

Guide for Inclusive Language

Language matters. Language that defines and describes the experiences of historically marginalized and oppressed groups matters that much more. The words we use to label, discuss, and recognize underrepresented groups can validate, invalidate, celebrate, demean, highlight, erase, empower, and disenfranchise people. Language becomes even more significant in modern media organizations, which have the power to shape public discourse, drive progress, and exemplify thought leadership. That's why it's essential to understand language around identity, know how to use it, and know how to keep up with it as it evolves. This resource will help you better understand inclusive and sensitive language and give you the tools to understand the complexities of identity-based language in our rapidly evolving social climates.

How do I use inclusive language?

While using sensitive and inclusive language can be complex—and sometimes difficult—it's important to recognize why it's necessary. In order to create and maintain an inclusive, respectful space, we have to use language that makes people and groups feel seen, heard, and valued, especially when it involves historically marginalized and oppressed groups.

The most important thing to remember when it comes to inclusive language usage is that people matter more than words/labels, so you should take a people-first approach to it. The idea of person-first language was introduced primarily for/by the disabled and mental health communities, but its governing principle is useful for inclusive language, in general. Always weigh your attachment to or discomfort with certain terminology against the needs and feelings of the groups it represents. In nearly every case, inclusion should outweigh exclusion.

Be mindful that you will make mistakes. It's part of the process. What's important is how you respond, how you challenge and question your attitudes, and how you correct and modify your behavior. If a person or group of people tells you they find a word, expression, or action offensive, show compassion. In some cases, you may find that the offense was a misunderstanding or an

isolated instance, but in many others, there's a history and context associated with the offense that you may not know or understand. Apologize (and mean it), if need be, and commit to educating yourself on the issue.

How do I to keep up with it?

Language evolves quickly, especially in certain communities, so it's understandable why someone would be overwhelmed by the thought of keeping up with it all. When in doubt of how a person identifies and which terms are acceptable when referring to them, remember it is always ok to (politely) ask them. You can also use the guides below to better understand respectful and inclusive language around identity. Most of these resources provide guidance for how to cover various issues in news stories, but their insights and guidelines also apply to conversational/interpersonal language use.

- General Resources
 - [A Progressive's Style Guide](#)
 - [The Diversity Style Guide](#)
 - [The Spectrum of Language](#)
 - [Should I Use the Adjective "Diverse?"](#)
- Race/Ethnicity
 - [Race-Related Coverage](#)
 - [Racial Equity Tools Glossary](#)
 - [Race Reporting Guide](#)
 - [Style Guide: Race and Ethnicity](#)
- Gender/LGBTQ+
 - [General Guidelines for Reducing Bias](#)
 - [GLAAD Media Reference Guide](#)
 - [HRC's Brief Guide to Getting Bisexual Coverage Right](#)
 - [Style Guide: LGBTQ+](#)
 - [Trans Journalists Association Style Guide](#)

- Ability/Disability
 - [APA Style-Disability](#)
 - [Disability Style Guide](#)
 - [Guidelines for Writing About People with Disabilities](#)
- Mental Health
 - [BuzzFeed's Style Guidelines for Writing About Mental Health](#)
 - [Language Matters in Mental Health](#)
 - [Words Matter: Reporting on Mental Health Conditions](#)
- Socioeconomic Status
 - [Covering poverty: What to avoid and how to get it right](#)

Timely Conversations

Below are some terms/labels around which there is a lot of debate, conversation, and/or confusion. Be mindful that the guidance below is not set in stone. Language is dynamic and often context-specific, so preferred terminology may change over time or based on where/when/how you use it.

“Latinx” or “Latine?”

Both terms refer collectively to people from or with ancestral origins in Latin America and attempt to neutralize gendered constructions (e.g., Latino/a) in the Spanish language for greater inclusion of trans and nonbinary people. Use of the term “Latinx” is most common in the U.S., but it’s not widely used in Latin American countries—or even within Latin American communities in the U.S.—in part because the “x” in “Latinx” is difficult to pronounce in Spanish. It’s also viewed by many as an example of linguistic imperialism, wherein U.S. English speakers impose English language constructions (as well as American ideals) on a language they don’t organically correspond with. The less commonly used “Latine” is a more natural gender-neutral alternative, as it can be pronounced and conjugated in Spanish. Note: “Latinx/Latine” and “Hispanic” are not synonyms. “Hispanic” refers to people from Spanish-speaking countries and excludes non-Spanish-speaking Latin American countries (e.g., Haiti and Brazil).

“Native American” or “Indigenous?”

The term “Native American” refers to indigenous communities that were living in the U.S. before European contact/colonization, whereas “indigenous” refers broadly to people in any country who were living as sovereign communities prior to contact with settlers/colonists. Used within the context of the U.S., the term “indigenous” refers to Native American, Alaska Native, and First Nations people, but the term has a much broader meaning outside the U.S. Similarly, use of the terms “tribe” and “tribal” in the context of the U.S. usually connotes Native American, Alaska Native, and First Nations people, but the meanings and connotations of those terms vary widely outside the U.S.

“Black” vs. “African American?”

“Black” and “African American” are both terms that refer to people from the African diaspora, but they are not necessarily synonyms. “African American” refers specifically to African descendants of slavery whose ancestors were brought to the U.S. during the Transatlantic Slave Trade; it’s an ethnicity. The term “Black” generally refers to a race. It includes African Americans, as well as Afro-Latinx, Afro-Caribbean, and indigenous African people, regardless of their nationality.

“Black” is a more inclusive collective term than “African American,” which is often used as a microaggressive way to avoid saying “Black.” “African American” can also be a misnomer, because it is frequently used to describe all Black people in America, when there are large populations of Afro-Caribbean people, Afro-Latinx people, and African immigrants who do not identify with the term. Note: “Black” is also an ethnicity for African Americans, who were stripped of their original ethnicities during the Slave Trade, so they often use “Black” as an indication of both race and ethnicity.