



 intellect

Inclusive Language Guide

Inclusive Language

Introduction to the Inclusive Language Guide

These guidelines are designed to help authors avoid using language that may harm individuals who are part of minority or marginalized groups. They are not a strict set of rules, but have been put together in the spirit of inclusivity and respect, values Intellect wishes to champion in all its content.

We suggest referring to this guide particularly when you are writing about communities that you are not a part of. Intellect editors may challenge language that they deem inappropriate or offensive, but will always remain open to discussion on the matter. We will not bar authors from talking about their own identity and experiences using the language they prefer.

As a general rule, you should not refer to a person's ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, religion, class or age unless it is relevant to your argument. If you need to refer to any of these characteristics, you should be as specific as possible to avoid homogenising distinct groups e.g. do not refer to someone as 'LGBT' if you know they are transgender or 'Asian' if you know they are Chinese.

In many instances, using person-first language – e.g. 'patient diagnosed with dementia' rather than 'dementia patient' – is preferable, as it prioritises the individual over their characteristic/s. This is the social model, which Intellect prefers. However we will not bar authors from using the identity-first model if they feel it is the better choice for their writing.

It is also advisable to use non-judgemental language when comparing groups or individuals – that is, avoiding 'better' or 'best' when you could use the more objective more/most/less/least/as likely to X.

Some of the language included in the guide may be used with caution, other terms should be avoided altogether. It should also be noted that although some initially derogatory terms have been reclaimed by the communities against which they were initially used, these reclaimed terms should be used with caution, particularly if you are not part of the community. Further, if offensive terms must be referred to when referencing sources that use them, they may be used within quote marks, but their use should be minimized as much as possible.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. It is always preferable that you sensitively ask the people you feature in your work about their background and identity than misrepresent them. Please see this guide's reference section for extensive resources, or e-mail the diversity team on: naomi@intellectbooks.com.

You can read Intellect’s Ethical Guidelines [here](#).

Age

General tips

- When referring to age groups it is best to avoid informal or vague terms such as ‘OAPs’ as well as disparaging or infantilising ones. Vague terms can fail to fully represent the different experiences of that group or imply judgement.
- Try to find a label that describes the specific age group being discussed, such as octogenarians or teenagers.
- Above all, it is important to avoid any language that reinforces stereotypes such as younger people as irresponsible or older people as infirm.
- Age descriptors are frequently gendered. Use terms individuals use to self-describe, whether these are binary ‘female adolescent’, ‘young man’ or non-binary e.g. ‘gender-queer child’ or ‘gender-fluid woman’. Please refer to the [LGBTQ+ and Gender Equality](#) section for further guidance.

Terms to be careful of

Avoid	Use
OAPs, the elderly, aged, seniors	older adults, older people, people in their sixties, octogenarians etc. (see tips above)
senile	person with dementia

Class

General tips

- Avoid using generalizing terms and be mindful of the negative connotations of some terms such as ‘the homeless’.
- Terms referring to socio-economic status have historically been used to imply minority ethnic people. Be explicit in your descriptors e.g. ‘low-income African Americans’ to avoid bias and deficit-based language. Please refer to the [Ethnicity](#) section for further guidance.

- Deficit-based language focuses on what people lack, and can imply blame or judgement for an individual’s economic status, for instance ‘poorly educated’.

Terms to be careful of

Avoid	Use*
high-school dropouts, poorly educated	people without a high-school diploma, people without a university degree
the homeless	people experiencing homelessness
illegal immigrants, undocumented people	people without documents for legal immigration
the poor, poor people	people with low incomes, people below the poverty threshold
welfare mothers	mothers who receive income support, mothers who receive TANF benefits

* See [Disability](#) for further guidance on person-first language.

