

Inclusive Terminology Glossary

The words people use to describe themselves and others are very important. The right terms can affirm identities and challenge discriminatory attitudes. The wrong ones can disempower, demean and reinforce exclusion.

The aim of these guidelines is to increase awareness of discriminatory language in everyday use and to offer a variety of examples and suggested alternatives. The glossary of terms below is a point of reference but is not meant to be exhaustive or definitive. Language evolves and appropriate terminology changes as Canadian culture and society shifts. As much as using the 'right' terms or words is something we all work towards, it is equally important to foster a climate of open, effective communication and demonstrate a willingness to learn. If you have terms to add, please contact Sarah Gauen at gauens@algonquincollege.com

Gender₁

Non-sexist or gender inclusive language ensures that bias is not expressed in favour of one sex over another. **Generics and personal pronouns:** A common form of sexism in the English language is the use of *man* and *he/him/his* as generic terms, where the reference is to both women and men. Using *man* generically can be confusing and discriminatory. As an alternative, try *humans*, *woman and man*, *people* and *humanity*. Further examples include:

- manned instead use staffed
- tradesman instead use tradesperson
- man-made instead use handcrafted, artificial

Instead of *he/him/his*, it is acceptable to use the plural *they/them/their*, add the female equivalent or omit the pronouns:

- when a teacher commences he must ... when teachers commence they must... when a teacher commences she/he must ...
- each student must bring with *him* students must bring with *them* ...

It is no longer acceptable to add a disclaimer stating that all masculine nouns and pronouns are to be taken as referring to both females and males.

Sex role stereotyping: Occupational terms or job titles that relate to only one sex are inaccurate and discriminatory, and should be replaced with neutral, generic terms such as:

- businessman/woman instead use business executive
- chairman instead use chair/convenor

Avoid irrelevant, gratuitous gender descriptions that imply deviation from the norm, such as *a woman doctor* or *a male nurse*.

Word order and word choice: As men usually precede women in expressions such as men and women and his and hers, try reversing the order occasionally. When describing the same characteristic in women and men, use similar terms.

Titles and forms of address: As a general rule use a first name, a neutral title or nothing. For women, the use of *Miss* and *Mrs* identifies marital status as well as title, whereas *Mr* refers only to title. The use of *Ms* is recommended for all women where the parallel *Mr* is applicable, and when a woman's preferred title is unknown. As with men, a woman's preferred title should be respected when known. When listing names, use alphabetical order except where order by seniority is more important. If addressing correspondents whose name and/or gender are unknown, do not assume they are male.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity¹

Any discussion of issues pertaining to sexual orientation should be accurate and informed. Lesbians and gay men should be described in terms that do not trivialise or demean them, do not encourage discrimination or distorted images of their lives. Avoid negative stereotyping of supposed characteristics of lesbians and gay men, use the term partner instead of spouse, and do not assume that everyone belongs to a traditional family.

We have identified some introductory terms to be aware of. For a full detailed glossary of the terms related to gender, gender identity and sex please visit the [Ontario Human Right Commission](#).

Sexual Orientation: In talking about sexual orientation, we're getting into an individual's emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. People who are straight experience these feelings primarily for people of the opposite sex. People who are gay and lesbian experience these feelings primarily for people of the same sex. People who are bisexual experience feelings for people of both sexes. And people who are asexual experience no or very little attraction to either sex.

Gender Identity: the term that is used to describe a person's deeply held personal, internal sense of being male, female, some of both, or maybe even neither. Here's the important part: A person's gender identity may not always correspond to their assigned biological sex.

Cisgender: Cisgender people identify with (or are on the same side of) the gender assigned to them at birth. So when we mention a cisgender man, the focus is on an individual who was assigned male at birth, and whose internal sense of his gender has been the same as that identification: male. Similarly, a cisgender woman is an individual who was assigned female at birth, and also identifies as female. Use this term instead of "non-transgender", "I'm not transgender, not that there's anything wrong with that."

Transgender: is a term often used to describe an individual whose gender identity does not necessarily match the sex assigned to them at birth. So we have transgender women (individuals who were assigned male at birth but whose gender identity is female) and we have transgender men (individuals who were assigned female at birth, but whose internal sense of their gender identity is male). But we did mention that this is the basic explanation. As in any group, there is tremendous diversity within the transgender (which can sometimes be referred to as "trans") community.

Terms to Avoid

Offensive: "homosexual" (n. or adj.)

Preferred: "gay" (adj.); "gay man" or "lesbian" (n.); "gay person/people": Use gay or lesbian to describe people attracted to members of the same sex. Because of the clinical history of the word "homosexual," it is aggressively used by anti-gay extremists to suggest that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically/ emotionally disordered. Avoid using "homosexual" except in direct quotes and as a style variation simply to avoid repeated use of the word "gay."

