



Inclusive Language Guidelines

2019 EDITION



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Words matter,

and they shape our perceptions. Words can make the difference between forging trust or creating distance. Our language must continually evolve with our understanding and acceptance of diverse groups of people.

This booklet aims to guide us, as public media professionals, in the quest to communicate accurately and sensitively in a manner that respects all human beings.

As a vital resource for news and information, as well as educational and cultural programming, public media has an obligation to uphold the highest standard for inclusive language.

The language in this guide may not apply to every individual, making it critical to take personal preference into account.



Person-First Language

Person-first language emphasizes **the individual as the most essential element**; there is more to each person than their descriptors.

Mention characteristics such as age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, racial group or ability **only when relevant**.

Age and Family Status

Families come in many forms, either by design or circumstances. As society comes to have a broader understanding of families, it is important to choose language that avoids stereotypes and pejorative words. Similarly, society has begun to develop an awareness about ageism. Ageism is stereotyping and discrimination against individuals on the basis of their age, whether old or young. Avoid mentioning age unless it is relevant to the issue at hand, and be sensitive about language concerning physical ability, health and work capability as people grow older. Furthermore, it is important to avoid implying that people within a certain age, class or family structure are all alike.

For additional resources on how to fairly and accurately report on **age** or **family status**-related issues, please see:

AARP | aarp.org

National Council for Adoption | adoptioncouncil.org

Society of Professional Journalists | spj.org

The Diversity Style Guide | diversitystyleguide.com

Instead of...	Use...
elderly, old timer, granny, of a certain age, over the hill, blue hairs, geezer	senior, older person, experienced, seasoned, mature
dotty, old coot	has dementia, person with Alzheimer's (if diagnosed), person who is aging
upstart, brat, troublemaker	teenager, young person
real mother/father/parent	birth mother/father/parent, biological parent
give/given up for adoption	placed for adoption, birth parent chose adoption
is adopted	was adopted
adoptee	person/individual who was adopted
adoptive parent	parent
grandfather clause	legacy
poor, blue-collar	lower-income
homeless	people experiencing homelessness, people without homes
spinster, old maid, maiden (as in, my maiden aunt)	person who is single, person who is unmarried
divorcée, divorcé, divorcee	person who is divorced

NOTE: the term **grandfather clause** originated as a way to defy the 15th amendment and prevent Black Americans from voting

Disability

For additional resources on how to fairly and accurately report on **disability**-related issues, please see:

National Center on Disability and Journalism | ncdj.org

Society of Professional Journalists | spj.org

The Diversity Style Guide | diversitystyleguide.com

This guide uses the term *disability*, even though the term itself is not universally accepted. Disabilities can affect people in myriad ways and may be invisible. As with communications about other characteristics of people, the best guidance is to use person-first language, and when in doubt ask individuals how they would like to be described. Choose language that emphasizes what people can do, rather than what they can't (e.g., *person who uses a wheelchair* instead of *wheelchair-bound*).

General guidelines include the following:

- Listen to the language people with disabilities use about themselves.
- Do not assume that people with disabilities are willing to disclose that information.
- Mention a disability only when relevant to the topic at hand.
- Refer to a disability only when a trustworthy diagnosis has been made.
- Avoid made-up words such as *diffability*.

Instead of...	Use...
the handicapped, the disabled, the differently-abled	people with disabilities
normal, healthy, whole people	people without disabilities, neurotypical (when referring to cognitive ability)
disabled community, disabled sport	disability community, sport for athletes with a disability
person with a birth defect	person who has a congenital disability
person afflicted with, suffers from, is stricken with, a victim of...	person who has... person who has been diagnosed with...
Downs person, mongoloid, mongol	person who has Down syndrome
the autistic	person who has (or has been diagnosed with) autism, person on the autism spectrum, on the spectrum
a quadriplegic, a paraplegic	person with quadriplegia, person with paraplegia, person diagnosed with a physical disability
a cripple	person with a physical disability, person with a mobility impairment, person who walks with crutches, person who uses a walker
a dwarf, a midget	person of short stature, little person
dumb, mute, non-verbal	person who is unable to speak, person who uses a communication device, communicates without using words

Disability (continued)

Instead of...