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Disability

General tips

- Choose language that is neutral, accurate and represents the preference of the groups to which it refers, to convey respect and integrity.
- Avoid passive, victim words.
- Use language that respects disabled people as active individuals with control over their own lives.
- Our accessibility strategy is based on the social model of disability. Under social model thinking, the person has an impairment and is disabled by oppressive barriers of attitude, structures and environments in society. Disabled people are anyone with a long-term impairment who is oppressed and discriminated against because of these barriers. Not everyone uses the social model and that’s ok. [Visit Scope’s webpage at this link for more information about models of disability.](#)

<i>Avoid</i>	<i>Use</i>
able-bodied	non-disabled
afflicted by, suffers from, victim of	has [name of condition or impairment]
the blind	visually impaired person, blind people, blind and partially sighted people
(is) colour blind	(has) colour vision deficiency
cripple, invalid	disabled person
deaf and dumb, deaf mute	deaf, user of British Sign Language (BSL), person with a hearing impairment
Down's, person with Down's	person/people with Down's Syndrome
dwarf, midget	someone with restricted growth or short stature, person with dwarfism, people with dwarfism
an epileptic, diabetic, depressive, etc.	person with epilepsy, diabetes, depression or someone who has epilepsy, diabetes, depression
fits, spells, attacks	seizures
(the) handicapped, (the) disabled	disabled (people)
hearing impaired	<p>D/deaf or hard of hearing. In some cases, the word Deaf is spelled with a capital D to refer to members of the Deaf Community. This would be appropriate if discussing a cultural issue.</p> <p>The use of deaf with the lower-case spelling more typically refers to a hearing loss and is appropriate if cultural issues are not part of the</p>

	discussion topic.
mentally handicapped, mentally defective, retarded, subnormal	with a learning disability (singular) with learning disabilities (plural)
mental patient	person with a mental health condition
normal	non-disabled people/person
spastic	person with cerebral palsy
wheelchair-bound, confined to a wheelchair	wheelchair user

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Ethnicity

General tips

- If a person's ethnicity is not genuinely relevant to your point, don't mention it.
- It's better to be as specific as possible when talking about ethnicity to avoid homogenizing distinct groups.
- A person cannot be described as 'ethnic' – we all have ethnicity, so be specific.
- Do not treat White as default – if it's necessary to mention the ethnicity of people of colour, it's likely that you should also mention the ethnicity of White people in the same context.
- If you are listing ethnicities, alphabetize your list; be careful not to default to putting 'White' first.
- Capitalize Black, Brown, Indigenous and White when referring to a racial, ethnic or cultural context. However, we understand that some authors may prefer to use a lower case letter for 'white' as a protest against White supremacy, and that is also acceptable.
- When describing physical characteristics such as hair, ensure you use the correct language and if necessary double-check with the subject e.g. cornrows, braids.
- Be careful not to conflate ethnicity and nationality. Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian and Pakistani are ethnic groups and nationalities. When referring to the ethnic group, use 'people from the Chinese ethnic group', not e.g. 'Chinese people' (which would suggest nationality).

Terms to be careful of

Avoid	Use
Afro-American; Afro-Caribbean	African American; African Caribbean (no hyphen) or Black
BAME/BME	<p>people of colour; minority ethnic; BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of colour)</p> <p>Note that BAME/BME is generally disliked as it's often used to homogenize everyone who isn't White. The terms above are preferred by many, but it's better to be as specific as possible.</p>
Blacks	Black people
coloured	<p>Black; multiracial (see below other preferable alternatives to 'mixed race'); people of colour; minority ethnic; BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of colour)</p> <p>Be specific if you can.</p>
exotic	Calling a person of colour 'exotic' is othering. If relevant, mention their specific ethnicity.
Gypsy (if referring to Roma people in general; the term is fine if that is the group from which a person hails e.g. the UK and Ireland are home to Gypsy groups)	<p>Roma, Sinti, Travellers, Ashkali, Manush, Jenische, Kaldaresh, Kalé (as appropriate)</p> <p>Please note that while EU institutions use Roma as the umbrella term, not all Romani-speaking groups identify this way, so it's better to be specific if possible.</p>
host society	society receiving migrants
<p>Indigenous [Nationality] / [Country's] Indigenous people</p> <p>e.g.</p> <p>Indigenous Canadians/Canada's Indigenous people</p>	<p>Indigenous people in [Country] (e.g. Indigenous people in Canada)</p> <p>Many Indigenous people see themselves as a nation within a nation (hence, e.g. Indigenous Canadians is not appropriate).</p> <p>Using [Country's] Indigenous people is paternalistic and implies ownership.</p>

