

2022

## Western Libraries Inclusive Language Guide

Western Libraries

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### Recommended Citation

Western Libraries, "Western Libraries Inclusive Language Guide" (2022). *Western Libraries Inclusive Language Guide*. 1.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/wllanguageguide/1>

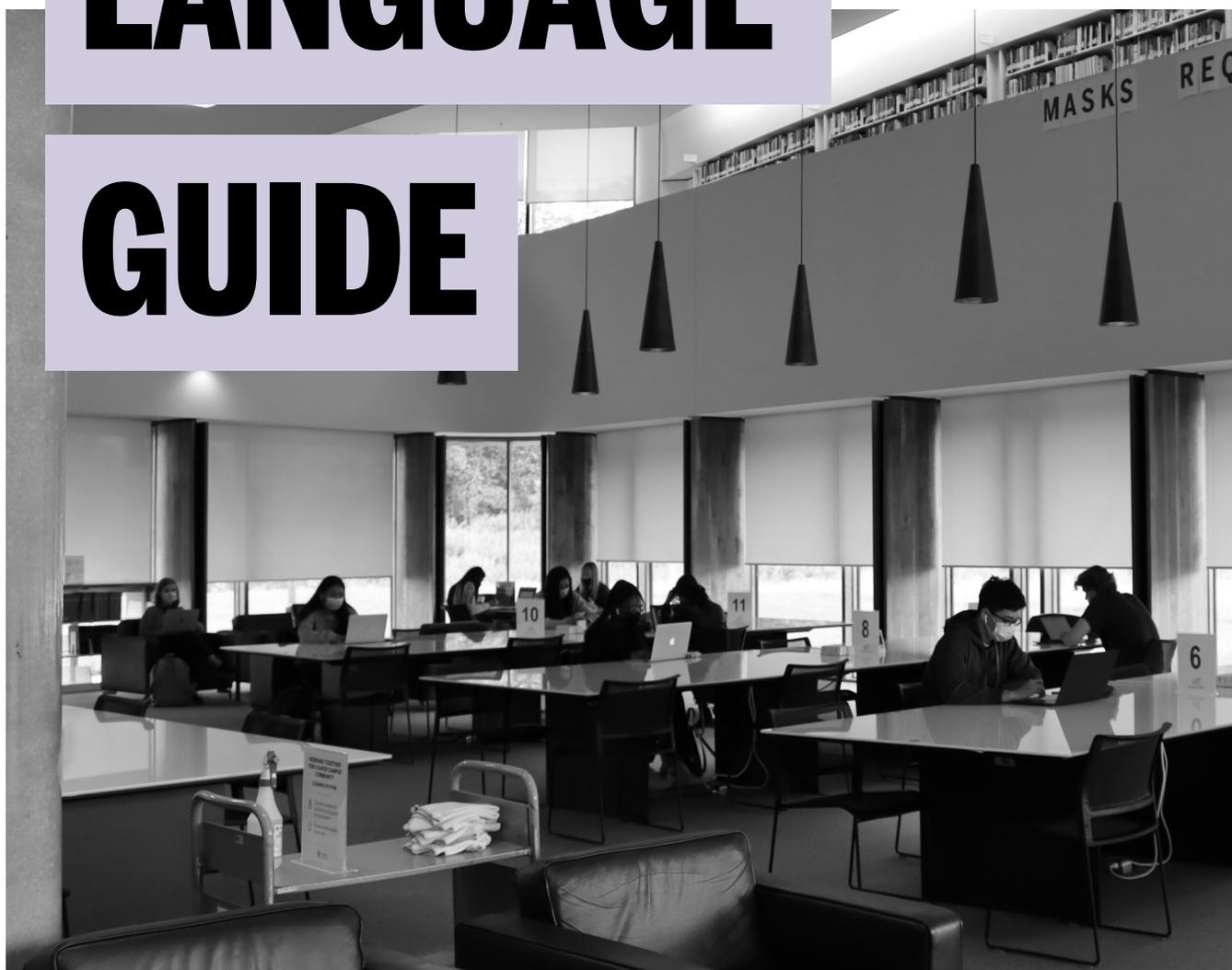
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**INCLUSIVE**

**LANGUAGE**

**GUIDE**



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# INTRODUCTION



“... we need to be willing to show up and—crucially—we must accept that we are never finished learning.”

Jane Schmidt, *White Fragility and Privilege in Librarianship*

Through inclusive language, we work to honour lived experiences and reflect a community where everyone is equally valued, regardless of their personal attributes. This means a language that is free from words and sayings that demean individuals or reinforce prejudice as a form of violence against cultures or people.

