

ACS Inclusivity Style Guide

TIP SHEET Narratives, framing, and sentence structure

For more context, review the [“Narratives, framing, and sentence structure”](#) section of the Inclusivity Style Guide. Use this tip sheet in combination with the [“General guidelines”](#) tip sheet.

Think about your frames and narratives

The way people or issues are described can promote or disrupt stereotypes. Some elements of frames and narratives include the following:

Sources: Aim to include a variety of voices in your content, and center the people most affected. Be transparent about conflicts of interest and sources that undermine social justice and equity.

Order: Be aware of how the information mentioned first sets the tone of your communication and primes people to think a certain way.

Explanations: Give context behind differences among groups, such as health outcomes for people of different races and ethnicities. And avoid overexplaining identities that are not part of dominant cultures.

Comparisons: Carefully consider which groups you’re comparing and which is implied to be the standard. Avoid equating things that are qualitatively different, such as violence against people and damage to businesses during protests. Also recognize how your choice of metaphor, such as “flood” to describe immigration, may perpetuate stereotypes.

Frames and narratives to avoid

Deficit framing: Deficit framing leads with people’s struggles. Instead, lead with their assets.

Blaming: Avoid language that seems to blame marginalized people for inequitable outcomes. Instead, name the true causes, such as racism, heterosexism, and other forms of discrimination and oppression.

Overcoming and exceptions: Overfocusing on individual success stories may imply that personal effort is the answer to systemic injustices. Instead, put stories in context and support personal cases with group successes.

Polarization: Pitting groups in opposition to one another can feed into an “us versus them” mentality.

White saviorism: Framing White people as saviors of people of color denies people of color’s agency and power.

Use active phrasing

Choose a sentence structure that names oppressors. Avoid wording that is more passive and abstract and that omits agents.

Example

- ✓ **Use:** The university discriminated against her.
- ✗ **Avoid:** She was discriminated against.
- ✗ **Avoid:** Discrimination occurred at the university.
- ✗ **Avoid:** There was discrimination at the university.

Think about who is missing

Recognize when an explicit or implied “we” refers to only a subset of people. Also notice when lists of identity groups might fail to acknowledge overlapping identities.

Example

- ✓ **Use:** In 2020, White people in the US finally began to reckon with racism in the US.
- ✗ **Avoid:** In 2020, we finally began to reckon with racism in the US.

Like what you’ve read? See the full guide from the American Chemical Society.

www.acs.org/inclusivityguide