Inclusive Language Guide

University Marketing
and Communications

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Inclusive
Language Guide

Words matter. Your choice of words has the power to uplift and inform or stigmatize and misinform. Diversity and inclusion are cornerstone values at the University of Houston. Using language that addresses our diverse world with accuracy, authority and dignity is imperative to writing for UH.

What is Inclusive Language

Inclusive language is defined as language that avoids the use of certain expressions or words that might be considered to exclude particular groups of people. It gives respect to groups who are vulnerable to marginalization.

Using the Guide

This guide provides a roadmap for using inclusive language — externally and internally. The inclusive language guide provides general guidance on writing with a diverse perspective to avoid offense, be inclusive and communicate effectively. It can be used when writing for websites, marketing materials, videos, press releases, campus communications and more. It is categorized by topic for ease of use.

Note: It is not comprehensive, a mandate or intended to replace terminologies or specific language used to describe programs or initiatives in departments, divisions, colleges or schools.

Guidelines
for Race/Ethnicity

Recommendations

• According to the AP Stylebook, which the University follows in most cases, reporting and writing about issues involving race calls for thoughtful consideration, precise language, and discussions with others of diverse backgrounds, whenever possible, about how to frame coverage or what language is most appropriate, accurate and fair.

• Only use race or ethnicity information when it is pertinent to your communications. When writing about a program, service or research that focuses on a specific race or ethnicity, it is appropriate to include racial or ethnic information relevant to the subject matter. In a communication about a topic that does not focus on race or ethnicity it is inappropriate to include racial or ethnic information, unless there is a first-ever accomplishment (i.e., *UH alumni Dr. Bernard Harris is the first African American astronaut to complete a spacewalk*).

Appropriate: In a communication about UH College of Medicine's initiative to bring more underrepresented people of color into the medical field it would be appropriate to provide statistics on the number of Black and Latino physicians in the United States and to include the racial breakdown of the college's student body.

Inappropriate: In a story about a student receiving an honor it would be inappropriate to mention the person's race or ethnicity, unless it is a first-ever accomplishment. "Johnny Nguyen, an Asian American music major has been named to the Dean's List."

• When it's appropriate to write about a person's or a group's race or ethnicity, ask the subjects of the communications what terminology they prefer and take it into consideration.

Terms to Avoid/Use
for Race/Ethnicity

Terms to Avoid	Terms to Use
• **Any kind of racial or ethnic slur** • **Black, Indigenous and people of color or its acronym BIPOC.** Some see the term as more inclusive by distinguishing the experiences of Black and Indigenous people, but others see it as less inclusive by diminishing the experiences of other people of color. • **Caucasian, Arabs, Orientals** • **Foreigners** • **Minority** • **Mixed race or mulatto** • **The name of a continent instead of the person's country of origin.** For example, instead of "Asian" use specificity such as "Korean," "Asian American" or "Chinese American." Instead of "African" use specificity such as "Nigerian" or "Somali American." Exception: When speaking of a group of people from the same race and/or ethnicity in a broad perspective using the continent as an adjective is acceptable. Example: Research shows Asian Americans have experienced an increase in violence since the pandemic.	• **Black** (capitalized). Do not use as a singular noun and do not use Blacks for plurals. Use Black people, Black teachers, Black students, etc. • **African American** (no hyphen) can be used when referring to Black Americans of African descent and is sometimes interchangeable with Black. However, some Black people may not identify as African American. For example, Black people from Caribbean or African countries may prefer Black. • **Arab American** (no hyphen) can be used for an American of Arab descent. When possible, refer to a person's country of origin or preference. For example, Lebanese American, Syrian American or Egyptian American. • **white** (lowercased). Do not use as a singular noun and do not use whites for plurals. Use white people, white teachers, white students, etc. • **Native American, Indigenous American, American Indian or Indigenous people** can be used interchangeably for the native inhabitants of America. When possible and available use the name of the person's tribe or preference. • **Hispanic** is a person whose ethnic origin is a Spanish-speaking country or land. • **Latino** is a person whose ethnic origin is Latin American ancestry including non-Spanish-speaking countries or lands. Use Latinos for a group. **Latina** is used for females, Latinas for plural. **Latinx** is a recently coined gender-neutral word, increasingly used instead of Latino and/or Latina. It should only be used for quotations, names of organizations or descriptions of individuals who request it and should be accompanied by a short explanation. Example: Engineering student Juan Ortiz prefers the gender-neutral term Latinx. • **Asian American** (no hyphen) can be used for an American of Asian descent. Use the person's country of origin or preference.