The dialogue around equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) is broad and ever-evolving. And we know that words often have multiple meanings: depending on lived experiences, words can hold different meanings for different people.

This guide resists discriminatory language and reflects Western Libraries' commitment to a learning, research, and workplace environment that is diverse and equitable. We are committed to this work and to remaining in dialogue.

It's from this understanding and willingness to learn that we offer this Inclusive Language Guide, in the spirit of deepening EDI efforts within Western Libraries.

# USING THE GUIDE



The Western Libraries Inclusive Language Guide aims to educate and empower Western Libraries staff to confidently use inclusive language.

The purpose of this guide is to help inform a framework around inclusive communication – whether in print, in person, or online, such as with research guides, emails, reports, and the Western Libraries website. It can be used to help make mindful and respectful language choices.

A content warning: As alternatives to outdated language are offered in this guide, please know there are derogatory terms used to demonstrate examples of inappropriate, discriminatory phrases and words.

It's important to remember that language is dynamic and constantly evolving in response to changes in culture, society, and the collective construction of social justice. While this guide promotes thoughtfulness and openness about how language is used or could be used, it should not be treated as definite or finite. We will make every reasonable effort to update this document with the most current terminology and [invite feedback](#) from all staff across Western Libraries.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Three principles were followed when creating this language guide (adapted from [A Progressive's Style Guide](#)).

We encourage you to embrace these principles in your inclusive communications to help foster a more positive campus and workplace culture.

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## 01. Self-Identification

Self-identification imparts the power of language choices to groups that have not historically had the opportunity to define themselves. Wherever appropriate, use regional or cultural language, pronouns, and specific proper nouns related to the person(s) or experience you're describing. If you aren't sure how to refer to a person, group, or subject matter within your work, seek feedback from those who can speak to it personally. Self-identification is also personal: for example, if your colleague refers to their partner as "husband," you can follow this lead.

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## 02. People-First Language

Whatever qualities someone has, they are first and foremost a person, and that should be central in all communications. Their identities and demographics are essential to the extent that they are relevant to the work at-hand. For example, if your writing is focused on accessible buildings, and it's relevant to describe someone with a disability, it may be more appropriate to say, "John, who uses a wheelchair," rather than, "A disabled person, John..." Active voice, over passive voice, reinforces agency for the people who are the subject of your communications.

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## 03. Language is Evolving

This guide reflects language as it evolves, and inclusive language will shift along with cultural norms. As equity-deserving individuals and groups who were historically excluded continue gaining agency, we all learn more about how to communicate with respect and mindfulness. This is a living document and [we welcome feedback](#) to achieve the goals of the guide.

# AGE/FAMILY

Western Libraries staff and the campus community come from diverse age and family backgrounds. However, ageist language and language that isn't inclusive of different familial relationships can be part of everyday interactions and conversations – and on the surface, may even appear complimentary.

Take for example, addressing an older man as a "young lad." This maintains that growing older is bad and that being young is best; it's infantilizing.

Or how about when asking a coworker about their weekend with their family? It's easy to assume that "family" means heterosexual married parents and their biological children, all living in the same household. Inclusive language doesn't make assumptions about the relationships between people.

Stereotypes of someone's capacity, abilities, and behaviours due to age or family status are some of the most socially accepted forms of discrimination. This section of the Western Libraries Inclusive Language Guide addresses problematic phrases and terms, related to age and family, and provides substitute wording.

# AGE

Age discrimination can be a barrier to younger and older people alike. Inappropriate and ageist language can be directed towards people or groups of any age, perpetuating stereotypes that certain age groups are more or less capable.

Using age-inclusive language recognizes persons of any age as capable, without generalizing select age groups or generations. Typically, age-inclusive language:

- Refers to age only when relevant and necessary.
- Centres and reflects the skills, characteristics, and capabilities of individuals rather than one's years of experience or age.
- Avoids drawing correlations and assumptions between one's characteristics, skills, or capabilities and their age.

## Instead of...

aged/ancient/boomer/elderly/  
old timer/old man or old woman/  
blue hair/geezer

senile

middle-aged

kids (in reference to post-secondary  
students)

## Consider...

senior/older person/experienced/  
seasoned/mature/ageing

person with dementia or person with  
Alzheimer's (if diagnosed)

person over XXXX age; person under  
XXXX age

students

# FAMILY

For us to create an inclusive environment, it's important to remember that family relationships are much more varied than mother + father = baby.

