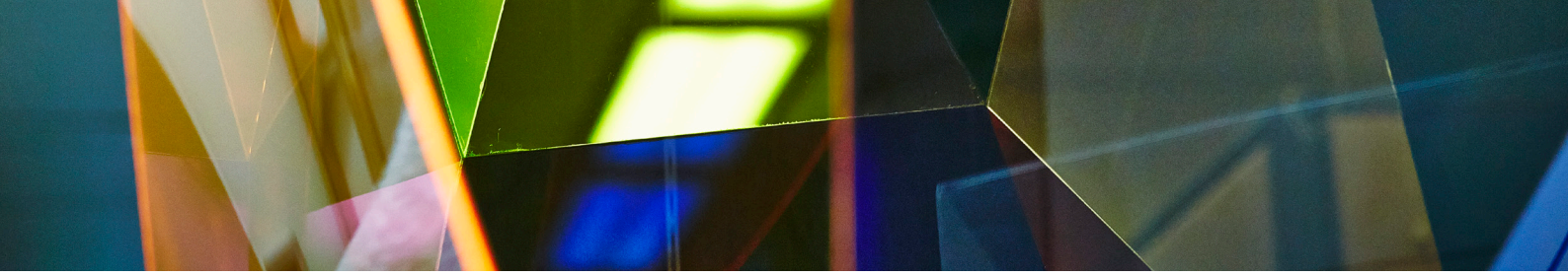




Murdoch
UNIVERSITY

Guide to **Inclusive Language**



Murdoch University is committed to creating an inclusive, welcoming, and equitable culture that values the rich diversity of our staff and students. Language is powerful and dynamic. We use it every day in speaking and writing, yet may never have stopped to think how we may be including or excluding people in our audience. Inclusive words can be used to create a sense of being valued, respected and part of the community.

Creating and maintaining an inclusive culture is everybody's responsibility; language is an important way you can help make Murdoch a welcoming place for our community.

What is inclusive language?

Inclusive language is language that is free from words, phrases or tones that reflect prejudiced, stereotyped or discriminatory views of particular people or groups. It is also language that doesn't deliberately or inadvertently exclude people from our conversations both when we are communicating directly with someone, and when describing someone who isn't present. It is not about impinging on free speech or political correctness; it is about communicating in a way that is accessible and respectful, and values, includes and empowers all members of our audience.

Inclusive language acknowledges that meaning and connotations of words can change. Previously accepted terms may no longer be perceived as acceptable. It is more important to apply inclusive language principles rather than learning specific appropriate phrases, as these may change in meaning over time.

Why is inclusive language important?

Language is our main form of communication and plays a powerful role both in contributing to or in eliminating discrimination. Using inclusive language creates a more open and respectful environment, and helps break down prejudice, stigma and stereotypes. When inclusive language is used it can make people feel included, valued and empowered.

Inclusive language is a key attribute of a progressive modern, diverse and inclusive society. The goal of developing inclusive societies is embodied in a number of international, national and state laws relating to equal opportunity and anti-discrimination. As a result, it is generally unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of a wide range of characteristics including race, colour, religion, national or ethnic origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, age or disability, be it physical, sensory, intellectual or psychiatric. There is no place in written or spoken communication for uninformed, prejudiced, stereotyping or insensitive references to a person or people based on their actual or perceived characteristics or membership of particular groups.

Principles of inclusive language

- Put people first. Use people-centric language that emphasises individuality ahead of their characteristics or the demographic group they belong to. People-centric language doesn't classify or stereotype people based on their association or identity with a group or culture.
- Only reference personal attributes or characteristics when it is relevant to the context.
- Consider a strengths-based approach (recognising the resilience of individuals and focussing on abilities, knowledge and capacities), rather than a deficit approach (focussing on deficiencies or supposed failings of a person, or group of people).
- Don't make assumptions about people or their characteristics based on stereotypes or limited information. If you aren't sure, ask about the terminology the person prefers and respect choice and style in how they talk about themselves.
- Be conscious of the implications of your language. Avoid words and phrases that might exclude others or make them invisible. Avoid language and expressions that disparage or trivialise others.
- Where possible, empower the person or group to speak for themselves.
- If you do need to speak on the behalf of a group of people, it is very important that you consult widely to ensure that the language you use is reflective of the group.
- Address and remove stereotypes and myths. If someone uses inappropriate language in your presence speak out against it and correct the inappropriate language used, if you feel safe to do so.
- Be aware of the context of the language being used. Some terms are ok to use by people as a means of claiming their identity, but are not ok, and can be seen as derogatory, when used by others.
- Acknowledge that sometimes our unconscious biases mean we can say things that exclude others – even when we do not intend to.
- Responding with 'it was just a joke' or 'don't take it so seriously' is not helpful. If you have caused offence, even accidentally, take responsibility and make an effort to understand how and why.

