

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

As universities and society at large progress toward equality and equity, there is an increased awareness of inclusive language. What do we mean when we talk about inclusive language? Inclusive language is language that purposely avoids expressions considered to express or imply ideas that are sexist, racist, or otherwise biased. By using inclusive language, you are able to resonate with a wider variety of audiences through speaking and writing in a way that everyone can understand.

HOW TO WRITE INCLUSIVELY

Though it can seem difficult at first, you will be better able to write inclusively by examining the biases that inform your writing. Even if you are not actively thinking about exclusive groups, names, terms, etc., it is possible that your writing could still be more inclusive.

General Tips for Selecting Inclusive Language

- Avoid gendered language and instead opt for the gender-neutral pronoun “they.”
- Be aware of any terms or language that might relate to race, nationality, ethnicity, or culture.
- Remain mindful of any ability terms or descriptions that hinge on medical conditions (i.e., avoid phrasing such as “like a cancer”).
- Write with an understanding of what your opinion is and what is verifiable.
- Avoid writing with religious or political opinions in mind unless that is the goal of the assignment.

SHOULD YOU USE PERSON-FIRST OR IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE?

Person-first and identity-first language are two different ways to think about describing people and their qualities. Person-first language aims to emphasize the person before their (dis)abilities. For example, instead of writing “a blind person,” person-first language would suggest writing “a person who is blind.” Identity-first language, on the other hand, places the (dis)ability first; for example, “the autistic person” instead of “the person who has autism.” Ultimately, there is not one correct choice; when in doubt, ask the individual you are writing about, your professor, or a peer in your field.

LANGUAGE CHANGES

While there are certain ways of speaking and writing that are preferred right now, language is always in flux. Individuals within their communities have the power to create or repurpose language that they prefer to use. For instance, the term “queer” used to be a derogatory insult used to describe homosexuality but is now the preferred term by many members of this community. The best advice for writing about a community that is not your own is to do some research to make sure you are using terminology that does not offend in the moment.

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