When working with people of all ages, cultures, and identities, many different stages and types of family life are present. Though it's normal and generally positive to discuss life outside of work, and bond based on commonalities, your colleagues may not be comfortable sharing details of their relationship or family status. We must work to avoid assumptions about what people may want in life based on generalizations or what the reasons are for their circumstances.

Here are a few ways family assumptions commonly show up in the workplace:

- Assuming everyone can relate to the experience of parenthood or wish to be parents.
- Assuming a pregnant mother will take parental leave and a father will continue working.
- Assuming everyone has a similar upbringing and experience of being parented.
- Assuming everyone will celebrate holidays with their children or parents.

Some family situations may require workplace accommodation, such as pregnancy or responsibility for caring for loved ones. It may be hard to take extra time off and may come with feelings of guilt, or of not being essential to the workplace. Let's welcome our coworkers to share their full selves and do their best work, while respecting their personal needs and comfort levels.

Often terms related to family status have a gender-specific lens to them, e.g. husband or wife. That doesn't mean you can't use those terms, but consider using gender-neutral language first or until you know how the person you're communicating with refers to their partner, family member or loved one.

## Instead of...

## Consider...

dad/mom/mom and dad

caregiver/guardian/parent(s)/adult

son/daughter

children

brother/sister

sibling

real mother/father/parents

biological parent/birth mother/  
father/parent

given up for adoption

placed for adoption/birth parent chose  
adoption

is adopted

was adopted

family resemblance



if used without knowing someone's family  
context, this term assumes a resemblance  
and familial relationship where one may  
not exist.

maternity leave

parental leave

maiden name

birth name

wife/husband/spouse/girlfriend/  
boyfriend

partner/significant other

# ABILITIES/ DISABILITIES

All bodies have value. And creating a world where physical, mental, and emotional differences are seen without discrimination is fundamental to undoing harmful labels that limit people's potential.

It's important to recognize that disability is not a universally accepted term and is typically linked to [the medical model](#) that says having a bodily or neurological difference means something is wrong or a person is somehow in need of fixing.

It's key that our language shifts from a purely medicalized view of abilities to one that sees people as people first and reflects an understanding that social environments, attitudes, and barriers are what prevents individuals from full participation in society.

This section of the Western Libraries Inclusive Language Guide addresses ableist language centered on physical differences and provides alternatives to commonly used words and phrases that demean or romanticize people with disabilities.

Remember: Disabilities can be visible or invisible; you shouldn't assume someone does not have a disability because you can't see it.

Ableist language with respect to disability perpetuates the common assumption that there is an ideal body and mind, and that such a body and mind is better than others. However, an inclusive environment, fostered through use of inclusive language, recognizes that this assumption is not true, and that all people and bodies are valuable and worthy of dignity, respect, and access to opportunities.

In addressing and describing disability, inclusive language:

- Is generally person-centered but yields to preferred terminology and self-identification.
- Focuses on a person's abilities and characteristics, rather than (perceived) limitations.
- Refers to a disability or diagnosis only when it is relevant to a given context.
- Avoids phrases that suggest victimhood ("suffers from") or confinement ("wheelchair bound"). Similarly, avoid language that suggests heroism for adapting to a disability or made-up words such as "handicapable."
- Refrains from use of disability terminology and descriptors as metaphors to describe a situation, such as "fell on deaf ears" or "blind to the truth." Doing so trivializes and stigmatizes disabilities as inherently negative.

Instead of...	Consider...
able-bodied this term implies that people with disabilities lack "able bodies" or the ability to use their bodies well	use the phrase "does not have a disability" or "non-disabled"
disabled community/disabled sport	disability community/sport for athletes with a disability
person afflicted with/suffers from/is stricken with/a victim of XXXX	person with/person who has been diagnosed with XXXX
learning disabled	person with a learning disability
special ed student/special education student	student who receives academic accommodation

## Instead of...

## Consider...

special needs

functional needs/accessibility requirements

handicapped parking/handicapped bathrooms

accessible parking/accessible bathrooms

caretaker

caregiver

mute/non-verbal

person who is unable to speak/person who uses a communication device/communicates without using words

the blind

people who are blind/people who are visually impaired/people who have low vision

the hearing impaired/the deaf

person who is deaf (little to no functional hearing, often communicates through sign language)/ person who is hard of hearing (mild to moderate hearing loss, may or may not use sign language)



Deaf vs. deaf

capital "D" typically refers to the culture (i.e., the Deaf community); lowercase "d" generally refers to audiological status

# MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health affects each of us directly and indirectly throughout our lives, but discussing it still carries a stigma that can be limiting in the workplace.

