UW-Stevens Point
Inclusive Language Guide

General Principles

- Use language that reflects what people call themselves. For example, taking the time to find out what labels or words a person or group uses for their identities and experiences rather than making assumptions, and always respecting the language a person uses to self-identify over any general rule that you might otherwise adhere to.

- Use "person-centered" language as a general rule. For example, when talking about groups you aren't a member of, not using an identity as a stand-in for a person or a group: "people with disabilities" instead of "the disabled"; "transgender people" instead of "transgenders" or "the transgendered"; etc., remembering that any aspect of a person is just that: an aspect of a person.

- Avoid irrelevant references to details about a person.

- Be mindful that identity is complex, and that people have many aspects of their identities that intersect to shape their experience. Avoid reducing a person to only one aspect of their identities.

- If you're not sure, do some research or ask! If you mess up, apologize and learn so you can move forward.

- Avoid using ableist language such as "dumb," "lame," "crazy," "psycho."

- Avoid using violent or militaristic metaphors such as "You killed it!" or "I'm going to shoot you an email."

- Avoid using titles that have colonial or racist legacies, such as "master" or "chief." There are many available alternatives to describe important or leadership roles.

- When citing or using historical texts with outdated language, either plan in advance alternatives or provide context for understanding past use. See Chapter 9, Section 1 in the handbook for guidelines on doing this in a pedagogical context.

Race and Ethnicity

- Do not refer to students of color or racially minoritized students as "diverse students" or "diversity students." This is grammatically incorrect and tokenizing. Furthermore, there are many ways that students contribute to diversity beyond race and ethnicity.

- Capitalize the proper names of nationalities, peoples, and race: Native Americans, Aboriginal Peoples, Arab, Caucasian, French-Canadian, Inuit, Jew, Latin, Asian/ Pacific Islander, Cree.

- Avoid references that draw undue attention to ethnic or racial backgrounds. When references are valid, learn the most appropriate specific terminology or use the term preferred by the person or group concerned.

- When it is necessary to describe people collectively, the term "people of color," "BIPOC," 'racialized person' or 'racialized community' is preferred by more and more organizations, as these terms express race as a social construct and do not promote broad 'other than white' categorizations. Racialized groups include people who might experience differential treatment on the basis of race, ethnicity, language, religion or culture.

- Using 'minority' may imply inferior social position and is often relative to geographic location. When needed, the use of "racially minoritized group" is preferred over 'minority group' because it makes clear that active oppression.

- When referring to immigration status, do not call people "illegal." Instead, use "undocumented."

Gender

- The AP Stylebook permits the use of "they" as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun.

- Don't deadname (refer to a trans person by their previous name).

Gender continued

- When possible, refer to someone by their name or role: "The author," "The gender studies scholar," "Dickinson wrote."

- Do a little research: if you are writing about a public figure of any kind, chances are that others have also written about that person; you may be able to follow their lead. If you see multiple practices, imitate the ones that seem most respectful.

- Don't use "man" or "men" to refer to groups of people who may not be men. For example, use "humankind" instead of "mankind." When citing or using historical texts, contextualize the past use of this language.

- When welcoming or greeting people, avoid using gendered language. Use alternatives like "distinguished guests," "colleagues," "friends of the university," instead of "ladies and gentlemen."

- Do not make assumptions about a person's gender or relationship status. Use gender-neutral honorifics, such as "Mx." or people's titles ("Dr." or "Professor") or just use names if you are unsure.

- Make it a habit to introduce yourself with your gender pronouns, and invite others to do so as well: "My name is Lindsay, and my pronouns are she/hers."

- In class, be clear with your students how you would like them to address you at the beginning of the semester.

Ability and Health

- Default to using language that focuses on the person, not the disability. If they indicate they prefer other language to refer to themself, then use that.

- Use language that emphasizes abilities rather than limitations (for example, "Barbara uses a wheelchair for mobility" instead of "Barbara is confined to a wheelchair".

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

- Do not label people by their disability.

- Use the term "neurodiversity" or "neurodivergent" as a general way to refer to brain variation regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood, and other mental function.

- Be mindful that chronic health conditions and mental health issues, though not always visible, are still extant and not a failing of the individual.

- Follow others' lead on how willing they are to disclose their health status or what it means to them.

- Do not problematize somebody's condition on their behalf.

University of Wisconsin
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