<p>Jew - used in a derogatory way or as a verb</p>	<p>Only use the term to factually refer to someone of Jewish ethnicity and/or someone who practises Judaism</p>
<p>Kurd/s; Kurdish (if referring in general to those living in Kurdistan)</p>	<p>Kurdistani/s</p> <p>The term Kurdistani is more inclusive than 'Kurd' or 'Kurdish', because it refers to everyone in the region instead of to a specific ethnicity. However, not everyone identifies as 'Kurdistani'; it is generally most popular with younger generations.</p>
<p>minority/minorities when used to refer to an individual/individuals</p> <p>e.g. there are three minorities on the board</p>	<p>Be specific about the person/people's ethnicity (as far as is relevant).</p> <p>Minority ethnic (which prioritizes minority over ethnic and better conveys that we all belong to an ethnic group).</p> <p>You can also use people of colour + its variations (women of colour, academics of colour, etc.).</p> <p>Use only as a mass noun.</p> <p>Bear in mind that 'ethnic minorities' as a term can include White minorities i.e. in the UK anyone outside White British would be in a minority ethnic group.</p> <p>Make sure if you do use 'minorities' the group should be a minority in the context – either numerically or according to power held.</p>
<p>mixed; mixed people; mixed race people</p>	<p>Biracial/multiracial (be aware not all bi- or multiracial people will want to identify in this way and you should check); people with a mixed ethnic background; people from the mixed ethnic group; dual heritage</p>
<p>Native/Aboriginal</p>	<p>Indigenous</p>

non-White	people of colour; minority ethnic (excluding White minorities); BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of colour)
oriental (when referring to a person)	Asian, Chinese, Japanese (as appropriate)
race	<p>ethnicity</p> <p>Ethnicity is the social group a person belongs to, and either identifies with or is identified with by others, as a result of a mix of cultural and other factors including language, diet, religion, ancestry and physical features traditionally associated with race. It is self-defined and may change over time.</p> <p>Meanwhile, race is controversial as there is no objective set of categories and categorizing by appearance is of questionable validity when studies have found 93-95% genetic variation is within commonly recognized 'racial' groups.</p>
racially diverse (when you mean 'not White')	people of colour; minority ethnic (excluding White minorities); BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of colour)
redskin	<p>Indigenous People/s; Indigenous people in America</p> <p>When this term came into use Indigenous Peoples were being violently removed from their land; it is a slur</p>
slave ¹	<p>enslaved (people, mothers, workers, artisans, children, etc). Using enslaved (as an adjective) disaggregates the condition of being enslaved with the status of 'being' a slave. People aren't/weren't slaves; they are/were enslaved.</p> <p>If possible, use the enslaved people's names when referring to them in your work.</p>

¹ Although ethnicity and slavery are not necessarily related, discourse around slavery is often connected to power dynamics around ethnicity, hence its inclusion in this section.

<p>slave master/slaveholder/slave owner</p>	<p>enslaver</p> <p>The term 'master' transmits the aspirations and values of the enslaving class without naming the practices they engaged.</p> <p>Alternatives: those who claimed people as property, those who held people in slavery.</p>
<p>slave mistress/enslaved mistress</p> <p>slave breeding/breeders</p> <p>slave concubine/enslaved concubine</p>	<p>Enslaved person who survived sexual violence; also consider centring the abuser's crimes and referring to them as an abuser or rapist, or enslaver who sexually abused those they enslaved. Never refer to sexual abuse of the enslaved as 'sex'.</p> <p>Forced reproduction</p>
<p>Third World</p>	<p>developing countries</p> <p>If necessary to use e.g. when discussing sources that use the term, 'Third World' may be used within quote marks, but its use should be minimised as much as possible.</p> <p>The term has negative connotations, which include characterizing nations or people as uncivilized/primitive.</p>
<p>tribe (used as a generic term in reference to Indigenous Peoples in the US)</p>	<p>nation; people</p> <p>Not all Indigenous nations in the US have been allowed to gain recognition as a tribe, so it's best to research the specific nation you are writing about, and avoid 'tribe' if not.</p> <p>Do not use tribe to refer to a sports team or social circle.</p>
<p>West Indian</p>	<p>African Caribbean, if referring to those of African descent. However be careful as this can homogenize various distinct groups of Black people in this culturally diverse area.</p>