According to the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#), in any given year, 1 in 5 people will experience mental illness or mental health issues. Many people who haven't sought treatment or a diagnosis have likely still experienced days with poorer mental health and can understand that it lies on a spectrum. The experience of mental health differs from individual to individual and over time.

Some people have a physical predisposition to certain mental health conditions just like physical health conditions, but for some their mental health condition may be primarily caused by social/societal factors. Similarly, problematic substance use can be a combination of mental health factors, societal factors, and physical or medical factors. It's common to find ourselves coping with feelings of negative mental health with actions or coping mechanisms that we would have otherwise not chosen to do. This is often a contributing factor to a substance use disorder, which is why we have grouped them together for this guide.

Given the universality, sensitivity, and invisibility of mental health and/or substance use issues, it's particularly important to be thoughtful about how we discuss this topic.

Remember:

- To respect one's self-identification.
- Focus on ability over limitations.
- Avoid phrases that suggest victimhood, e.g., "suffers from XXXX."
- Refrain from using mental illnesses as metaphors to describe situations or circumstances. Examples of phrases to avoid include "that's so crazy" or "I'm organized because I'm so OCD."
- Everyone has mental health; mental illness is a term that refers only to diagnosed mental health issues.

## Instead of...

crazy/insane/psycho/mentally ill/  
emotionally disturbed/demented/nuts

offensive slang when describing a  
situation, e.g., mental/crazy/psycho/  
nuts/looney

is a paranoid schizophrenic/is anorexic/  
is OCD/is bipolar

committed suicide/unsuccessful or failed  
suicide attempt

addict/alcoholic/drug abuser/substance  
abuser/junkie/crackhead

clean (with respect to substance use)

dirty

former or reformed addict/alcoholic

## Consider...

person diagnosed with a mental health  
condition or mental illness/person with a  
psychiatric disorder

wild/absurd/surreal

has paranoid schizophrenia/has anorexia  
nervosa/has obsessive-compulsive  
disorder/has bipolar disorder

died by suicide/attempted suicide

person with a substance use disorder

abstinent

actively using/positive for substance use

person in recovery/person in long-term  
recovery



harm reduction

this term reflects a progressive approach  
to substance use, accepting that not all  
people who use substances can, or want  
to, stop. It acknowledges that we should  
work to ensure the safety and humanity of  
people who use substances, reducing  
negative consequences where possible,  
and making different choices accessible  
without judgment

# SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Language around sexuality and sexual orientation is important. The right words can open people's hearts and minds, while others create distance and confusion. Language and understandings of sexual orientation are evolving, and it's key that our language shifts to embrace and uplift human experiences over science, law, and cultural norms.

Sexual orientation refers to the feelings an individual has for someone they are physically, emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to. Sexuality includes sexual orientation, as well as a person's attitudes and values related to sex.

When considering general guidelines for discussing sexuality and sexual orientation, you can apply many of the same principles discussed throughout this guide:

- First, ask yourself whether it's necessary to discuss sexual orientation; and if you're talking about a specific person, it's important they have consented to your sharing their orientation.
- Use terminology preferred by the individual(s) you're referring to, if you can ask them.
- Avoid making characterizations about someone based on sexual orientation.
- Be aware of in-group vs. out-group language, whether you and/or your intended audience identify as part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and what language is appropriate for the context.

## 2SLGBTQIA+ — WHAT DOES IT STAND FOR?

**Two-Spirit (2S)** An umbrella term used by some Indigenous Peoples in reference to their sexual, gender, and spiritual identity. It may encompass same-sex attraction and a wide variety of gender variance. The placement of Two-Spirit (2S) first recognizes that Indigenous individuals are the first peoples of this land, and their understanding of gender and sexuality precedes colonization and Eurocentric norms.

**Lesbian** Women who are physically and romantically attracted to other women.

**Gay** Men who are physically and romantically attracted other men.

**Bisexual** Describes physical attraction, romantic attraction, or sexual behaviour not limited to one sex and/or gender.

**Transgender** Transgender people have a gender identity different from the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Queer or Questioning** "Queer" is a term to acknowledge individuals who are not cisgender or heterosexual. However, it's important to remember that, historically, "queer" has also been used as a slur. Some feel a reclamation of power in using the term and others may not.

