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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.
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](http://aarp.org)
- **National Council for Adoption** | [adoptioncouncil.org](http://adoptioncouncil.org)
- **Society of Professional Journalists** | [spj.org](http://spj.org)
- **The Diversity Style Guide** | [diversitystyleguide.com](http://diversitystyleguide.com)

### Instead of...  Use...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elderly, old timer, granny, of a certain age, over the hill, blue hairs, geezer</th>
<th>Senior, older person, experienced, seasoned, mature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dotty, old coot</td>
<td>Has dementia, person with Alzheimer’s (if diagnosed), person who is aging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upstart, brat, troublemaker</td>
<td>Teenager, young person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real mother/father/parent</td>
<td>Birth mother/father/parent, biological parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give/given up for adoption</td>
<td>Placed for adoption, birth parent chose adoption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is adopted</td>
<td>Was adopted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoptee</td>
<td>Person/individual who was adopted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoptive parent</td>
<td>Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandfather clause</td>
<td>Legacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor, blue-collar</th>
<th>Lower-income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>People experiencing homelessness, people without homes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinster, old maid, maiden (as in, my maiden aunt)</td>
<td>Person who is single, person who is unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorcée, divorcé, divorcee</td>
<td>Person who is divorced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Disability

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

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
### Disability (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of...</th>
<th>Use...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| hearing impaired, the deaf | person who is deaf  
(little to no functional hearing, often communicates through 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 |

**NOTE: “Deaf” vs. “deaf”**
- Capital “D” typically refers to the culture (e.g., the Deaf community)
- Lowercase “d” generally refers to audiological status
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](http://genderspectrum.org)
- GLAAD | [glaad.org](http://glaad.org)
- The Association of LGBTQ Journalists | [nlgja.org](http://nlgja.org)
- Society of Professional Journalists | [spj.org](http://spj.org)
- The Diversity Style Guide | [diversitystyleguide.com](http://diversitystyleguide.com)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of...</th>
<th>Use...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>homosexual, gay (n.)&lt;br&gt; (as in, He is a gay.)&lt;br&gt; homo, sodomite</td>
<td>gay (adj.), lesbian (n. or adj.), bisexual, bi (adj. and should not be hyphenated), queer (adj.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homosexuality, lesbianism, gay (as a pejorative)</td>
<td>being gay/lesbian/bisexual/queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sexual preference, same-sex attractions, sexual identity</td>
<td>sexual orientation, orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gay/lesbian/bisexual lifestyle</td>
<td>LGBTQ+ people and their lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>normal</td>
<td>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)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>admitted homosexual, avowed homosexual, openly gay</td>
<td>out, out gay man, out lesbian, out queer person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.
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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of...</th>
<th>Use...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>he/she</td>
<td>they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>zie/ze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>him/her</td>
<td>them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>zim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his/her</td>
<td>their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>zir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his/hers</td>
<td>theirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>zis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hirs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>himself/herself</td>
<td>themself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ziesel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hirself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*zie/ze* is typically pronounced with a long “e”  

*Hir* and its forms are usually pronounced like “here”
Gender Inclusivity

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.

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 | nlgja.org
Society of Professional Journalists | spj.org
The Diversity Style Guide | diversitystyleguide.com

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

**Instead of...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addict</th>
<th>person with a substance use disorder, person with a serious substance use disorder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addicted to ___</td>
<td>has an ___ use disorder, has a serious ___ use disorder, has a substance use disorder involving ___, is struggling with ___ addiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholic</td>
<td>person with an alcohol use disorder, person with a substance use disorder involving alcohol, person struggling with alcohol addiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean</td>
<td>abstinent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean screen</td>
<td>negative screen, substance-free, testing negative for substance use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty</td>
<td>actively using, positive for substance use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty screen</td>
<td>positive screen, testing positive for substance use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug abuse, substance abuse, drug habit</td>
<td>substance use disorder, compulsive or regular substance use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug abuser, substance abuser</td>
<td>person with a substance use disorder, person who uses drugs (if not qualified as a disorder), person struggling with addiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former/reformed addict, former/reformed alcoholic</td>
<td>person in recovery, person in long-term recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opioid replacement, methadone maintenance</td>
<td>treatment, treatment involving medication use, medication-assisted treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational/casual/experimental users</td>
<td>people who use drugs for non-medical reasons, people starting to use drugs, people who are new to drug use, initiates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohols Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous... etc.</td>
<td>When using these terms, take care to avoid divulging an individual’s participation in a named 12-step program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

### 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,

| **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)

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](http://aaja.org)
- **National Association of Black Journalists** | [nabj.org](http://nabj.org)
- **National Association of Hispanic Journalists** | [nahj.org](http://nahj.org)
- **Native American Journalists Association** | [najanewsroom.com](http://najanewsroom.com)
- **Race Forward** | [raceforward.org](http://raceforward.org)
- **Religion Newswriters Association** | [religionstylebook.com](http://religionstylebook.com)

(continued on next page)
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