Offensive: "homosexual relations/relationship," "homosexual couple," "homosexual sex," etc.

Preferred: "relationship," "couple" (or, if necessary, "gay couple"), "sex," etc. Identifying a same-sex

¹ Adapted from PFLAG 'Guide to Being an Ally' <https://www.pflag.org/sites/default/files/guide%20to%20being%20a%20trans%20ally.pdf> and GLAAD 'Terms to Avoid' <https://www.glaad.org/reference/offensive>

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couple as "a homosexual couple," characterizing their relationship as "a homosexual relationship," or identifying their intimacy as "homosexual sex" is extremely offensive and should be avoided. These constructions are frequently used by anti-gay extremists to denigrate gay people, couples and relationships. As a rule, try to avoid labeling an activity, emotion or relationship gay, lesbian, or bisexual unless you would call the same activity, emotion or relationship "straight" if engaged in by someone of another orientation.

Offensive: "sexual preference"

Preferred: "sexual orientation" or "orientation" The term "sexual preference" is typically used to suggest that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a choice and therefore can and should be "cured." *Sexual orientation* is the accurate description of an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex and is inclusive of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, as well as straight men and women.

Ability²

A disability is a functional limitation or restriction of an individual's ability to perform an activity. The word "disabled" is an adjective, not a noun. People are not conditions. It is therefore preferable not to use the term "the disabled"; but rather "persons with disabilities". The following are suggested guidelines on appropriate terminology to be used when speaking or referring to persons with disabilities.

- Focus on the issue rather than the disability. If the disability is not relevant to what you are speaking about, it is not necessary to mention it.
- Try to avoid categorizing persons with disabilities as either super-achievers or tragic figures.
- Choose words that are non-judgemental, non-emotional and are accurate descriptions.
- Avoid using "brave," "courageous," "inspirational" or other similar words that are routinely used to describe a person with a disability. Try to focus as much on abilities as disabilities.
- Remember that the majority of persons with disabilities have similar aspirations to the rest of the population and that words and images should reflect their inclusion in society, except where social isolation is the focal point.
- Similarly, references which cause discomfort, guilt, pity or insult, should be avoided. Words like "suffers from," "stricken with," "afflicted by," "patient," "disease" or "sick" suggest constant pain and a sense of hopelessness. While this may be the case for some individuals, a disability is a condition that does not necessarily cause pain or require medical attention.
- Avoid the use of words such as "burden," "incompetent," or "defective," which suggest that persons with disabilities are inferior and should be excluded from activities generally available in the community.
- Persons with disabilities are comfortable with the terminology used to describe daily living activities. Persons who use wheelchairs go for "walks," people with visual impairments "see" what you mean, etc. A disability may just mean that some things are done in a different manner; however, that does not mean the words used to describe the activity must be different.

Instead of...	Please use...
Birth defect, congenital defect, deformity	Person born with a disability, person who has a congenital disability
Blind (the), visually impaired (the)	Person who is blind, person with a visual impairment
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound	Person who uses a wheelchair, wheelchair user
Cripple, crippled, lame	Person with a disability, person with a mobility impairment, person who has a spinal cord injury, arthritis, etc.
Hard of hearing (the), hearing impaired	Person who is hard of hearing Note: These individuals are not deaf and may

² Adapted from A Way With Words and Images: Suggestions for the Portrayal of Persons with Disabilities from Social Development Canada. 2002. Available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/words-images.html>

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Instead of...	Please use...
	compensate for a hearing loss with an amplification device or system.
Deaf-mute, deaf and dumb	Person who is deaf Note: Culturally-linguistically deaf people (that is, sign language users) are properly identified as "the Deaf" (upper-case "D"). People who do not use sign language are properly referred to as "the deaf" (lower-case "d") or "persons who are deaf."
Epileptic (the)	Person who has epilepsy
Fit, attack, spell	Seizure
Handicapped (the)	Person with a disability
Handicapped parking, bathrooms	Accessible parking, accessible bathrooms
Inarticulate, incoherent	Person who has a speech disorder, person who has a speech disability
Insane (unsound mind), lunatic, maniac, mental patient, mentally diseased, mentally ill, neurotic, psychotic	Person with a mental health disability Note: The term "insane" (unsound mind) should only be used in a strictly legal sense. The expression "person with a mental health disability" is broad. If relevant to the story, you can specify the type of disability, for example, "person who has depression" or "person who has schizophrenia."
Invalid	Person with a disability
Learning disabled, learning disordered, dyslexic (the)	Person with a learning disability
Mentally retarded, defective, feeble minded, idiot, imbecile, moron, retarded, simple, mongoloid	Person with an intellectual disability Note: If relevant to the story, specify the type of disability.
Normal	Person without a disability
Person who has trouble...	Person who needs...
Physically challenged, physically handicapped, physically impaired	Person with a disability
Spastic	Person who has spasms
Suffers from, stricken with, afflicted by	Person with a disability Note: People with disabilities do not necessarily suffer.
Victim of cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.	Person who has cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc. Person with a mobility impairment, person with a disability

