

## 20. Inclusion

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### Definition and Background

Inclusion is what it means to be considered and included within a group, design, or opportunity. It is most felt (or measured) when people know that their ideas and input are going to be leveraged in a given situation. In technical and professional communication (TPC), inclusion helps us to move beyond our own needs, desires, and goals for design and design thinking, and opens space to consider others who may benefit greatly from design thinking that engages their perspective. The social justice turn in technical communication has centralized inclusion in design thinking; yet, inclusion has been at the fore of user experience (UX) and design since the 1990s. As April O'Brien points out in her entry on *social justice* later in this collection, social justice issues, such as disability and accessibility (Colton & Walton, 2015; Hitt 2018; Melonçon, 2017), gender and sexuality (Cox, 2018a, 2018b; Edenfield, 2019), feminism (Frost & Haas, 2017; Moeller & Frost, 2016), and race (Williams & Pimentel, 2014) are strongly tied to inclusion. Of course, this list is in no way exhaustive.

While inclusion has been an ongoing part of TPC for some time, Natasha N. Jones, Kristen R. Moore, and Rebecca Walton (2016) have called for the field to create a more vivid antenarrative. They assert that “dominant narratives of efficiency, technological expertise, and innovative infrastructure too often dominate the field and research projects where inclusion sits at the heart of the project” (Jones et al., 2016, p. 213). As part of their ongoing efforts to create an antenarrative for TPC scholars, Jones et al. (2016) offer a heuristic for moving inclusion forward in the field, the 3Ps: positionality, power, and privilege. This situates us in thinking more critically about marginalization, disempowerment, and the promotion of agency and advocacy (Jones et al., 2016, p. 420).

In design thinking, we often associate the stage of *empathy*, or empathizing with the user, with inclusion, as it is key to generating “human-centered products and services” (Shalamova, 2016). Inclusion, however, can be critical to every stage of design thinking. Empathy, if anything, reminds us that design thinking should be participatory throughout. When we localize inclusion within social justice-driven work, we decentralize the role of the designer as the authority. In this collection’s *participatory design* chapter, Ian Weaver emphasizes that we can challenge the notion of the designer as the expert by involving users in the full design process. Similarly, inclusion should not be thought of as a static practice or centered in one stage or moment within design thinking. Rather, inclusion is an

“active localization practice that includes whether or not diversity and difference is explicitly named and in what ways” (Shivers-McNair & San Diego, 2017). In other words, inclusion is a dynamic process whereby a practitioner, researcher, or designer critically examines positionality, power, and privilege through engaged listening, conversation, and participation with users.

## ■ Design Application

Let’s consider some of the professional writing produced for communities by hospitals. Consider videos that appear on departmental profiles, like that of a postpartum depression informational video. Such a video is important because it not only defines postpartum depression, but it also lists symptoms one might look for postpartum. The video features a patient, a doctor, definition, symptom lists, and contact information. Within the design of both the webpage and the video itself are clear indications that inclusion was considered: written transcript, captions, an audio only file, and a link to a version in Spanish. These moves make the video accessible to people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH), those who speak Spanish, and people with disabilities. But even while this may be a standard practice at a given hospital, it’s important to reflect upon positionality, power, and privilege and ask, “How am I embodied—represented, manifested, or subjected—in this space as a designer?” as well as “Who is missing from this resource?”

Such questions about inclusion, especially in teams, help us to consider how inclusive the design of a text is. They might lead us to realize that only White users are shown and are occupying spaces in the video. Or, we might be led to include more statistics on postpartum depression and how this affects Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) at much higher rates. This may lead to follow-up with the physician featured in the video and scholarly research. And this all helps to create 1) a more inclusive resource for community members and 2) a reminder to do this with resources we create in the future.

## ■ Pedagogical Integration

A viable way to cultivate inclusivity is by modeling inclusive concepts and practices in the classroom. Of course, foregrounding these into assignments is critical. For example, if students are to produce a video, it should be scaffolded in that they create captions and/or a transcript. Likewise, if they’re creating a webtext, it should be a standard expectation that images would have alt text for anyone accessing the site who uses a screen reader. These moves help to 1) cultivate an inclusive space where diverse experiences of texts are foregrounded into the design process and 2) open a channel for discussing difficult issues related to oppression and marginalization.

Regardless of the project students are working on, there are key questions that are useful to return to often when situating inclusion in the TPC students do together:

- How am I present in the design? How are my team members?
- How would I describe my own positionality and privilege relevant to the project?
- How did our values become embodied in the design?
- How can I embody the primary users more fully? What about tertiary users?
- How did users' values become embodied in the design?
- Who is missing? Or, who might have a hard time understanding, using, or applying what we are creating?
- What is my positionality, relevant to the stakeholders?
- How might that be affecting the design?

These questions provide a useful framework for continuously returning to inclusion throughout the design thinking process. The TPC classroom can also be a space where diversity and inclusion are celebrated, not just for namesake but with true intentions to promote underrepresented perspectives and experiences. In course readings and lesson examples, instructors should work to ensure representations of diverse perspectives and cultures. Students should be given the opportunities to grapple with difficult topics or conversations regarding differences based on their backgrounds, values, and beliefs. When designing solutions, students should be prompted to exercise inclusive practices so as to enact ideas and directions that reflect empathy, tolerance, and acceptance.

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