White Gypsy/Roma ethnic group	White Gypsy and Roma ethnic group (using a slash in this instance implies that the groups are the same).
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LGBTQ+ and Gender Equality

General tips

- LGBTQIA+ is itself not seen as an inclusive term by some, and although we recommend the use of LGBTQIA+ or 2SLGBTQIA+ in general (the latter including Two Spirit people, an identity found in some Indigenous groups), varied perspectives should be taken into account. We respect authors' rights to use any initialisms they are comfortable with and are applicable to their work: LGBTQ+, LGBT, GLBT, QIPOC and any others are all valid.
- Be careful of using historically derogatory terms, even those that may be reclaimed by LGBTQ+ people, such as 'fag', 'dyke' or 'queer'. Similarly, any phrase that suggests being LGBTQ+ is shameful, negative or a preference, should be avoided.
- Try not to generalize about the people you are discussing. Terms like 'gay lifestyle' can undermine the diversity of LGBTQ+ experience, and should be avoided. Similarly, do not use LGBTQ+ as a catch-all term if you are not discussing an issue that affects all parts of the initialism; e.g. doesn't affect transgender people or bisexual people, etc.
- Use the guidance of the person you are discussing in order to determine if specific terms apply to them. The way someone defines themselves may not be obvious, nor does it need to be.
- It is never appropriate to refer to someone's pronouns or name in quotation marks ('she' said, 'Elliott' said), or in any other way that invalidates them. This includes other derogatory terms such as 'he/she', '(wo)man', 'it', 'shim', 'she-male'.
- Avoid gender-biased descriptions that reinforce gender stereotypes. A good way to check if the language is gender-biased is to change the gender used within your sentence.
- Questions to ask yourself:
 - Have you used 'man' or 'men' or words containing them to refer to people who may not be men?
 - If you have mentioned someone's sex or gender, was it necessary to do so?
 - Do you use any occupational (or other) stereotypes?
 - Do you provide the same kinds of information and descriptions when writing about people of different genders?
 - Have you used 'he', 'him', 'his', or 'himself' to refer to people who may not use he/him pronouns?
- Avoid gendered metaphorical expressions; e.g. Mother Nature, Father Time

- If you are unsure of a person’s pronouns and are not able to check them, we suggest using ‘they’ and ‘their’ as a gender neutral singular pronoun:
 - Use they or their instead of he or she: *Before a production editor sends a book to be copy-edited, they need to ensure it has passed peer review.*
 - Use they when referring to generic subjects: *Production editors must familiarise themselves with the revised production bible.*
 - Use the pronoun one: *An author in the UK might reply to an e-mail earlier in the day than one in the US.*
 - Use the relative pronoun who: *A peer reviewer who has completed their review, will be entitled to choose three books.*
 - Use the passive voice: *The author of a communication must have direct and reliable evidence of the situation being described.*

Terms to be careful of

Avoid	Use
Bathroom Bill	Refer to the specific law / ordinance. The term ‘bathroom bill’ is politically charged. It can be seen as simplifying arguments on both sides, and politicizing the role of public bathrooms when discussing complex nondiscrimination laws.
biologically male, biologically female, born male, born female	assigned, designated or assumed... at birth. Use with care, as these terms can be problematic. A person’s gender can be a complex mixture of biology and gender identity and should not be simplified, even if they do identify with the sex assigned at birth. ‘Assigned... at birth’ is seen as more inclusive.
deviant, disordered, perverted...	Terms like these suggest that being LGBTQ+ is a psychological illness, and should be avoided. If they are used to analyse a historical attitude towards the LGBTQ+ community, the bias within this use of language should be clearly shown.
freshman	first-year student
gay agenda, homosexual agenda special rights	Refer to the specific issue being discussed by activist groups. Use equal rights or equal protection.