"Questioning" refers to people who may be unsure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

**Intersex** A person born with male and female biological traits.

**Asexual** Somebody who does not experience sexual attraction to anyone.

**+** This symbol is used to be inclusive of other ways individuals express their sexuality outside of heteronormativity and is for all the new and growing ways we become aware of sexual orientations and gender diversity.

## Instead of...

sexual preference/lifestyle/choice

homosexual

gay (as a noun, e.g., he is a gay)

bisexual – when intending to reference 2SLGBTQIA+ community members attracted to people of all genders or attracted to people regardless of gender

admitted homosexual/outwardly homosexual

gay community – when intending to reference 2SLGBTQIA+ community members who aren't explicitly gay

passing/fooling/pretending/  
masquerading (as straight, for example)

## Consider...

sexual orientation

gay or lesbian, to describe people attracted to members of the same sex

gay man/gay person

pansexual

out/out gay man/lesbian/queer person

2SLGBTQIA+ or be specific when speaking to a particular community

do not use these terms – they promote the harmful belief that individuals are deceitful in their sexual identities

# GENDER

Gender identity is distinct from sexual orientation; gender identity is not about who one is attracted to, it's about who one is. Gender is also not the same as sex: Sex refers to a set of biological attributes in humans and animals and is usually categorized as female or male; gender refers to socially constructed roles and behaviours of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people.

Gender identity and gender expression are also distinct from one another. While gender identity refers to one's feelings of whether they are a man, woman, both or neither, identity is not seen by others. Gender expression is seen by others and refers to behaviours, mannerisms, interests, and appearance that are associated with gender in a given cultural context. Gender expression may or may not align with one's gender identity at any given time.

In thinking about gender, it's important to remember that our understandings of gender, and how gender should be performed, are socially constructed. Colonization attempted to erase experiences and identities that didn't fit into narrow definitions of gender — the effects of which persist today.

In recent years, society has seen growing recognition and education about the broad spectrum of gender. Here we provide guidelines for language that is respectful and inclusive of the various ways that people may identify or express their gender.

## A NOTE ON PRONOUNS (adapted from [MyPronouns.org](https://www.mypronouns.org/))

Making an assumption about someone's gender (even if correct) sends a potentially harmful message — that people look a certain way to demonstrate the gender they are or aren't. Using someone's correct pronouns is a way to respect them and create an inclusive environment.

One way to create and normalize space for people to share their pronouns is first to share your own. For example, at Western Libraries, some folks share their pronouns in their email signatures, Zoom screen names, and staff name tags.

Gendered language and ignorance regarding gender affects us all. It's crucial to recognize that someone's gender has no bearing on their skills, behaviour or worth. That understanding gives us the opportunity to affect change from within our own circles and communities through the language we use. Some ways to do this include:

- First, ask yourself whether it's necessary to include gender in your conversations or communications; and if it is, use the pronouns indicated by the individual.
- Offer your pronouns when meeting someone new, not assuming what pronouns a person uses.
- Avoid making characterizations about someone based on gender.
- Think about your use of adjectives that have been unfairly applied based on gender, e.g., calling a woman "sassy" for asserting herself. If you wouldn't describe a man the same way in the same situation, consider whether that word might be demeaning based on gender.
- Work towards gender-neutral language when gender is not relevant to the circumstances. For example, firefighter vs. fireman.
- "Use language that avoids replicating gender stereotypes, that resists the hegemony of binaries and strict categories, and that embraces and uplifts human experience over science, law, or cultural norms" (A Progressive's Style Guide).

### Instead of...

guys, e.g., "Hi guys, how's it going" when addressing a group of people – do not assume their genders

born or biological male, female

transsexual/tranny

deadnaming – using the name someone used before they transitioned

### Consider...

hi folks/greetings guests/hi everyone

assigned male, female at birth (AMAB, AFAB)

transgender/trans person

use the name someone identifies with – never use their dead name. This also applies to pronouns!

## Instead of...

opposite sex, e.g., a person of the opposite sex – this reinforces a sex and gender binary, and ignores the reality of intersex persons

chosen or new gender

sex change/gender reassignment surgery

gender dysphoria – psychiatric vocabulary that focuses on the distress or pain caused when assigned sex at birth does not mirror a person's gender identity

pregnant woman

real man/woman

defining roles via gender, e.g., policeman, chairman, manning a booth

mankind

manmade

## Consider...

of a different gender, e.g., a person of different gender

gender

gender-affirming surgery

gender euphoria – focusing on gender euphoria instead of dysphoria centres the positive aspects of being trans or gender expansive

pregnant person

cisgender – refers to an individual whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth

gender-neutral terms, e.g., police officer, chair or chairperson, staffing a booth

humankind

artificial/constructed/synthetic

# RACE/ETHNICITY

Race and ethnicity – there is a difference between the two: Race is a social construct that categorizes people based on physical traits, like skin colour, and is used to establish power over communities through legal, institutional, and societal means; it's hierarchical and there is no biological basis for racial classification. Ethnicity, while also socially constructed, is multidimensional and centered on culture, language, and customs.

