

Neurodiversity: Quick terminology guide

For planners, urban designers, engagement teams & event organisers

Neurodiversity

What it means: The natural variation in how human brains function and process information. This is a concept, not a condition.

How to use:

- ✔ "Our team values neurodiversity."
- ✔ "This consultation process was designed with neurodiversity in mind."
- ⊗ Not a synonym for being neurodivergent!

Neurodivergent

What it means: Describes an individual whose brain functions differently from what is considered typical (including but not limited to ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's, etc.)

How to use:

- ✔ "We ensured the consultation materials were accessible for neurodivergent participants."
- ✔ "The room is designed to be neurodivergent-friendly."
- ⊗ Don't call a person "neurodiverse" - individuals who aren't neurotypical are neurodivergent.

Neurodiverse

What it means: Describes a group of people with different types of brains. For example, a team made up of neurotypical and neurodivergent people would be considered neurodiverse.

How to use:

- ✔ "The steering group was intentionally neurodiverse to reflect a range of perspectives."
- ✔ "We want to engage with a neurodiverse group of people."
- ⊗ Don't say one person is "neurodiverse" - that word only applies to groups, not individuals.

Neurotypical

What it means: Someone whose mind aligns with what's considered typical by the society.

How to use:

- ✔ "The format may favour neurotypical styles of communication- how can we adapt it?"
- ✔ "We're trying to balance the needs of neurotypical and neurodivergent participants."

Common mistakes to avoid

Incorrect	Better alternative
<p>Saying "Neurodiverse" person.</p>	<p>Say "Neurodivergent" person.</p>
<p>Referring to "neurodiverse people" when specifically referring to those whose brains function differently.</p>	<p>It's better to say "neurodivergent people." "Neurodiverse" is better for describing groups that include both neurodivergent and neurotypical people.</p>
<p>Using "neurodiverse" to describe objects or spaces.</p>	<p>Use more precise terms: "neurodivergent-friendly space", "inclusive of neurodiversity", "quiet space" etc. A space can't be "neurodiverse" - it's the group using it that can be.</p>
<p>Describing someone as "suffering from" or "afflicted by" a condition.</p>	<p>Use neutral, respectful language such as "autistic person". Use identity-first language where appropriate e.g., "ADHDer" unless the individual prefers person-first terms like "person with ADHD".</p>
<p>Using deficit based language - terms like "normal brains" vs "abnormal".</p>	<p>Say "neurotypical" and "neurodivergent".</p>

Why it matters

Getting the language right helps:

Neurodivergent people feel seen, respected and welcomed

Create more accessible and inclusive engagement

Support better outcomes in planning and placemaking