	<p>'Gay agenda' or 'homosexual agenda' are politically charged terms used to imply a unified, sinister and dangerous motive behind LGBTQ+ activism.</p>
Gender Identity Disorder (GID)	<p>Gender Dysphoria</p> <p>GID is an outdated term, and should be avoided. Not all transgender people have or desire a clinical diagnosis of gender dysphoria.</p>
gender-bender, gender-bending	<p>Use with care, self-referentially, or with the guidance of the person you are discussing. Not synonymous with gender fluid, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, non-binary, etc.</p>
<p>gendered occupational terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - chairman - policeman - fireman - steward, stewardess, air hostess - actor, actress - congressman - mailman/postman 	<p>gender-neutral occupational terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - chair, chairperson, coordinator, head - police officer - fire fighter - flight attendant - actor - congressional representative - mail carrier, letter carrier, postal worker
hermaphrodite	<p>intersex</p> <p>Note that intersexuality does not imply someone's sexual orientation or gender identity.</p>
homosexual	<p>gay, gay person, lesbian, bisexual, queer, etc. as appropriate.</p> <p>Homosexual has a clinical and negative association and has been used by anti-LGBTQ+ campaigns.</p>
man (when referring to a hypothetical individual, or humanity in general)	<p>person, individual</p>
man-made	<p>machine-made, synthetic, artificial</p>
mankind	<p>human beings, humanity, people</p>
manpower	<p>staffing</p>
practising, avowed, admitted, confessed, acknowledged [gay person]	<p>'Out' or openly is preferred, as other terms have more negative, shameful or confessional</p>

	<p>connotations. Some people also choose to avoid 'openly'.</p>
<p>pre-op / post-op pre-operative / post-operative</p>	<p>transition / transitioning</p> <p>Use of pre- or post-op suggests that a person must undergo surgery in order to transition, which is not the case. Avoid overemphasizing the role of surgery.</p>
<p>preferred pronouns male pronouns female pronouns</p>	<p>pronouns</p> <p>Pronouns are not necessarily tied to someone's gender identity or biology.</p>
<p>sex change/sex change operation Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS)</p>	<p>Gender Confirmation Surgery</p> <p>SRS is a term still used by some medical professionals, but it can also be seen as reductive.</p>
<p>sexual preference</p>	<p>sexual orientation, orientation</p>
<p>sodomy, sodomite</p>	<p>A derogatory term, used to demonize and criminalize certain sexual acts. If these terms are used to explain a legal or historical position, the bias within the use of language should be clearly shown.</p>
<p>the common man</p>	<p>the average person</p>
<p>a transgender / transgenders (n.) transgendered person transgenderism</p>	<p>a transgender person</p> <p>Transgender should be used as an adjective, not a noun or a participial adjective 'transgendered'. Terms such as 'transgenderism' are more often used by anti-transgender campaigns to suggest that being transgender is a condition.</p>
<p>transsexual (adj.)</p>	<p>Transsexual is not an umbrella term nor a synonym for 'transgender' - it should be used with care, self-referentially, or with the guidance of the person you are discussing. Transsexual should not be used as a noun. 'Tranny' is often a derogatory word and should be avoided.</p>
<p>transvestite</p>	<p>An outdated and often derogatory word. 'Cross-dresser' can be seen as more appropriate, though the person's preference should take priority.</p>

	Neither 'cross-dresser' or 'transvestite' indicate that a person is transgender, or gay. Not synonymous with drag queen or drag king.
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Religion

General tips

- Be mindful that sweeping generalizations might ignore denominational differences within a certain religious movement, or unnecessarily conflate terms (note the Arab/Muslim distinction drawn below).
- Consider any gendered references to figures of worship in your work, and whether they owe themselves to necessity (biblical exegesis, for instance), or prejudice.
- Consistency of capitalization is most important:
 - Employ the lower-case 'god/goddess' when discussing polytheistic religion(s) or using as a common noun.
 - Exceptions may be made if quoting directly from scripture (in most standardized versions of the Bible, for instance, non-specific uses of the term 'god' are often capitalized, and reverential capitalization used, e.g. 'Him', 'His', 'He').
 - Ensure that all appearances of deistic names as proper nouns are capitalized.
 - If using gendered pronouns in reference to God outside of direct quotation, remain consistent in your application/exclusion of capitals.
- Dysphemisms that stereotype religious tradition (such as 'Bible-basher') are, when used interpretatively, often inappropriate and serve to compromise the standing of an academic text.
- Be careful not to inadvertently ostracize religious or social groups through your terminological choices. Question whether labels such as 'BC/AD' are appropriate.
- Be careful not to inadvertently express ableism through your terminological choices. Question whether expressions such as 'standing up for one's beliefs' serve as the best turn of phrase