Terms to **Avoid**/**Use**
for Race/Ethnicity

Terms to **Use**

• **Pacific Islander** is used to describe the Indigenous people of the Pacific Islands, including but not limited to Hawaii, Guam and Samoa. Use the person's specific community whenever possible. Should be used for people who are ethnically Pacific Islander, not for those who simply live in Pacific Islands.

• **Communities of color**
Acceptable when necessary in broad references to multiple races other than white. Communities of color is a very broad term, use specificity of race or descriptors when possible and applicable. Example: Underserved communities of color are a priority for our health care services. Graduation rates have increased in Black and Hispanic communities.

• **People or person of color**
Acceptable when necessary in broad references to multiple races other than white. Use specificity when possible and applicable. See example for communities of color.

• **Biracial or multiracial**. Biracial refers to people of two races; multiracial refers to people of two or more racial backgrounds. These terms are best used for describing large groups of people than individuals. For example, UH conducted a study of biracial youths' political views. When describing a biracial or multiracial individual use specificity by detailing the person's racial background. For example, With an Indian father and white mother, Koshy calls herself "a little brown girl," …

For information on racial injustice and racism issues, please refer to the AP Stylebook race-related coverage guidance.

Guidelines
for Age

Recommendations

• When including age information about an individual carefully consider whether it is necessary to your communications.

• When writing about a program, service or research that focuses on age it is appropriate to include age-related information relevant to the subject matter. In a communication about a topic that does not focus on age it is inappropriate to include age-related information, unless there is a first-ever accomplishment (i.e., UH Cullen College of Engineering student Timothy White is the youngest student ever to graduate from UH).

Appropriate: In a communication about a study on older adults it would be appropriate to provide age-related information.

Inappropriate: In a story about a staff member being promoted it would be inappropriate to mention the person's age. "Jorge Rodriquez, an older adult, is a professor emeritus in the College of Pharmacy."

• When writing about a person or a group's age, ask the subject of the communications what terminology they prefer.

Terms to **Avoid**/**Use**
for Age

Terms to **Avoid**	Terms to **Use**
• **Old** • **Senior** • **Elderly** • **Senior citizen**	• **Older adult(s) or older person/people** These terms are best used in general phrases about a group or groups and not for individuals. For example, concern for older Houstonians; a program for older adults. Aim for specificity when possible. For example, a new study on people 65 and older; an exercise program for women over 70. • **People over X age**

For additional guidance on communications about older adults, please refer to the AP Stylebook's <u>older adult(s), older person/people</u> *guidance and/or the Journal of American Geriatrics "When It Comes to Older Adults, Language Matters"* <u>publication</u>.

Guidelines
for People-first and Identity-first language

People-first language (also known as person-first language) is a key guiding principle that places the person first in sentence structure, ahead of the group's or individual's condition. It avoids defining a person or group in terms of their condition. Describing a group or person by their condition can place the focus on it instead of their personhood, which can lead to stigmatization and marginalization. People-first language recognizes an individual's or group's humanity. It is widely used with health conditions but is a good practice for other descriptors.

Examples of people-first language.

- "People living with HIV" not "HIV infected people"
- "People with disabilities" not "disabled people"
- "People who have had COVID" not "COVID infected people"
- "People experiencing homelessness" not "homeless people"

Note: Exclusive use of people-first language in your communications can lead to awkward sentence structure. However, use its goal to place people's humanity at the forefront and their condition secondary as the guiding principle in your communications.

Identity-first language conversely places the condition before the person and is favored by some groups. Generally, the deaf and hard of hearing community and people with autism prefer identity-first language, such as "deaf and hard of hearing people," "autistic people," or "autistic child." Although, some with autism may prefer person-first language. Ask the subjects of the communications what terminology they prefer.

- Additional information on people-first and identity-first language can be found in the Association of Health Care Journalists "Identity-first vs. person-first language is an important distinction" article.

Guidelines
for Socioeconomics

Recommendations

• Socioeconomics includes income, educational attainment, housing, occupations and subjective perceptions of social class and status. Language used to describe a person's or group's socioeconomic factors should be used carefully as it can marginalize or stigmatize the subject.

