

Guidelines to Inclusive Language

What is it?

Inclusive language is language that does not demean, insult, exclude, stereotype, or trivialize people on the basis of personal attributes such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, family, or age. **It means avoiding terminology that may be offensive or portray any group in a stereotypical way.**

Gender Neutral Language:

- Don't Re-gender, instead De-gender
E.g. De-gender chairman to chair, don't re-gender it to chairwoman.
- Avoid occupational designations having derogatory -ette and -ess endings.

Don't use: **Use:**

Stewardess Flight attendant
Waitress Waiter (or server)

- Don't single out a person's sex, race, ethnicity, or other personal traits or characteristics (such as sexual orientation, age, or a disability) when it has no direct bearing on the topic at hand.

People of all genders should be called by their:

- full names,
- first or last name only, or
- by title (Mr. or Ms. if identify as male or female)

In messages not addressed to a specific person, start with "To Whom It May Concern" or refer to their position (e.g. "Dear Colleague/Manager/Customer).

Sexual Orientation:

- Don't assume everyone is straight
- If you don't already know if someone has a boyfriend or girlfriend, you could use terms such as "partner" or "spouse"
- Use LGBTQ2+ terms correctly, and don't be afraid of using them—it helps make LGBTQ2+ people more visible
- Don't say "gay" other than when referring to a person who has self-identified that way

Gender Identity:

- Respect pronouns - he/him, she/her, they/ them, or otherwise. If you make a mistake apologize, then move on and remember for next time
- If you aren't sure which pronouns to use, introduce yourself with your pronouns, then ask for theirs
- Say "cisgender" if you are talking about a person who isn't transgender
- Ask if they are comfortable with you asking questions

A few things to know:

- 1) Sexual orientation is different from gender identity.
- 2) Gender identity and sexual orientation can flex and change over time.
- 3) Only you can identify/label yourself.
- 4) People experience attraction in different ways: sexual, romantic, emotional, etc.

Language is powerful. Language is one of the major ways in which we convey meaning, and influence thought and behaviour. This is about using language that includes everybody and makes everybody feel welcome.

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Abilities/Disabilities:

- Try to celebrate people's abilities and display dignity for their gifts. Do not label or single out people by a disability.

Example:

Avoid "they are special" or generalizing to "the schizophrenic".

- Use "People-first Language" that focuses on the person first and the disability second.

"Persons with Disabilities" or a "Child who experiences Autism".

- Use language that emphasizes abilities rather than limitations.

"They are successful and productive", rather than "courageous".

- Avoid negative or value-laden terms that overextend the severity of a disability.

Identify the official diagnosis only, instead of adding "poor, unfortunate, crippled, handicapped, physically-challenged, suffers from, or victim".

- Use objective descriptions when referring to supports and accommodations that are being accessed.

"A person who uses a communication device or a wheelchair".

If you see a person who may need assistance:

- Ask them if you can help them with something; do not assume they need the help.
- Don't be hurt if they say no! Independence may be something they value.
- Note that chronic conditions and disabilities, including mental illness, are both visible and non-visible.
- Be an ally! Listen. Educate and advocate for anti-oppressions. Build trust. Act accountably.

Please note:

These tips are not meant to be exhaustive or definitive; explore the resources below to learn more. Language evolves and appropriate terminology changes as Canadian culture and society shifts. It is important to role model open communication and a willingness to learn with respect for the preferred terms of each person and/or group of people.

Resources:

[HR Toolkit- Diversity Language Guidelines](#)
[ACCKWA- Guide to Inclusive Language](#)
[Queens University- Inclusive Language](#)