

Language Usage: Non-Discriminatory Language

UNE supports the use of non-discriminatory language in the work of its staff and students. It promotes the use of inclusive language to address and describe all people regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, and physical or intellectual characteristics. Use acceptable, inclusive language for:

1. Gender and/or sexual orientation
2. Indigenous peoples
3. Physical and/or intellectual disability
4. Race, ethnicity, and/or religion
5. Other examples

NOTE: APA referencing style is used in this factsheet.



GRAMMAR CHECKERS will not signal the inappropriate use of language in terms of discrimination. You will need to know the language guidelines for using non-discriminatory language and apply these to your writing.

1. Gender and/or sexual orientation

You should use *inclusive language* (gender neutral, non-sexist, non-gender specific) that includes and treats men, women, intersex, trans, and gender-diverse people equally.

Examples

- ✓ Use titles and modes of address consistently for men and for women.
(e.g., Use *Ms* in preference to *Miss/Mrs*, unless this is preferred.)
- ✓ Use *he*, *his*, *him*, *himself* only when referring specifically to males
(e.g., Each student is responsible for ~~his~~ their* library loan.)
- ✓ Use the words *man/woman*, *girl/boy*, *gentleman/lady* in a parallel way.
(e.g., Ladies and ~~men~~ gentlemen should . . . OR Men and women should . . .)
- ✓ Use similar terms when describing the same characteristics in women and men.
(e.g., Only ambitious men and (~~aggressive~~) women succeed in the business world.)
- ✓ Avoid using occupational titles containing the 'feminine' suffixes -ess, -ette, -trix, -ienne.
(e.g., ~~authoress~~ – author; ~~headmistress/master~~ – principal; ~~comediienne~~ – comedian)
- ✓ Avoid using gender-specific occupational titles
(e.g., ~~tradesman~~ – tradesperson; ~~businessman~~ – executive; ~~craftsman~~ – artisan)
- ✓ Avoid the generic use of man or of composite words involving the syllable 'man'.
(e.g., ~~spokesman~~ – spokesperson; ~~mankind~~ – humanity; ~~chairman~~ – chair)
- ✓ Avoid using gendered terms or expressions that may be patronising and/or demeaning
(e.g., Students should seek assistance from the ~~ladies~~ staff in the office.)
- ✓ Avoid irrelevant, gratuitous gender descriptions
(e.g., the ~~lady~~ editor; the ~~female~~ doctor; the ~~homosexual~~ minister)
- ✓ Avoid unnecessary reference to the relationship and/or parenting status of a person or a group.
(e.g., Jack ~~Smith and his wife~~ and Jane Smith; the ~~mother-of-five~~ woman appointed to the position of Minister of Education.)

*The use of the plural 'they' to replace a singular subject (each student) is accepted by the Oxford English Dictionary.

2. Indigenous peoples

Examples

- ✓ Always use capital 'A' for Aboriginals (Aboriginal peoples, Australian Aboriginals), capitals for Torres Strait Islanders, and capitals for the names of the various groups to which individuals belong (e.g., Koorie, Goorie, Yolngu).

- ✓ Never use negative, discriminatory, or stereotypical terms that would be offensive to the Indigenous peoples of Australia.

3. Physical and/or intellectual ability

Examples

- ✓ Avoid unnecessary reference to the physical and/or intellectual ability of a person or a group.
(e.g., A **blind** [unnecessary] musician played the violin at the local concert.)
- ✓ Avoid using terms that equate a person or a group with a disability.
(e.g., a **blind** musician – a musician with a vision impairment)
- ✓ Use terms that recognise that a disability is only one characteristic of the person or group.
(e.g., ~~a disabled person~~ – a person with a disability or people with special needs; ~~deaf and blind~~ – people with visual impairments and/or hearing impairments; ~~handicapped~~ – people with physical disabilities and people with psychiatric disorders)
- ✓ Avoid imprecise terms and euphemisms for a person or a group with a disability.
(e.g., ‘schizophrenia’ is a particular type of psychiatric disorder, not a general term)
- ✓ Never use the terms *victim* or *sufferer* to refer to a person or a group who has or has had an illness, disease, or disability.

4. Race, ethnicity, and/or religion

Examples

- ✓ Use the term ‘Australian’ for all groups of people who live permanently in Australia. If it is important to specify the descent or ethnicity of a person or group, or to distinguish between people born in Australia and elsewhere, then use a qualifier in conjunction with the noun ‘Australian’ or use hyphenated forms.
(e.g., *Vietnamese-born Australian*; *Jewish Australians*; *Italo-Australian*)
- ✓ Avoid unnecessary reference to the ethnic or racial background of a person or a group.
(e.g., *Some **Lebanese** [unnecessary] youths were injured in the accident.*)
- ✓ Avoid terms that denigrate a person or a group on the basis of race, ethnicity, and/or religion.

5. Other examples

- ✓ Avoid unwarranted assumptions about age.
(e.g., ~~old people’s home~~ – aged care facility; ~~pensioner, geriatrics~~ – more suitable terms include older people, seniors, mature aged)
- ✓ Avoid terms that denigrate a person or a group on the basis of geographical location.
(e.g., *Do not use derogatory terms to refer in an unfavourable manner to the places where people live, such as country **hicks** – people who live in the country.*)



Legal requirements

Australia’s commitment to inclusiveness is embodied in both federal and state laws. They include the federal *Racial Discriminations Act 1975*, *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986* and *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, as well as the various state Acts relating to equal opportunity and anti-discrimination. Under this legislation, it is generally unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of race, colour, national or ethnic origin, gender, or physical or mental capabilities.

Linguistic discrimination can take various forms that may marginalise or exclude particular segments of the population—whether unwittingly or not. Stereotypical description of any group of people or member of an identifiable group is probably the most insidious. There is no place in public documents for uninformed, prejudiced, or merely insensitive references of this type.’

Commonwealth of Australia. (2002). *Style manual: for authors, editors and writers* (6th ed.). Canberra, Australia: John Wiley & Sons Ltd. Extract quoted from p. 55.