• Only use socioeconomic factors if it is pertinent to your subject. When writing about a program, service or research that focuses on socioeconomics it is appropriate to include social or economic information relevant to the subject matter. In a communication about a topic that does not focus on socioeconomics it is inappropriate to include those details about the person(s) featured, unless there is a novel and direct tie-in to the topic of focus *(i.e., Professor John Smith is studying the obstacles first-generation college students face, a topic he understands well as a former first-generation student).* These mentions should be carefully considered and upon approval of the subject.

Appropriate: In a communication about College of Nursing's clinic serving people experiencing homelessness it would be appropriate to provide data on people without homes in the region and their health challenges.

Inappropriate: In a story about a professor receiving an honor it would be inappropriate to mention the faculty's socioeconomics unless it has a direct connection to the topic of focus. *(i.e., Professor Keisha Scott, the multi-millionaire owner of ABC MedTech, has been named a National Academy of Sciences member).*

• When writing about people with low incomes avoid language that portrays them as victims, helpless or in despair. Conversely, when writing about people with high incomes avoid using language that portrays them as victors, higher class or free of problems or challenges.

Terms to Avoid/Use
for Socioeconomics

Terms to Avoid	Terms to Use
• Poor • Less fortunate • Vulnerable • Poverty-stricken • Working poor	• **People with low or lower incomes** • **People with income at or below the poverty line** When possible, include specific details about income levels. For example, people who make $40,000 or less a year.
• Rich • Wealthy	• **Higher income** • **People with higher income**
• Third-world country	• **Developing nation/country** • **Underdeveloped nation/country** • **Less developed nation/country** • **Nations/countries with fewer economic resources**
• Disadvantaged	• **People/communities with fewer resources** • **People/communities with limited resources** • **Under-resourced** Be specific about the lack of resources. Example: Under-resourced communities that lack public transportation, clean water, healthy food health care providers. • **Underserved** *Note:* underserved can imply that people or communities are waiting to be served. Oftentimes people or communities' challenges or disparities are due to an overall lack of resources, which can include services, therefore; under-resourced may be more appropriate. Only use when speaking of a lack of services such as health care, banks, tutoring services, etc., and when possible, be specific about the lack of services. • **Inequities** When communicating about issues such as disparities and poverty explain the underlying inequities (lack of resources, quality schools, etc.) which cause the issues.

Terms to **Avoid**/**Use**
for Socioeconomics

Terms to **Avoid**	Terms to **Use**
• Homeless • Homeless people	• People experiencing homelessness • People without homes
• Uneducated • Undereducated	• **Be specific when speaking about someone's education level.** Example: People with a high school education. Young adults with a college degree.

For additional guidance on communications about socioeconomic status, please refer to the American Psychological Association Style (APA Style) Socioeconomic Status guidelines.

Guidelines
for Disabilities

Recommendations

• Only include a person's disability information if it is pertinent to your subject. When writing about a program, service or research that focuses on disabilities it is appropriate to include disability information relevant to the subject matter. In a communication about a topic that does not focus on disabilities it is inappropriate to include those details about the person(s) featured, unless there is a novel, connection to the topic of focus *(i.e., Professor Roma Khan has received a $2 million grant to study ADHD interventions in children. As a person with ADHD, Khan finds the topic near and dear to her heart).*

Appropriate: In a communication about UH Adaptive Athletics, a program promoting athletic programs for students with disabilities, it would be appropriate to discuss its participants' disabilities.

Inappropriate: In a story about a staff member with a disability receiving a promotion it would be inappropriate to mention his or her disability, unless there is a novel, connection to the story. *(i.e., Executive Director of Construction Kareem Jones, who uses a wheelchair, has been promoted to associate vice president of Construction).*

• Use person-first language when writing about people with disabilities. An exception to this is the deaf and hard of hearing community and the autistic community, which tend to prefer identity-first language. See person-first language section for greater details.

• When writing about a person's or a group's disability, ask the subjects of the communications what terminology they prefer.