Breaking down racist systems requires us to have conversations with curiosity, openness, and, importantly, a willingness to get things wrong but not let that stop us from trying to understand and do better. We must call racism what it is, intentional or not.

Remember: Many of the microaggressions and racist behaviours experienced in the workplace are based on false assumptions. Take notice of the assumptions you make about people.

- Don't assume that someone's appearance can tell you where they're from, what their beliefs are, or anything about their individual qualities.
- When referring to an individual's race or ethnicity, first ask yourself if this is relevant to your message. If so, use the language preferred by the individual.
- Avoid grouping equity-deserving groups together in strategies or messaging unless that is your specific intention. Consider the American term "BIPOC," which refers to Black, Indigenous, people of colour. To assume those groups share an experience can be invalidating, though the term may be useful when specifically contrasting all members of those included communities to the white experience.
- Take guidance and encourage active involvement from individuals in underrepresented groups, but don't rely on their labour unfairly.
- Educate yourself where you find gaps in your understanding of different cultural experiences from your own. This includes learning the correct pronunciation of unfamiliar names, rethinking ideas and stories you were raised with, or showing respect to different cultural traditions.

An area in this section speaks to Indigeneity. This is to bring deliberate attention to the specific ways settler colonial language is used against First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in (what we call) Canada.

## Instead of...

## Consider...

black community/culture

Black community/culture

visible minority group/minorities

racialized person/group/communities

third-world country

developing country

slaves

enslaved people

blackmark

a negative

blacklist/blackball

ban/bar/boycott/exclude/ostracize

ghetto (as an adjective)



it's difficult to disassociate the term from its use to characterize low-income Black Americans, so when "ghetto" is used as an adjective, it sounds like a racial insult

grandfather clause/grandfathered in

legacy

this term has its roots in America's racial history. It entered lexicon in the 19th century with legislation that intended to prevent Black people from voting, without denying white people the same rights

# INDIGENEITY

It's unquestionable that anti-Indigenous racism and colonialism continue to exist, as anti-Indigenous racism is embedded in everyday practices: in service delivery, in policy and program development, and in librarianship. And while words can only do so much when action is needed to breakdown the power structures that uphold anti-Indigenous discrimination, language is a place that enables us to have a common understanding of words and to recognize and show respect for the lives of others, moving away from terms and phrases that appropriate or shame Indigenous Peoples.

Additional communication guidelines to consider related to Indigenous peoples in Canada:

- Note the differences between Indigenous, Aboriginal, and First Nations Peoples.
  - Indigenous is generally used over Aboriginal (more commonly used in Australia), and both terms can encompass First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.
  - First Nations includes Indigenous peoples who are neither Métis nor Inuit.
  - Inuit are the Indigenous inhabitants of the northern areas of Canada.
  - The Métis identity is more ambiguous, developing from European and Indigenous relationships. Someone may identify as Métis but not hold legal "Indian" status in Canada.
- Be specific about which Indigenous peoples you are referring to when possible and appropriate, as their experiences may be vastly different historically, culturally, and geographically.
- Find out about the land you live and work on using [Native-Land.ca](https://www.native-land.ca) or another resource.
- Be very conscious of how you use land acknowledgements. If verbally delivering the land acknowledgement, it's recommended to write your own according to your positionality, field, and/or discipline. You're encouraged to bring your personal story or meaning to the words in the environment the acknowledgement is delivered in. More [information on land acknowledgements](#) can be found through Western's Office of Indigenous Initiatives.
- If you have a speaker or contributor from the Indigenous community, observing customs like smudging, offerings, and providing food conveys respect and gratitude. These practices are outlined by [Western's Office of Indigenous Initiatives](#).