Inclusive language for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Murdoch University acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Owners of the land on which Murdoch University is located; the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation. It is upon their ancestral lands that Murdoch University is built.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia have diverse and distinctive cultures, which span more than 65,000 years. Inclusive language recognises and values the diversity of languages, communication and social protocols of the original custodians of Australia and the contributions they have and continue to make to contemporary Australian society.

Good practice inclusive language

- ✓ Being conscious of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Acknowledge the historical context and current systemic barriers faced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- ✓ Using capital letter initials when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, i.e. 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' peoples, 'Indigenous Australian' peoples, 'Aboriginal' person or 'First Peoples'.
- ✓ Recognising that popular and acceptable usage of names changes over time and taking the time to find out what the people themselves prefer to be named. This may depend upon the family structure and land area associated with each particular person.
- ✓ Using the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' peoples in full and don't abbreviate to 'ATSI'. Aboriginal shouldn't be used as a general noun, e.g., the aboriginal.
- ✓ Seeking advice if unsure of the correct names and terms when required in appropriate contexts to refer to a specific language or cultural group.

Language and practices to avoid

- ✗ Isolating or excluding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, for example by stating that 'all Australians have access to quality medical care' excludes the lived experience of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- ✗ Avoiding the use of expressions that ignore the history, achievements and continuing cultures of Aboriginal people in Australia, e.g., 'Australia was first settled in 1788'.
- ✗ Using language in English for Aboriginal cultural practices. These are often inaccurate cultural conceptualisations, e.g. 'Walkabout'. Such terms can have negative connotations when used inappropriately or out of context.
- ✗ Interchanging cultural group names such as Yamatji and Noongar for 'Indigenous'. These terms refer specifically to a group of Aboriginal Australians who identify as connected to specific land, culture and language.
- ✗ 'Aborigine' is a generic word should be avoided when referring to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as it is a generic term for the original inhabitant of any country.
- ✗ Avoid any judgements about whether someone looks like an Indigenous person.
- ✗ Using stereotypical descriptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which implies that all members of communities share the same characteristics.
- ✗ Trivialising or misrepresenting important cultural beliefs and practices, e.g. referring to the Dreamtime as myths or legends. Words that imply that Aboriginal creation and religious beliefs are less valid than other religious beliefs, should be avoided.
- ✗ Making assumptions about someone's ancestry based on their physical features, e.g. avoid eugenic terminology such as 'half-caste', 'full-blood' and 'part Aboriginal' should not be used.

Inclusive language for people with a disability

How we write and speak about disability can have a profound effect on the way people living with disability are viewed by the community and themselves. It is likely that one in five people you meet will live with disability. Remember that disabilities can be visible and invisible.

It is important to remember that people living with disability are only 'disabled' to the degree that the physical or social environment does not accommodate their disability or health condition.

Good practice inclusive language

- ✓ Use people centric language: the disability doesn't define the person. Always refer to the person before referring to their disability e.g.
 - Person with disability or people with disability
 - Person with Autism
 - A person who has epilepsy
- ✓ Use a strength-based approach, such as 'uses a mobility aid', rather than 'can't walk or stand' i.e. one highlights independence, ability and freedom, the other highlights the deficit.

Language and practices to avoid

- ✗ Avoid inappropriate language such as cripple, handicapped, mental patient, wheelchair bound, disabled person.
- ✗ Avoid using historically derogatory words and phrases like retard or spaz in any way or context, e.g., 'the computer is having a spaz' or 'you are such a retard'.
- ✗ Avoid using sensationalizing language or using euphemisms, e.g., 'physically challenged' or 'special'. Saying someone with a disability is 'an inspiration' or 'brave' or 'amazing' for doing everyday things such as going to work is considered to be condescending.
- ✗ Avoid terms that define the disability as a limitation, such as 'confined to a wheelchair'. A wheelchair liberates, it doesn't confine.
- ✗ Never make assumptions about disability, some disabilities may be invisible.

Inclusive language for people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Australia is a racially and culturally diverse nation with a rich, diverse and long-standing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) culture. However, the dominant culture in Australia, for the past 220 years or so, has been Anglo-Celtic Australian and is widely regarded as the 'norm' by which people from other backgrounds are often unfairly compared or assessed.

