# Neuroinclusive Communications Guide for the John Innes Centre (JIC)

## Introduction

Effective communication is the cornerstone of collaboration, innovation, and progress at the John Innes Centre. As part of our *Understanding, Valuing and Celebrating Neurodiversity Project* (2024), this guide provides strategies for creating an inclusive environment that supports Neurodivergent individuals. Neurodivergence encompasses a range of natural cognitive differences, including Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, and others. These differences enrich the JIC community by bringing diverse perspectives and approaches to problem-solving.

Neuroinclusive communication improves accessibility, and can enhance collaboration, creativity, and overall wellbeing of individuals. This guide outlines best practices for language use, document and presentation design, meetings and events, and clear, direct communication.

## 1. Neuroaffirmative language

### Embrace differences, not deficits

Using Neuroaffirmative language is key to fostering a respectful, inclusive culture at JIC. Identity-first language, such as "Autistic person" rather than "person with Autism," recognises Neurodivergent traits as integral aspects of a person's identity. This language reflects an understanding of difference, not deficit, and avoids framing Neurodivergence as something that needs to be "fixed."

- **Do:** Use identity-first language: "Autistic person." Many Neurodivergent people prefer identity-first language. However, some describe themselves with person-first language: "Person with Autism". Try to use the language they prefer.

- **Avoid:** Terms like "suffering from" or "disorder." Use neutral, affirming language like "Neurodivergent traits" or "Neurodivergent experiences."

By moving away from deficit-based language, we can foster an environment where Neurodivergent staff, researchers, and visitors feel valued for their contributions.

## Why it matters

Language shapes how we understand and interact with others. Using Neuroaffirmative language promotes inclusivity, helping Neurodivergent individuals feel respected and understood. This can foster better working relationships and collaboration, essential for our scientific and research goals, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued.

## 2. Creating accessible documents and presentations

Documents and presentations are essential tools for researchers, for both internal communication and the dissemination of research. Ensuring that these materials are accessible allows everyone to engage fully with the content.

## Font and layout

- **Readable fonts:** Use sans serif fonts like Lato (the one used here, JIC's official body copy font), Arial, Calibri, or Verdana. These fonts reduce visual crowding and improve readability. Text should be 12-14pt, but you should use larger sizes as needed.

- **Spacing:** Ensure proper spacing between lines (at least 1.5) and words. Avoid justified text, as it can create uneven spacing that makes reading more difficult.

- **Avoid underlining or italics:** These can make text harder to read. Use bold for emphasis instead.

- **Colour contrast:** Black text on a white background can be inaccessible to some readers, especially those with dyslexia. JIC documents should use dark text on

soft backgrounds, like cream or pastel shades, to reduce glare and improve accessibility where possible.

## Visual and structural clarity

- **Visual aids:** Use diagrams, infographics, and other visuals to break up dense information. Ensure these are clear, relevant, and not overwhelming.

- **Headings and bullet points:** Break up long paragraphs with headings and bullet points, helping readers navigate the content more easily.

## Why it matters

By ensuring documents and presentations are accessible, JIC enables everyone, regardless of cognitive style, to engage with and contribute to scientific discussions and research. These practices foster inclusion and ensure that JIC's work reflects the full range of perspectives present in its diverse community.

## 3. Inclusive meetings and events

Meetings, seminars, and events are core to collaboration. Ensuring these gatherings are inclusive allows Neurodivergent individuals to participate fully and contribute meaningfully to discussions and research projects.

## Meetings

- **Prepare with agendas in advance:** Distribute agendas and relevant materials well in advance to allow attendees time to process the information. This helps reduce anxiety and ensures that everyone, including Neurodivergent individuals, can engage confidently.

- **Flexibility in participation:** In online meetings, JIC staff and participants should feel free to keep their cameras off or engage via chat if they find it more comfortable. This flexibility respects individual communication preferences and reduces pressure.

- **Supportive technology:** JIC meetings should make use of AI-powered transcription tools, or offer live captions, to support those who have difficulty processing auditory information in real-time.

Events

- **Sensory-friendly environments:** Events could offer quiet spaces for those who need to step away from the main area. Consider factors like lighting and noise levels to minimise sensory overload in these spaces.

- **Hybrid and online options:** Offering hybrid or virtual attendance options allows individuals to participate in a format that best suits their needs. Making event recordings available post-event ensures that everyone can engage with the material and supports those that require more time to process the information.

Why it matters

Inclusive meetings and events ensure that all members of the community can contribute their ideas, insights, and expertise. By offering flexible participation options and creating sensory-friendly environments, we can create spaces where everyone feels comfortable engaging, enhancing the quality and inclusivity of our research and projects.

4. Using clear and direct language

Clarity is key, especially when conveying complex ideas. Neurodivergent individuals often benefit from clear, direct language that reduces cognitive load and ensures the message is fully understood.

Keep language simple and precise

- **Concise sentences:** Use short, direct sentences that focus on one idea at a time. This makes information easier to process and reduces misunderstandings.

- **Avoid figurative language:** Stay away from idioms, metaphors, or sarcasm, as these can be interpreted literally. Focus on being clear and straightforward.

- **Specific questions:** Avoid open-ended questions. Instead, offer structured options such as, "Would you prefer attending the seminar online or in person?" rather than, "How would you like to attend?"

Pauses and processing time

During presentations or discussions, allow pauses between key points. This gives everyone, especially Neurodivergent individuals, time to process information and formulate responses. Avoid rushing through complex material to ensure understanding.

## Why it matters

Clear, direct communication is crucial to JIC's mission of fostering research and innovation. Ensuring that language is straightforward and accessible supports effective collaboration and helps all team members feel included in scientific discussions.

## Conclusion

By adopting these Neuroinclusive communication practices, the John Innes Centre can create an environment where colleagues are supported, valued, and empowered to thrive. These practices not only enhance accessibility but also ensure that the diverse perspectives within the John Innes Centre are fully integrated into its research and innovation.

The *Understanding, Valuing and Celebrating Neurodiversity Project* (2024) is a critical step in shaping JIC into a place where everyone can contribute to its world-class research and discoveries.

**Keen to learn more?** The Neu Project's guide (included in the references below) is highly recommended and has a wide range of resources to help you.

---

## References

1. **Autistica.** (n.d.). *How to develop a neuroinclusive culture at work.* Retrieved from [Autistica](Autistica)

2. **Ambitious about Autism.** (n.d.). *Top tips for communicating effectively with autistic people.* Retrieved from [Ambitious about Autism](Ambitious about Autism)

3. **British Dyslexia Association.** (2023). *Dyslexia friendly style guide.* Retrieved from [British Dyslexia Association](British Dyslexia Association)

4. **Dash, I.** (2024). *7 Strategies for Effective Communication in Neurodiverse Teams.* Retrieved from auticon

5. **Holmans, L.** (2024). *The Language of Inclusion: A Guide to Neuro-Affirming Communication.* Retrieved from Neurodivergent Rebel

6. **Broome, G.** (2024). *Neuroinclusive communications guide for communications professionals.* Retrieved from Georgia Broome Substack

7. **National Autistic Society.** (n.d.). *Communication tips.* Retrieved from National Autistic Society

8. **The Neu Project.** (2023). *An Event Professional's Guide to Neuroinclusion.* Retrieved from *https://assets-global.website-files.com/63179c4c48d09421c000e458/64ee295b08552c47a6623c74_An%20Event%20Professional%E2%80%99s%20Guide%20to%20Neuroinclusion.pdf*