## Instead of...

## Consider...

indigenous people

Indigenous peoples



the "s" in peoples is critical to the plurality of Indigenous communities. The capital "I" is also imperative

Inuit people

Inuit — in the Inuktitut language, the term Inuit translates to "the people" and is therefore already pluralized

Canada's indigenous people

Indigenous peoples in Canada

tribe, pow wow, spirit animal,  
totem pole

do not use metaphors with specific significance to Indigenous groups to describe non-Indigenous experiences

Indian, Aboriginal (unless part of a formal or organizational name, or tied to historical government acts/documents)

Indigenous

# SOCIOECONOMIC INCLUSION

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a multifaceted lens of societal standing that can include racial, cultural, gender, sexuality, and geographical/physical factors, plus educational, occupational, and financial elements. This intersectionality shows just how complex SES is, but there's a common belief that people control their own social standing, that everyone has an equal chance at success if only they work hard enough — pulling up those proverbial bootstraps.

However, social systems show us how inequalities are stratified and there is only so much an individual can do in the face of larger, systemic inequity when it is upheld by society.

Part of this inequity is language that discriminates against people impacted by low SES. Terms like "white trash" or "welfare mom" marginalize and demean people of a perceived low SES and reinforce a class divide between communities.

Though Western Libraries is part of a large academic institution where privilege can feel inherent, it's important to remember that colleagues and campus community members also experience (or have experienced) SES challenges. The words we use to refer to people can reflect our attitudes toward them — whether implicit or unconscious — and it's important to carefully consider the language choices we make when speaking about poverty, education levels, and access.

We live in a class-conscious society and the language we use casually reflects that.

- If socioeconomic status is relevant to your communications, be specific. What income level are you including as "high" or "low" income? What education level are you referring to? What race or gender correlations are demonstrated that may impact your context?
- Consider the emphasis you place on someone's work when first meeting them, the assumptions you make when you hear about where or how someone lives, and the value you place on traditional Euro-Western education. Stable employment, the opportunity to invest in real estate or find secure housing, and the attainment of post-secondary education are often highly privileged and not realistic for many people. These socioeconomic markers are not of value to all people.

### Instead of...

the homeless/a homeless person

at-risk — as an adjective, this is stigmatizing language and does not account for the intersectionality and complexity of peoples' lives

poor/underprivileged/poverty-stricken/disadvantaged (to describe individuals or groups)

coded language like "inner city," "ghetto," and "the projects"

### Consider...

people without housing/individual experiencing homelessness

be specific about the systemic causes at the root of the issue and what the person is at risk for, or use quotation marks ("at-risk") to demonstrate the problematic implications of this term

experiencing economic hardship

do not use these terms as they conflate social class with race and ethnicity

## Instead of...

## Consider...

leveling the playing field

avoid using this term; game-based metaphors suggest winners and losers

white trash

do not use this term as it demeans rural populations with low income levels and infers by adding the qualifier of "white" that all other racialized groups are "trash" by default

blue or white collar/unskilled labour

do not use these terms — all labour is skilled

prostitution/prostitute

sex work/sex worker

well-educated/less-educated

this language assumes that formal Euro-Western education is the only means to gain knowledge and ignores lived experiences

specify the degree or formal education without assigning value to it, e.g., Toni holds a Bachelor's degree

food desert

the term assumes that scarcity of food is a naturally occurring situation rather than something systemic; it ignores the communities and lives in these areas given that "desert" implies empty, desolate environments

reflect on the context and if "food security," "food apartheid," "food justice" or "food sovereignty" would be more appropriate

# LANGUAGE OF CATALOGUING

Western Libraries holds a broad range of items in our shared collections. Part of organizing and describing these materials includes the use of standardized metadata that reflect the biases and norms of the time in which the items and/or their descriptions were created. These metadata can include offensive wording, cultural references, and stereotypes.

We recognize the harm caused by these knowledge organization systems and that they uphold the library's place as a colonial institution that contributes to ongoing oppression and white supremacy.

We are working with partners at local, provincial, and national levels to explore reclassification projects and processes that remove discriminatory subject headings from our library records. We also flag individual records to alert users of offensive descriptions.

"Librarians [and library staff] must also recognize and reflect on their own internal biases when cataloguing and make it their job to deconstruct language and decolonize the systems that perpetuate the continued marginalization of others."