Use of culturally-inclusive language means all ethnic and cultural groups are represented as equally valid. In general, avoid referring to the ethnic and racial background of a person or group unless there is a transparently valid or legal reason for doing so.

Good practice inclusive language

- ✓ The term CALD refers to people from 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse' backgrounds. Older terms you may hear include: NESB (from 'non-English speaking background') or LBOTE (Language Background Other than English). These terms can refer to staff and domestic and international students.
- ✓ Pronounce people's names correctly. If in doubt, ask the person and if announcing names, ensure accuracy.
- ✓ Use the words 'given name' or 'preferred name' rather than or 'first name' which does not suit the cultural and ethnic groups in Australia who use their family name first. Similarly, 'Christian name' is inappropriate for people who are not Christian.
- ✓ Only reference someone's cultural background when it is appropriate for the context. Generally, it is unnecessary to refer to someone's cultural background, but if you do need to use people-centric language e.g., person of Sudanese descent. Some Australians prefer not to be identified through their cultural origin or descent at all, this preference should be respected.

Language and practices to avoid

- ✗ Avoid undue emphasis on differences, e.g., introducing all your colleagues, but describing one as 'Chinese'.
- ✗ Avoid making someone's culture invisible, e.g., the use of umbrella terms such as 'Asians' ignores the many racial, cultural and ethnic differences within the geographic boundaries of Asia. Instead refer to the persons ethnicity where appropriate, e.g., Indonesian, Chinese etc.
- ✗ If having difficulty pronouncing a name, persist, rather than saying things like "Oh that was a very difficult name to pronounce".
- ✗ Avoid expressing the assumption that a person with a recognisable accent was not born in Australia.
- ✗ Avoid 'positive/patronising' comments based on stereotypes, such as 'Where are you from?' or 'You speak such good English'

Inclusive language for diverse genders, sexes and sexualities

People of diverse genders, sexes and sexualities have always been part of Australia. However, the considerable discrimination and bias in society against people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual (LGBTIQ+) continues to be a problem in today's society making many people feel to invisible, marginalised and inferior to other people.

It can be difficult for people to be open about identifying as LGBTIQ+ for fear of discrimination or harassment, affecting the quality of their work, study and inclusion in university life. Inclusive language that embraces the reality and experiences of people who identify as LGBTIQ+ contributes to creating a safe and inclusive culture.

Good practice inclusive language

- ✓ Recognise the diversity of family structures and relationships. Do not assume that someone's partner is of the opposite gender.
- ✓ Using inclusive language such as 'partner' or 'spouse' before using wife/husband/boyfriend/girlfriend when referring to a person or people's personal relationships unless the preferred term is specified by the person.
- ✓ Challenging heteronormative assumptions, homophobic jokes and derogatory comments when these are expressed by others, particularly when done in a threatening or offensive manner.
- ✓ If misgendering someone, apologise briefly and start using respectful gender language. (In that moment, prolonged discussion about the misgendering is likely to make the person who was misgendered feel worse.)
- ✓ If someone discloses to you that they identify as part of the LGBTIQ+ community, respectfully ask what terms they use to describe themselves, then use those terms. Ask or be guided by them about who to share this information with as they may not be comfortable with being 'out'.
- ✓ When unsure of someone's pronoun, asking them respectfully, and preferably privately. Use a question like "Can I ask what pronoun you use?" instead of "What pronoun do you prefer?". A person's pronoun and identity are not a preference. Instead, just ask what pronoun they use.

Language and practices to avoid

- ✗ Avoid turns of phrase that trivialise or demean the experience of members of the LGBTIQ+ community, such as:
 - What a waste he is gay.
 - That is so gay (as a put-down).
 - He makes an ugly woman (referring to someone who is transgender).
 - He/she is just confused./sitting on the fence (referring to a bisexual person).
- ✗ Avoid potentially derogatory terms such as poofter, lezzo, lemon, faggot, fairy, tranny. Some previously derogatory terms have been reclaimed by members of the LGBTIQ+ community but, as a general rule, it is best for those who do not claim the identity themselves to avoid the use of these terms.
- ✗ Do not sensationalise gender diversity, or silence or ignore gender diverse people by only including heterosexual perspectives.
- ✗ Do not ask intrusive questions about people's bodies, sexual activities or private lives.
- ✗ Don't assume that everyone has a heterosexual outlook or identity. Avoid hetero-normative language and concepts.