Use...

hearing impaired, the deaf

NOTE: "Deaf" vs. "deaf"

capital "D" typically refers to the culture (e.g., the Deaf community)

lowercase "d" generally refers to audiological status

person who is deaf

(little to no functional hearing, often communicates through sign language),

person who is hard of hearing

(mild to moderate hearing loss, may or may not use sign language)

the blind

**people who are blind,
people who are visually impaired,
people who have low vision**

attack, spell, fit

seizure

learning disabled

person with a learning disability

brain damaged

**person with a brain injury,
person who has sustained a brain injury**

crazy, insane, psycho,
mentally ill, emotionally
disturbed, demented, nuts

**person diagnosed with a mental health condition,
person with a psychiatric disability**

mentally retarded,
retarded, slow, idiot,
moron, simple

**person diagnosed with a cognitive disability
or with an intellectual/developmental disability**

special ed student,
special education student

student who receives special education services

confined to a wheelchair,
wheelchair bound

person who uses a wheelchair or a mobility chair

handicapped parking,
handicapped bathrooms,
etc.

**accessible parking,
accessible bathrooms, etc.**

special, courageous,
heroic, inspiring, brave

**! people who adapt to their disability do not
necessarily acquire these traits — consider
whether the individual or situation merits
these terms *beyond* disability**

A Note About **Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression**

The following terms are a general guide and are not all-encompassing. Sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression are complex and highly personal. As such, there are a wide variety of expressions beyond those listed, and it is important to use the correct words to describe someone. **Before using any term, make sure to refer to the definitions provided in the GLAAD Media Reference Guide available online to ensure accuracy.**

- **Sexual orientation** refers to a person's physical, emotional and/or romantic attraction to other people.
- **Gender identity** is someone's internal sense of gender, which may or may not match the sex they were assigned at birth or fit neatly into a single category.
- **Gender expression** refers to all external manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, hairstyle, behavior, voice and/or body characteristics.

! When it is necessary to refer to an individual's identity, be sure to
■ **confirm how they self-identify and follow suit.**

Sexual Orientation

For additional resources on how to fairly and accurately report on **sexual orientation**-related issues, please see:

Gender Spectrum | genderspectrum.org

GLAAD | glaad.org

The Association of LGBTQ Journalists | nlgia.org

Society of Professional Journalists | spj.org

The Diversity Style Guide | diversitystyleguide.com

Instead of...

homosexual,
gay (n.)
(as in, *He is a gay.*),
homo, sodomite

homosexuality,
lesbianism,
gay (as a pejorative)

sexual preference,
same-sex attractions,
sexual identity

gay/lesbian/bisexual
lifestyle

normal

admitted homosexual,
avowed homosexual,
openly gay

Use...

gay (adj.),
lesbian (n. or adj.),
bisexual, bi (adj. and
should not be hyphenated),
queer (adj.)

NOTE: **queer** has been reclaimed by some LGBTQ+ people to describe themselves; however, be aware that it is not a universally accepted term in the LGBTQ+ community

being gay/lesbian/bisexual/queer

**sexual orientation,
orientation**

LGBTQ+ people and their lives

**people who are not gay,
people who are not lesbian,
people who are not bisexual,
heterosexual,
heteronormative** (to describe
norms that shut out LGBTQ+ people)

**out,
out gay man,
out lesbian,
out queer person**

Gender Identity and Gender Expression

For additional resources on how to fairly and accurately report on **gender**-related issues, please see:

Gender Spectrum | genderspectrum.org

GLAAD | glaad.org

The Association of LGBTQ Journalists | nlgja.org

Society of Professional Journalists | spj.org

The Diversity Style Guide | diversitystyleguide.com

Instead of...	Use...
transgendered, a transgender (n.), transgenders, transvestite, tranny, she-male, he/she, it, shim	transgender (adj.), trans
transgenderism	being transgender
gender identity disorder	gender dysphoria
biologically male/female, genetically male/female, born a man/woman	assigned male/female at birth, designated male/female at birth
sex change, sex reassignment, sex-change operation, pre-operative, post-operative	transition, gender affirmation
hermaphrodite	intersex
normal	non-transgender people, cisgender
opposite sex	different sex
gay community	LGBTQ+ community
special rights	equal rights, equal protection
passing, stealth, deceptive, fooling, pretending, posing, trap, masquerading	! these terms should not be used because they promote the harmful idea that transgender people are being deceitful in their gender expression

NOTE: a transgender identity is **not** dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedure

Gender Identity and Gender Expression
(continued)

Non-Binary Pronouns

For people who identify as non-binary or genderqueer (someone who does not identify as either male or female), every effort should be made to refer to them using their personal pronouns (don't assume, ask!).

See below for some examples of non-gendered personal pronoun sets; if it's absolutely not possible to confirm which the individual prefers, the singular they (in italics) can be used as a default. It is never appropriate to put quotation marks around someone's name or personal pronouns.

If it is appropriate/relevant to use an honorific, **Mx.** or **Ind.** can be used as non-gendered alternatives to **Mr., Mrs.** and **Ms.**

Instead of...	Use...		
he/she	they	zie/ze	sie
him/her	them	zim	sie
his/her	their	zir	hir
his/hers	theirs	zis	hirs
himself/herself	themselves	zieself	hirsself

Zie/Ze is typically pronounced with a long "e"

Hir and its forms are usually pronounced like "here"

Gender Inclusivity

For additional resources on how to fairly and accurately report on **gender inclusivity**-related issues, please see:

Gender Spectrum | genderspectrum.org

GLAAD | glaad.org

The Association of LGBTQ Journalists | nlgia.org

Society of Professional Journalists | spj.org

The Diversity Style Guide | diversitystyleguide.com

Gender-specific language can end up excluding people or propagating stereotypes. Here are some basic tips to make your language more inclusive and respectful for everyone.

- Consider whether gender is relevant/necessary for communication — can non-gendered synonyms or alternative pronouns be used without losing meaning (e.g., *children* instead of *boys and girls*)?
- There should be consistency when referring to women and men: if one of them is addressed by name, last name, courtesy title, or profession, the other one should be as well.
- Try restructuring your sentence to omit a gendered pronoun entirely — often it can be removed without affecting clarity (e.g., *A person must live here for 20 years before he may apply for permanent residence.* vs. *A person must live here for 20 years before applying for permanent residence.*)
- Consider descriptors — while not inherently gendered, adjectives like *feisty*, *bossy*, *bubbly*, *petite* and *frumpy* are often only used to describe women, and can carry a negative or demeaning connotation. If you switch the subject’s gender and it seems strange (e.g., a shrill man), then the word is best avoided.

Instead of...	Use...
man	person, individual
mankind	people, human beings, humanity
freshman	first-year student
man-made	machine-made, synthetic, artificial
the common man	the average person, folks
chairman	chair, chairperson, coordinator, head
mailman	mail carrier, letter carrier, postal worker
policeman	police officer
steward, stewardess	flight attendant
actor, actress	actor
congressman	legislator, congressional representative
husband, wife	partner, spouse
brother, sister	sibling
he, she	they, their, one, who, we, use names/nouns
his, hers	the, a, an

Substance Use

Addiction is a disease manifested by cravings and compulsive substance use, in spite of negative consequences. Research shows that the language we use to describe this disease can either perpetuate or mitigate the stereotypes, prejudice and lack of empathy that keeps people from getting treatment they need.