[Crystal Vaughan, The Language of Cataloguing](#)

**[Read Western Libraries' statement on the use of problematic language in the library catalogue.](#)**



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## AGE/FAMILY

- Who You Calling 'Young Lady?': <https://www.aarp.org/disrupt-aging/stories/ideas/info-2018/ageist-language-glossary.html>
- A quick guide to avoid ageism in communication: [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/ageing/quick-guide-to-avoid-ageism-in-communication---en.pdf?sfvrsn=a43edc4a\\_1&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/ageing/quick-guide-to-avoid-ageism-in-communication---en.pdf?sfvrsn=a43edc4a_1&download=true)
- The Language of Ageism: Why We Need to Use Words Carefully: <https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article/56/6/997/2952876>
- Including the 21st century family: <https://incluseum.com/2014/07/07/including-the-21st-century-family/>

## ABILITIES/DISABILITIES

- Ableism/Language: <https://www.autistichoya.com/p/ableist-words-and-terms-to-avoid.html>
- How to avoid using ableist language: <http://deareverybody.hollandbloorview.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/DearEverybodyTipsonAbleistLanguage2018-19.pdf>
- Disability Language Style Guide from the National Center on Disability and Journalism: <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>

## MENTAL HEALTH

- Language Matters from the Mental Health Commission of Canada: [https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/drupal/2020-08/language\\_matters\\_cheat\\_sheet\\_eng.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/drupal/2020-08/language_matters_cheat_sheet_eng.pdf)
- Why Is the Language of Addiction So Tricky?: <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/visions/the-language-we-use-vol14/why-is-the-language-of-addiction-so-tricky>
- Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance Language Guide: <https://www.dbsalliance.org/about/language-guide/>

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- APA Bias-Free Language – Sexual Orientation: <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/sexual-orientation>
- CANBC Gender and Sexuality: <https://www.canbc.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Gender-and-Sexuality-Terms.pdf>
- List of Library of Congress Subject Headings related to the queer community: <http://www.netanelganin.com/projects/QueerLCSH/QueerLCSH.html>

## GENDER

- APA Bias-Free Language – Gender: <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/gender>
- Qmunity Gender-Neutral Language Sheet: <https://qmunity.ca/resources/gender-neutral-language-sheet/>
- MyPronouns.org: <https://www.myprouns.org/>

## RACE/ETHNICITY

- White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack: [https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege\\_McIntosh-1989.pdf](https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege_McIntosh-1989.pdf)
- Why the term “BIPOC” is so complicated, explained by linguists: <https://www.vox.com/2020/6/30/21300294/bipoc-what-does-it-mean-critical-race-linguistics-jonathan-rosa-deandra-miles-hercules>
- APA Bias-Free Language – Racial and Ethnic Identity: <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities>

## INDIGINEITY

- Key Terms: Reconciliation, Indigenization, Decolonization, and Resurgence: <https://indigenous.uwo.ca/docs/Indigenous-Initiatives-Key-Terms.pdf>
- Elements of Indigenous Style: <https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=a08d8739-cc63-4ee7-94f6-fb8928d05406%40redis&vid=0&format=EB>
- Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers – Glossary: <https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationcurriculumdevelopers/back-matter/glossary>

## SOCIOECONOMIC INCLUSION

- Covering Poverty: What to Avoid and How to Get It Right: <https://consciousstyleguide.com/covering-poverty-what-to-avoid-and-how-to-get-it-right>
- DC Fiscal Policy Institute Style Guide for Inclusive Language: [https://www.dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Style-Guide-for-Inclusive-Language\\_Dec-2017.pdf](https://www.dcfpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Style-Guide-for-Inclusive-Language_Dec-2017.pdf)
- Food Justice Glossary: <https://utenvironment.org/projects/microfarm/food-justice/glossary/>

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Western Libraries Inclusive Language Guide addresses communication choices associated with age and family status; disability; sexual orientation; gender; mental health and substance use; race and ethnicity; and socioeconomic position.

- We commit to offer our most informed guidance for inclusive language, in order to create a culture of respect and support for all members of our community.
- We commit to considering and representing a wide range of identities and experiences.
- We commit to seek advice and information from sources that can speak best to a community's experience.

*(adapted from [A Progressive's Style Guide](#))*

**This guide wouldn't be possible without the work of those who speak truth to power in the language we use every day.**

**We acknowledge the people, movements, and organizations that came before this guide and helped inform its content:**

- [A Progressive's Style Guide by Hanna Thomas and Anna Hirsch](#)
- [WGBH Inclusive Language Guidelines](#)
- [Western's Office of Indigenous Initiatives](#)
- [National Centre on Disability and Journalism Language Style Guide](#)

**Western Libraries Inclusive Language Guide Working Group**

Mia Burton

Emily Carlisle-Johnston

John Critchley

Katrina Fortner

[wl-ediguide@uwo.ca](mailto:wl-ediguide@uwo.ca)