Ethnicity³

Non-discriminatory language in relation to race and ethnicity aims to recognise and present the diversity of the population in positive ways.

- The term *Canadian* refers to all Canadian citizens regardless of ethnic background, and some Canadians prefer not to be identified by their ethnic background.
- Avoid generalizations and stereotyping based in race or ethnicity.
- Avoid identifying people by race, colour, or national origin, unless it is appropriate for context, and do not assume that a person's appearance defines their nationality or cultural background.
- Capitalize the proper names of nationalities, peoples, races and tribes: Indigenous Peoples, Métis, Inuit, Arab, French-Canadian, Jewish, Latin, Asian.
- Avoid singling out specific cultures or drawing undue attention to ethnic or racial background. When references are relevant and necessary, find the appropriate, accepted terminology and use the language preferred by the individual or group concerned.
- Black is acceptable in all references to people of African descent. In the United States, African-American is used; in Canada, African-Canadian is sometimes used.
- Note that black and white do not name races and are lowercase.
- Be aware that some references can, often unintentionally, have negative racial connotations. Avoid vocabulary that carries hierarchical valuation or portrays groups as inferior, criminal, or less valued than others.
- The term "minority" may imply inferior social position and is often dependent on geographic location. Avoid generalizations and assumptions. If the term is needed, "minority ethnic group" is preferred over "minority group."
- Visible minority is a term commonly used to refer to a person or group who are visibly not the majority group in a population or geographic area. It typically describes individuals/groups who are not white. However, terms such as "visible minority" and "person of colour" are increasing becoming more outdated and inaccurate. If relevant, use the following terms to describe persons or groups: "racialized person," "member of a racialized group," or "racialized group."
- The word "race" is used with quotation marks by some authors as an acknowledgement that it is a controversial and contested term. This is a controversial term, which comes from historical attempts to categorise people according to their skin colour and physical characteristics. The word has no scientific basis for divisions into biologically determined groups. Individuals, not "races", are the main sources of human variation. It is, however, in everyday use and is enshrined in legislation in the Race Relations Acts.

³ <http://queensu.ca/styleguide/inclusivelanguage>

Indigenous Peoples⁴

First Nations: This term began to be used in the 1970's as a substitute for 'Indians', a term that has fallen into disfavour with 'Indigenous people'. The term does not mean the same as 'Indigenous people' or 'First Peoples', as it does not include Inuit and Métis. There is no legal definition for First Nation and it is acceptable as both a noun and a modifier.

Indian: The term 'Indian' is generally inappropriate, except where required for clarity in discussing legal or constitutional issues. (For example, entitlements to federal programs or benefits are limited to 'status' or 'registered' Indians, as defined in the Indian Act. Not all First Nations people are 'status Indians'.)

Indigenous In 2016, the government of Canada adopted the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which recognizes their internationally legal right to offer or withhold consent to development. This adoption signalled a change in terminology used by the government and many organizations followed suit.

- Avoid using the possessive phrase "Canada's Indigenous Peoples (or First Nations/Inuit/Métis)" as it implies ownership of Indigenous Peoples. Instead use "Indigenous Peoples in Canada".
- The distinction between Indigenous **people** and Indigenous **Peoples** is important. 'Indigenous people' is used in two ways: as a plural term for two or more people of Indigenous ancestry, and a collective term for all 'Indigenous Peoples' refers to the many distinct groups of original people, each with its own culture, language and traditions, many of which live in particular geographic areas.

Inuit: Inuit are the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic. In Inuktitut, the language of 'the Inuit', Inuit means 'the people', so it is not necessary to use either of these words with the term 'people' — not the Inuit or 'Inuit people'. The singular form is 'Inuk' (for example, an Inuk woman).

Métis: Métis are Aboriginal descendants of the Métis community of Western Canada or people of Aboriginal ancestry who identify themselves as Métis. It is appropriate to include the acute accent (é) when writing Métis in English, but many Métis organizations do not use the accent, so you should check their preferred spelling when addressing material to them.

⁴ Adapted from: <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100013785/1304467449155>