Terms to be careful of

Avoid	Use
Arab (not all Arabs are Muslim – or, indeed, inclined to any religion – and vice versa)	Muslim
BC/AD (numbering of years)	BCE/CE

He/His/Father (gendered pronouns bind us necessarily to a particular orthodoxy or metaphorical range that excludes – in this particular case, a patriarchal subtext reigns)	Utilize names: God/Allah/Yahweh, etc. or in a non-specific milieu: Parent/Creator Also god/goddess (lower case) when concerning polytheistic religions
Jew – used in a derogatory way or as a verb	Only use the term to factually refer to someone of Jewish ethnicity and/or someone who practises Judaism
Kingdom/Princedom	Domain/Realm/Sphere/House
Layman/Laywoman/Clergyman	Layperson/Minister/Leader/Ecclesiastic
Master/Son/Lord/Son of God (ordinarily referring to Jesus)	Teacher/Child (of God)/Heir/Sovereign (advocacy also of ‘The Human One’)
pagan (lower case – suggestive of non-Christian belief)	Pagan (capitalized, to reference revived religions, such as Wicca and Druidry, or Indigenous religions, such as Romuva, Voudun or Santeria)
Pejorative expressions/Dysphemisms: Bible bash/God bother To ‘jew’	Proselytize/Promote/Discuss Bargain/Negotiate/Barter
Vision/‘Standing up for one’s beliefs’ (the latter two examples betray a veiled ableism)	Aspiration/Values/‘Sticking up for one another’

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References

Age and Class

[APA Style](#)

Butcher’s Copy-Editing: The Cambridge Handbook for Editors, Copy-Editors and Proofreaders
The Chicago Manual of Style

[The Language of Ageism: Why We Need to Use Words Carefully](#)
New Hart's Rules: The Oxford Style Guide
[Purdue Online Writing Lab](#)

Ethnicity

[Black British Academics](#)
[British Sociological Association](#)
[European Network Against Racism](#)
[Foreman, P. Gabrielle et al. \(2022\), 'Writing about slavery/teaching about slavery: This might help', community-sourced document.](#)
[Gov.uk](#)
Iraq since the Invasion: People and Politics in a State of Conflict
The Kurds of Iraq: Ethnonationalism and National Identity in Iraqi Kurdistan
[Lexico](#)
[National Association of Black Journalists \(NABJ\)](#)
[Radical Copyeditor 1](#)
[Radical Copyeditor 2](#)
[Scottish Public Health Observatory](#)
[Style Guide for Reporting on Indigenous People](#)
[United Nations](#)
[University of Cambridge](#)

LGBTQ+ and Gender Equality

[Associated Press Stylebook](#)
[GLAAD Media Reference guide](#)
[NABJ style guide](#)
[NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists](#)
[Pink News - The Ultimate LGBT Glossary](#)
[Re:searching for LGBTQ2S+ Health](#)
[Stonewall](#)
[The Language of Inclusion, 3rd edition](#)
[The Writing Center](#)
[United Nations: Gender-Inclusive Language](#)
[University of North Carolina: Gender-Inclusive Language](#)
[YMCA Canada](#)

Religion

[18F Content Guide](#)
[Black Flag Theology](#)
[British Council](#)
[Campaign Against Anti-Semitism](#)

[GSMA Inclusive Language Guide](#)
[*Journal for the Study of Religion*](#)
[Metropolitan Community Churches](#)
[Religion Stylebook](#)
[*Religious Education*](#)
[Rider University](#)