Inclusive language for gender diversity

Historically, in the English-speaking world, language usage has privileged men and often rendered other genders invisible or inferior. The use of 'man' as a generic term excludes women, trans* and non-binary individuals, similarly words like 'mankind' and 'chairman' make people think 'male' rather than 'female' and render other genders invisible or diminishes their status.

The most inclusive strategy is to use words that are non-binary and gender neutral.

Good practice inclusive language

- ✓ Use neutral, gender neutral terms for occupations and job titles that recognise occupational diversity and omitting gender where irrelevant:
 - chair or chairperson, not chairman
 - flight attendant, not air hostess or stewardess
 - fire fighters, not firemen
 - 'CEO accused of...' not 'Female CEO accused of...'
- ✓ Using gender neutral terms such as:
 - 'welcome to all', not 'ladies and gentlemen'
 - 'humankind' not 'mankind'
 - 'workforce' not 'manpower'/'staffing' not 'manning'
 - 'the admin staff' or 'administrators' not 'the girls in the office'
- ✓ Use gender neutral pronouns such as 'they' or 'them' instead of 'him/her' or 'his/her' e.g. The Lecturer will display their timetable on their office door.
- ✓ Ask someone what their preferred pronouns (e.g., he, she, they, zie) and respectfully use them correctly.
- ✓ Using generic terms to avoid personifying inanimate objects as male or female, e.g.,
- ✓ instead of 'She's a fine ship' try 'It's a fine ship'

Language and practices to avoid

- ✗ Do not use expressions which stereotype gender roles, such as:
 - women stay home and care for children and men work
 - women are not interested in engineering, science, maths etc
 - men can't nurture children or are deficient in the kitchen
- ✗ Avoiding patronising expressions such as:
 - 'the girls in the office' instead use 'the admin staff' or 'administrators'
 - referring to people as 'dear', 'love' or 'sweetie'
 - using offensive colloquialisms such as 'sheilas', 'birds', 'bimbos' and 'jocks'.
- ✗ Avoid using unnecessary gender references, e.g., the male nurse or the woman doctor, unless it is appropriate for the context.
- ✗ Don't make an assumption about someone's gender based on their name or physical features.
- ✗ Avoid sexist descriptions such as 'The student's behaviour was typically female, instead use 'The student's behaviour was ... (specify the behaviour).'
- ✗ Don't use gender references in a demeaning or trivialising way, e.g., 'throw like a girl'.

Inclusive language for all ages

Inclusive language counters many of the myths about youth and ageing. Language and representations should reflect the fact that both young and older people are independent and contributing to the social and economic well-being of the community.

Good practice inclusive language

- ✓ Only refer to age when relevant to the context, and when it is necessary use people-centric language e.g., people over 45/55/65 years; older or elderly (for 80+)
- ✓ Use language that recognises the value of the person's experience and knowledge and the richness of their perspective.

Language and practices to avoid

- ✗ Don't stereotype and demonise people regardless of their age group, not all older people are ill or bad-tempered, just as not all young people are arrogant or lazy, and not everyone has a 'mid-life crisis'.
- ✗ Avoid language which shows an assumption of incompetence based on a person's older age for example
 - "Despite his age, Harry could understand the software..." or
 - "She's done a great job for someone her age..."
- ✗ Be mindful that students are of all ages and not refer to them as 'kids' or 'young people'.
- ✗ Terms like 'baby boomers' and 'millennials' may explain commonalities between generations who share socio-cultural histories, but these terms fail to account for other influences such as culture, ethnicity, class, race and gender.

Inclusive language for social inclusion

People are often assigned particular characteristics on the basis of factors such as where they live, how they speak, their cultural background, perceived levels of income and access to financial resources, and their physical appearance. This often result in people being unfairly and inaccurately judged against some perceived norm. Language can often reinforce class and socioeconomic divides, strengthen stereotypes and trivialise a person's experience.

Good practice inclusive language

- ✓ Treat all people, regardless of their perceived or actual economic circumstances or where they live, with respect, fairness and dignity.
- ✓ Only refer to location and relative economic circumstances where this is relevant to the discussion.
- ✓ Using terms such as 'low-socioeconomic' when referring to low-income or wealth.

Language and practices to avoid

- ✗ Avoid normalised references that reinforce traditional class structures, stereotypes or trivialise a person's experience such as:
 - "living off/cheating/bludging on the dole" instead use "a person/family entitled to government support".
- ✗ Avoid negative terms relating to location or social status, such as 'bogans', 'bum', etc.

For more information about inclusive language, visit murdoch.edu.au or email access@murdoch.edu.au