For additional resources on how to fairly and accurately report on **substance-use**-related issues, please see:

Society of Professional Journalists | spj.org

American Society of Addiction Medicine | asam.org

Instead of...	Use...
addict	person with a substance use disorder, person with a serious substance use disorder
addicted to ____	has an ____ use disorder, has a serious ____ use disorder, has a substance use disorder involving ____, is struggling with ____ addiction
alcoholic	person with an alcohol use disorder, person with a substance use disorder involving alcohol, person struggling with alcohol addiction
clean	abstinent
clean screen	negative screen, substance-free, testing negative for substance use
dirty	actively using, positive for substance use
dirty screen	positive screen, testing positive for substance use
drug abuse, substance abuse, drug habit	substance use disorder, compulsive or regular substance use
drug abuser, substance abuser	person with a substance use disorder, person who uses drugs (if not qualified as a disorder), person struggling with addiction
former/reformed addict, former/reformed alcoholic	person in recovery, person in long-term recovery
opioid replacement, methadone maintenance	treatment, treatment involving medication use, medication-assisted treatment
recreational/casual/experimental users	people who use drugs for non-medical reasons, people starting to use drugs, people who are new to drug use, initiates
Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous... etc.	! When using these terms, take care to avoid divulging an individual's participation in a named 12-step program

Race, Ethnicity and Nationality

Race generally refers to physical differences that groups and cultures consider socially significant, while **ethnicity** refers to shared culture, such as language, ancestry, practices and beliefs.

Don't use geographic descriptors interchangeably with religious or other terms to describe specific groups of people. For example, *Muslim* is not synonymous with *Arab*.

With regards to **nationality**, avoid using *citizen* as a generic term for people who live in a given country.

For additional resources on how to fairly and accurately report on **Race, Ethnicity**, and **Nationality**-related issues, please see:

Asian American Journalists Association | aaja.org

National Association of Black Journalists | nabj.org

National Association of Hispanic Journalists | nahj.org

Native American Journalists Association | najanewsroom.com

Race Forward | raceforward.org

Religion Newswriters Association | religionstylebook.com

Instead of...

Use...

Indian, natives, red

Native American, American Indian (for groups)

NOTE: individuals or individual tribes should be identified by tribal affiliation

indigenous, aboriginal (for non-American), **native** (adj.) can be used to describe styles (e.g., native art)

Eskimo

Alaska Native (Eskimo refers to a specific tribe and isn't all-inclusive)

oriental, yellow, jap
paki, flip

Asian, South Asian (India, Pakistan, etc.), **East Asian** (China, Japan, etc.), **Southeast Asian** (Indonesia, Philippines, etc.), **demonym** (a word used for people or the inhabitants of a place)

- can be joined with American
(e.g., Asian American or Indian American)

exotic, hapa

Pacific Islander (Fijian, Guamanian, Hawaiian, Northern Mariana Islander, Palauan, Samoan, Tahitian and Tongan)

negro, colored,
n-----

black, African American

NOTE: this word should never be spelled out, even when quoting someone

Spanish (for people not from Spain), brown

Latino/Latina/Latinx, Hispanic, Latin American, demonym (e.g., Mexican, Chilean)

Race, Ethnicity and Nationality (continued)

Instead of...	Use...
Middle Eastern, Muslim (in reference to a geographic area)	Given the size and diversity of the Middle Eastern region, there is not an accepted encompassing racial or ethnic term. Some more accurate localized terms include: Arab (referring to an Arabic-speaking country), Persian (referring to Farsi-speakers), North African, as well as many more country and region-specific designations.
WASP, redneck	white, Caucasian, European American
nonwhite	people/person of color
mulatto	multiracial, biracial, mixed race
alien	immigrant

Further Resources

AARP | aarp.org

American Society of Addiction Medicine | asam.org

Asian American Journalists Association | aaja.org

Gender Spectrum | genderspectrum.org

GLAAD | glaad.org

National Association of Black Journalists | nabj.org

National Association of Hispanic Journalists | nahj.org

National Center on Disability and Journalism | ncdj.org

National Council for Adoption | adoptioncouncil.org

Native American Journalists Association | najanewsroom.com

The Association of LGBTQ Journalists | nlgja.org

Race Forward | raceforward.org

Religion Newswriters Association | religionstylebook.com

Society of Professional Journalists | sjp.org

The Diversity Style Guide | diversitystyleguide.com



wgbh.org/inclusivelanguage