and dominant cultures) to achieve an optimal Universal Type Language outcome for learners. If there is a lack of diversity within the existing nursing faculty, interdisciplinary health faculty should be considered.

Universal Type Language Checklist for Learning Resources & Test Item Writing	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Free from Linguistic Complexity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentence structure and vagueness</li> <li>• Fry Readability Graph</li> </ul>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Free from Gender Bias
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Free from Racial Bias
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Free from Identity Bias (cultural, religion, sexual orientation, etc.)

Universal Type Language Checklist Post- Exam	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Free from Linguistic Complexity Did non-native English speakers answer the same items incorrectly?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Free from Identity Bias <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Disaggregation of data</b> - Did students from the non-dominant culture answer the same items incorrectly?</li> <li>• <b>Differential Item Functioning</b> - Is it clear that non-dominant culture learners of high performing ability performed differently on the same item as learners from the dominant culture of high performing ability?</li> </ul>

## Examples

### Free From Linguistic Complexity

**Complex:** The nurse is teaching a client with Diabetes about sick day rules before discharge. Which statement from the client to the nurse indicates that further teaching is needed?

**Non-Complex:** The nurse is teaching a client about Diabetic sick day rules. Which statement indicates that the client needs more teaching?

### Free From Gender Bias

**Bias:** The nurse assist the provider with setting up his sterile field. The nurse realizes she has dropped her hands above her waist. Which action should she take next?

**Non-bias:** The nurse prepares a sterile field for the provider. The nurses' hands drop below waist level. Which action should the nurse take next?

### Free from Racial Bias

The nurse is caring for four clients. Which client is at highest risk for Crohn's disease?

### Biased Answer Choices:

- 84 yr. old African-American client with chronic constipation
- 67 yr. old Jewish American client with severe diarrhea
- 43 yr. old Chinese American client with diverticulosis
- 25 yr. old Korean American client with intestinal obstruction

### Free from Racial Bias Continued

#### Unbiased Answer Choices focusing on Social Determinants of Health:

- Client who admits eating processed foods daily
- Client whose heritage is from Central Europe
- Client who drinks caffeine daily for ten years
- Client who does not have access to clean food or water

### Free from Cultural Bias

A client diagnosed with Heart Failure is receiving discharge instructions about diet by the nurse. The client indicates they understand foods that are low in sodium when they select:

#### Culturally Biased Answer Choices:

- Hot dog and baked beans
- Beef patty and baked potato
- Tomato soup and tossed salad
- Bologna sandwich and french fries

#### Culturally Unbiased Answer Choices:

- Fish and canned beans
- Beef and baked potato
- Canned soup and salad
- Chicken sandwich and fried potatoes

## Conclusions

Linguistic bias, as discussed, can result in an inaccurate student assessment and comprehension and can adversely affect the student's achievement. Using a universal type language can help these learners understand and comprehend the material, can help when examining, and promote the integration of students from all backgrounds in nursing and higher education in the United States. Furthermore, from our review of the literature it was identified more studies are needed on linguistic modification and universal languages for ESL nursing students to ensure our efforts in providing equity are not dismissed.

## References

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