

ACS Inclusivity Style Guide

TIP SHEET General guidelines

Language evolves

Visit the full guide periodically to ensure your language stays up to date. Periodic reviews for outdated language are especially important for those maintaining web pages.

Involve diverse people

Be as inclusive and collaborative as you can while creating content, particularly when writing for a broad audience. Do not rely on the same person every time a topic relating to a group they belong to arises.

Respect self-descriptions

Ask people how they want to be described, and respect that language. This includes the use of pronouns, the mention of racial or ethnic background, the use of honorifics or titles, and even the career role and spelling of someone's name.

Be appropriately specific

Avoid relying on a label for a large group of people when discussing only a subset of that group.

Example

- ✓ **Use:** Black, Hispanic, and Asian students reacted positively.
- ✗ **Avoid:** Students of color reacted positively.

Mention personal information thoughtfully

Mentioning an aspect of diversity, such as race, for some people and not others can introduce bias. Mention personal information only when it is immediately relevant to the topic.

Avoid labels

Avoid labeling people by a characteristic, and recognize that a particular characteristic does not define or describe a person as a whole.

Example

- ✓ **Use:** older people
- ✗ **Avoid:** the elderly

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TIP SHEET Disabilities, disorders, and other health conditions

For more context, review the “[Disabilities, disorders, and other health conditions](#)” section of the Inclusivity Style Guide. Use this tip sheet in combination with the “General guidelines” tip sheet.

Be mindful of people-first and identity-first language

People-first language (e.g., “person with autism”) and identity-first language (e.g., “autistic person”) are two ways of considering a condition. Use whichever the person or group prefers.

Example

- ✓ **Use:** people with disabilities, the disability community
- ✗ **Avoid:** the disabled

Use neutral language

When describing a health condition, use neutral terms like “with” or “has” rather than terms that connote pity or imply a person has a reduced quality of life.

Example

- ✓ **Use:** she has cancer
- ✗ **Avoid:** suffers from cancer

Avoid stigmatizing language

Words such as “abuse” have connotations of crime and violence. Instead of “drug abuse,” use the term “misuse” or an adjective in combination with the word “use.”

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

www.acs.org/inclusivityguide

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TIP SHEET Gender and sexuality

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

Use gender-neutral language

Opt for gender-neutral terms rather than gendered equivalents. Using words that refer to men as a default can reinforce the idea that men are or should be dominant.

Example

- ✓ **Use:** humankind will return
- ✗ **Avoid:** mankind will return

Gender is not binary

Not everyone has a gender identity that is completely female or completely male. Some people are a third gender, a mix of female and male, or no gender.

Example

- ✓ **Use:** Welcome, everyone.
- ✗ **Avoid:** Welcome, ladies and gentlemen.

Use the singular “they”

Use the singular “they” for all people who use that pronoun and when referring to an unidentified person. It is a neutral pronoun that can replace gendered language.

Example

- ✓ **Use:** their memory
- ✗ **Avoid:** his or her memory

Know the language

LGBTQ+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning

Nonbinary: An adjective to describe people whose gender identity is not completely male or completely female

Pronouns: The most common are “he/him,” “she/her,” and “they/them.” But many more exist. Ask “What pronouns do you use?” or “What are your pronouns?”

Transgender: Having a gender identity that does not perfectly match the biological sex assigned at birth. It is typically not a gender. Some consider being transgender as part of their identity, and some do not.

Key reminder: Use “is” instead of “identifies as” for gender and sexuality, and avoid “prefers” in reference to pronouns.

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TIP SHEET Race, ethnicity, and nationality

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

Be specific

Racial and ethnic categories are incredibly broad. Being specific is clearer and avoids homogenizing a diverse group.

Use with care

People of color: Think about what level of specificity is appropriate. If referring to the shared experiences of many people of diverse races and ethnicities who are not White, then this might be appropriate. If not, name the races and ethnicities.

Underrepresented: Use the term only when a comparison exists and only when people are truly underrepresented (for example, in some sciences, not all people of color are underrepresented). Specify what category is underrepresented.

Avoid

BIPOC, BAME, POC: Avoid using the abbreviations BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color), BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic), and POC (people of color). Be specific when possible.

Brown: Avoid because it has no clear definition. An exception is if someone identifies as Brown and it is important to mention their race.

Minorities, non-White: Often used inaccurately and has the connotation of being lesser than.

Caucasian: The term was originally used to reinforce inaccurate beliefs in natural racial categorizations. It is not a synonym for “White.”

Know the language

American Indian and Native American: Follow a person’s or group’s preference on which term to use. Use a specific nation’s name when possible.

Asian: Avoid using “Asian” to refer to a specific Asian population, such as East Asian people.

Black and African American: “Black” is a broader term that includes those who aren’t US citizens. Use “Black” if you aren’t sure of someone’s preference.

Hispanic and Latino: Hispanic people are of Spanish-speaking origin, whereas Latino people have a Latin American origin. The terms are not interchangeable, although there is overlap.

Latinx: A gender-neutral alternative to “Latina” or “Latino.” There is a lot of disagreement over use of the word.

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TIP SHEET Accessibility

For more context, review the “[Accessibility](#)” section of the Inclusivity Style Guide. You can also use the “[Accessibility](#)” web page of the [ACS Design System site](#).

Don't forget alt text

Alt text provides people who use screen readers a description of any nontext element, so it is essential for helping those with low or no vision understand a web page. Provide clear, concise alt text for all images. When a longer description is needed, options include providing a text summary beneath the graphic or in a linked document.

Avoid images of text

Using an image of text instead of actual text means that people using screen readers will not be able to access the information. Choose text, an HTML data table, or other languages supported by the platform to share text, formulas, equations, or diagrams.

Make transcripts and captions available

Transcripts make videos and podcasts accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. They are also useful to anyone that benefits from reading information. Captions are also a necessary accessibility feature for videos.

Choose colors carefully

Colors that convey information should be distinguishable by color-blind people and people with low vision. Also, use a combination of colors and symbols or text rather than color alone to communicate information.

Resources

-  [Color Oracle](#)
-  [WebAIM's contrast checker](#)