Inclusive Language Tip Sheet

Things to Keep in Mind

Inclusive language is constantly evolving, it's important for us to as stay as current and knowledgeable as possible.

The suggestions in this resource are meant to offer some perspective and consideration about the language we use in professional and personal settings.

Be guided by the preferences of the individuals you are referring to. Confirm spelling and pronunciations of any names or words you may be unsure of.

Indigenous Peoples

- Use "Indigenous Peoples" [uppercase] and avoid using "Aboriginal" or "Native."
- Avoid the common possessive construction "Canada's Indigenous Peoples." To many, it evokes a sense of paternalism and colonialism. Use "Indigenous Peoples in Canada" instead.
- Indigenous is the umbrella term
- Indigenous Peoples in Canada include First Nations, Métis and Inuit.
- If possible, try to be as specific as possible. Ask the individual or group how they identify themselves.
- Use "First Nation" or "community" instead of "reserve," unless the story is specifically about the tract of land allocated to a First Nation.
- Do not use "reservation" or "tribal affiliation," which are Americanisms

McMaster's land acknowledgement:

- McMaster University sits on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations and within the lands protected by the Dish With One Spoon wampum agreement.

Disability-Inclusive Language

- Use words that are factual, inclusive, and non-emotional.
- For example: "She uses a wheelchair" rather than "she is confined to a wheelchair."
- Avoid categorizing persons with disabilities as either super-achievers or tragic figures; avoid language such as "suffering with," "afflicted by," etc.
- Avoid cliches that assume everyone is nondisabled
- For example: "kick-start" or "put your best foot forward"
- Avoid using "see", "look", or "hear"
- Use "refer to", "check" or "go-to" instead
- If the disability is not relevant to the context, it is not necessary to write about it.

	Person-First: The Social Model	Identity-First: The Minority Model
Intent	-Present disability as a neutral characteristic -Disability cast as a social construction -Not equating people with impairment	-Portrays disability as neutral or even positive – human attribute, not a medical problem needing a cure -Disability activist counterresponse to historical oppression of disabled people
Example	-Person with a disability -Person with autism	-Disabled person -Autistic
Considerations	-Prevents objectification of person or use of monolithic terms -Counteracts use of highly problematic terms (e.g., the mentally retarded) -It is possibly a well-intentioned correction may be overcorrected in some ways	-Disability represents difference, not deviance – focus on disability pride

Resource: Dunn and Andrews 2015

- Should we use person-first or identity-first language?
    - There is no simple answer, always consider how the person or community chooses to be referred – what do they prefer.
    - Where scientific and professional communication is concerned if you are unsure of what that community or person prefer there tends to be a reliance on person-first language à also encouraged in the McMaster Writing Guidelines.
    - Dunn and Andrews 2015 recommend using identity-first language alongside person-first constructions to address the concerns of disability activists.
    - Flexibility is an appropriate and respectful response.

Age-Related Language
- Use "older" rather than "elderly,"
- Older adults, the older demographic, an older person.
- Give a person's age (e.g., 8, 38, 88) rather than using imprecise and potentially derogatory terms such as youngster, middle-aged, retiree, senior citizen, elderly.
- In general, avoid labelling people as young or old, unless directly relevant to your story.

- Note: Postsecondary students are not necessarily "young."

Gender-Neutral Language

- Use academic and professional titles, but avoid using Mr., Ms, Miss, Mx, Mrs.
- Mx is gaining traction for members of the community who wish to disrupt the gender binary.
- Is the individual's marital or family status — e.g., single, married, divorced, grandmother — relevant or important?
- Would this information be used if the subject were a cisgender man?
- Use gender-neutral terms to describe occupations:
  - Examples: Police officer, firefighter, flight attendant, mail carrier
- Pronouns: Where possible, reword your sentence to avoid the "he-she/him-her" gender binary:
  - NO: Staff members will have $50 added to his or her pay.
  - YES: Staff members will receive a $50 raise.
- "They/them/their" are increasingly acceptable alternatives to single pronouns. (This also recognizes there are those who do not identify as either male or female.)
- It is best practice to introduce your own pronouns and then ask for clarification from the person you are interviewing, whether you perceive them to be transgender or cisgender.

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

- Language about gender identity and other social identities continues to evolve. When writing about a person or group of people, remain sensitive to and respectful of their self-identification.
- For further clarification on terminology, refer to page 38 and 39 of the <u>McMaster Writing Guidelines</u>.
- A person's gender identity and/or sexual orientation should not be mentioned unless relevant to the story. (If so, use the phrase "sexual orientation," not "sexual preference.")

Members of Racialized Communities

The Ontario Human Rights Commission uses "members of racialized communities", which encompasses members of the Black community, South Asian communities, individuals who identify as bi-racial, and may include faith-based communities that are frequently racialized such as Muslim, Orthodox Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, etc.

- The current best practice is "racialized person" or "racialized group" instead of the more outdated and inaccurate terms of "racial minority," "visible minority," "person of colour," etc.
- Note that racial categories are socially constructed and complex; individuals and groups are entitled to self-identify.
- "People of Colour" is a general umbrella term that refers to anyone who isn't white
  - The term is so broad, it tends to lose some of its power, particularly when used to discuss the specific, separate struggles faced by people of colour with different ethnic backgrounds
- More recently, "BIPOC," which stands for "Black, Indigenous, and People of Color," is being used more frequently.

- o "BIPOC" emphasizes, more specifically than the term "People of Color," as People of Color face varying types of discrimination and prejudice.
  - o Even this term fails to articulate that racialized people experience race and racism differently by finding a way to lump these groups together.
- Terms like "BIPOC" and "POC" can group distinct identities together unnecessarily sometimes and in doing so, diminish individual experiences and cultural identities. When ethnicity is relevant to the conversation, use the most specific language.

Something to Think About: Use of the Term 'Vulnerable'

- Terms like 'vulnerable groups' are often vaguely defined or left undefined leaving readers to fill in the blanks on who's vulnerable or what makes them vulnerable.
  - o Readers may turn to false and damaging narratives.
  - o Vagueness can serve the political function of obscuring power relationships and limiting discussion of transformational change.
- When groups are depicted as inherently vulnerable you may risk implying that the population is vulnerable outside of other realities such as colonization, racism, misogyny, and economic exploitation.
  - o We're not saying don't use the term 'vulnerable' altogether, just make sure you clearly identify the sources of vulnerability when you do mention it.
- This is also applied to similar terms such as 'marginalized', 'disadvantaged' or 'at risk.'
  - o Our work must communicate the message that the onus for vulnerability falls on the system, not on the group. Health inequities are socially constructed yet the implication that populations are inherently vulnerable persists in public health.

Resources

- Words Matter: McMaster University's Editorial Style Guide- Notes on Inclusive Language.https://accessibility.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2021/04/writing-guidlines.pdf
- Dunn, D. S.; Andrews, E. E. Person-First and Identity-First Language: Developing Psychologists' Cultural Competence Using Disability Language. *American Psychologist* 2015, *70* (3), 255–264. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038636.
- Katz, A. S.; Hardy, B. J.; Firestone, M.; Lofters, A.; Morton-Ninomiya, M. E. Vagueness, Power and Public Health: Use of 'vulnerable' in Public Health Literature. *Critical Public Health* 2020, *30* (5), 601–611. https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2019.1656800.
- https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/words-images.html
- https://riic.ca/the-guide/on-the-air/lexicon-and-terminology/