Terms to **Avoid**/**Use**
for Disabilities

Terms to **Avoid**	Terms to **Use**
• **Special needs, special education** When possible, avoid these terms. While they remain in wide use in education and law, many view them as euphemistic and offensive. Instead, aim to be specific about the needs or services in question.	• **Students who receive special education services** • **Children with disabilities** • **A child with [medical diagnosis]**
• **Disabled** • **Handicapped** • **Afflicted with, stricken with, suffers from, victim of**	• **Person with a disability.** Be specific about the condition or diagnosis. "People living with HIV," "someone who has ADHD," or "being treated for multiple sclerosis."
• **Wheelchair-bound** • **Able-bodied** • **Normal or healthy when describing someone who doesn't have a disability**	• **Person who uses a wheelchair** • **Person who does not have a disability**
• **Hearing impaired**	• **deaf or hard of hearing**
	• **Blind** only when the person has complete loss of sight and "legally blind" when the person has almost complete loss of sight. It is best to ask the person which term they prefer and take that into consideration. Depending on the person's condition, other terms also may be acceptable including: • **Limited vision:** Acceptable when a person is not legally or completely blind • **Low vision:** Acceptable when a person is not legally or completely blind • **Partially sighted:** Used most often in British publications but acceptable if a person or individual uses it for themselves. • **Not legally or completely blind** • **Visually impaired:** Similar to the term "hearing impaired," some may object to it because it describes the condition in terms of a deficiency.

For additional guidance on communications about disabilities, please refer to the National Center on Disability for Journalism's Disability Language Style Guide or the Office of Disability Rights' People First Language guide.

Guidelines
for Gender and Sexuality

Recommendations

• Only include a person's gender or sexual orientation when it's pertinent to the subject matter.

• When writing about a program, service or research that focuses on gender and/or sexuality it is appropriate to include that information as it is relevant to the subject matter. In a communication about a topic that does not focus on gender and/or sexuality it is inappropriate to include those details about the person(s) featured, unless there is a novel connection to the topic of focus or a first-ever gender accomplishment (i.e., Professor Sara Wu is the first female to be named an Honorary League Fellow).

Appropriate: In a communication about a UH department's study on increasing workers in the STEM field, it would be appropriate to note the lack of women in the field and applicable statistics.

Inappropriate: In a story about a researcher who is LGBTQ receiving a grant it would be inappropriate to mention sexual identity (i.e., Jessie Davis, a researcher who is LGBTQ, has received a $2.5 million grant from NIH).

• In general, use gender-neutral language, such as police officer instead of policeman or chair instead of chairman, to avoid bias and foster inclusivity. Avoid using the generic he/his as generic pronouns for all people.

Pronouns:
Growing numbers of people, including some transgender, nonbinary, agender or gender-fluid people, use they/them/their as a gender-neutral singular personal pronoun.

They as a singular pronoun may be confusing to some readers. At the same time, efforts to write without pronouns to avoid confusion may make people feel censored or invisible. Try to honor both your readers and your story subjects. As in all writing, clarity is paramount.

Often a sentence can be sensitively and smoothly written with no pronoun. For example: Hendricks said the new job is a thrill (instead of *Hendricks said Hendricks is thrilled about the new job or Hendricks said they are thrilled about the new job*).

Guidelines
for Gender and Sexuality

When using *they/them/their* as a singular pronoun, explain if it isn't clear in context: *Professor Morales, who uses the pronoun they and is the principal investigator of the study, said they first became interested in the subject matter when they were a child.* Be sure that the phrasing does not imply more than one person. Rephrase if needed to avoid confusion about the antecedent.

Don't refer to *preferred* or *chosen* pronouns. *Instead, the pronouns they use, whose pronouns are, who uses the pronouns,* etc.

Don't make assumptions about a person's gender identity based on their pronouns, or vice versa. Don't assume a person's pronouns based on their first name.

When necessary, use they rather than he/she or he or she for an unspecified or unknown gender (a person, the victim, the winner) or indefinite pronoun (anyone, everyone, someone). But rewording to avoid a pronoun is preferable. For example: The foundation gave grants to anyone who lost a job this year (instead of anyone who lost their job).

A singular they may also be used when an anonymous source's gender must be shielded: The person feared for their own safety and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Source: AP Stylebook: Pronouns

Terms to **Avoid**/**Use**
for Gender and Sexuality

Terms to **Avoid**	Terms to **Use**
• Mankind	• Humanity/people/individuals
• Manpower	• Workforce/personnel
• Sexual preference When referencing a member of the LGBTQ community	• Sexual orientation
• Transsexual/Transvestite/Transgendered	• Transgender people/Transgender woman or man/ Trans man/ Trans woman
• Homosexual	• LGBTQ or LGBT • Gay, lesbian

For additional information on gender-neutral language refer to the AP Stylebook's gender-neutral guidance.