



# INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

Every member of our community has the right to safety, security and respect in their dealings with the University, as well as the opportunity to reach their full potential with access to all rights and opportunities.

The University of Adelaide is fortunate to attract a diverse group of staff members, students, volunteers, affiliates and community members. The University values this diversity and therefore promotes an inclusive campus culture that respects individuality and condemns behaviour that causes disadvantage, including bullying and harassment.

Language can be enormously powerful and politically charged, however, the use of inclusive language is not about being politically correct, but about being accurate, fair and respectful. The aim of the Inclusive Language Guidelines is to provide a resource to enable respectful and dignified communication. Inclusive language simply means language that avoids marginalising people who are already marginalised and is language that is accessible and meaningful to a wide audience.

All staff, students and representatives of the University are expected to use inclusive language when conducting the business of the University.

## Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders

It is important that we use appropriate and respectful terminology when communicating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

If known, it is a mark of respect to refer to an Aboriginal person by their language or cultural group. In other words, 'a Kurna elder' would be preferred to 'an Aboriginal woman'. It is important however, not to assume that all elderly Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people, are 'elders'.

To refer to the entire Indigenous community, or if you don't specifically know a person's cultural or language group, general terms such as 'Aboriginal Australians', 'Indigenous Australians', 'Aboriginal people', or 'First Australians' are appropriate. Use 'Aboriginal' or 'Indigenous' as adjectives.

Be aware that Aboriginal people who have been displaced may not know their language or cultural group. An Aboriginal person's identification is determined by the Aboriginal community and this is the reference point for the individual. Every Indigenous person is on their own journey with regard to their culture.

Always capitalise 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal' when you're referring to Indigenous Australians, but not when you are referring generically to the original inhabitants of other continents.

Terms like Koori and Nunga are not interchangeable for 'Indigenous'. These terms refer specifically to a group of Aboriginal Australians who identify with a specific area and language. Respect this distinction. It is preferable that non-Indigenous people do not use these terms.

If you're unsure how to refer to a specific group, or you want to know who to acknowledge for an Acknowledgement of Country, ask. Contact [Wirltu Yurlu Aboriginal Education](#).

Some Aboriginal people refer to themselves as 'blacks' or 'Aborigines', but others consider these terms offensive. If you are not Aboriginal Australian, avoid them.

Always spell 'Torres Strait Islanders' out in full. Never use the terms 'islanders' or 'natives' unless there's a good reason.

Together, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up Australia's Indigenous population. Again, always spell it out – do not use the acronym 'ATSI'.

## Australians

All Australian citizens and permanent residents – no matter what their religion, skin colour or country of birth – are Australians. It's best to avoid describing people by their country of origin or religion, e.g. 'Chinese Australian' or 'Muslim Australian', unless it's relevant. Think critically about your assumptions and your language e.g. the word 'Asian', incorporates many countries with entirely different cultures.

## Names and Titles

Some nationalities use given names last. If you're unfamiliar with a name, you may also be unsure of a person's gender. In these instances, it's always best to ask respectfully and clarify.

Terms like 'Christian name' should be replaced by 'given name' to avoid confusion.

If you are unsure how to address someone, use their given name, a neutral title or nothing. Where titles are appropriate, use parallel titles:

Instead of:	Use:
Miss or Mrs	Ms
Contact Professor Smith or <u>her</u> administrative assistant Mary Jones	Contact Professor Smith or Ms Jones

## Disability

How we write and speak about disability can have a profound effect on the way people with a disability are viewed by the community and themselves. Discriminatory language in relation to the portrayal of people with disability risks marginalising and depersonalising the individual by emphasising the disability rather than the person, and by perpetuating inaccurate stereotypes.

'Person-first' language is the most widely accepted terminology in Australia – it is based on the principle that a disability is only one characteristic of the person, rather than an all-encompassing definition. The following guidelines are based on this principle:

- Put the person first - eg 'person with disability' 'person who is deaf', 'people with psychosocial disability', 'person living with AIDS', 'person experiencing depression' (rather than 'disabled person', 'deaf person', 'mentally ill person' etc). *A person isn't defined by their disability – they are a person before anything else*
- Avoid referring to people with disability using collective terms as this depersonalises them – eg use 'people with disability' rather than 'the disabled'
- Be aware that many people with disability dislike euphemistic terms like 'physically challenged' and 'differently abled'
- Use objective language such as 'wheelchair-user' or 'person who uses a wheelchair' rather than negative or limiting language such as 'wheelchair-bound' or 'confined to a wheelchair'. *Wheelchairs and other mobility aids enable the person to get around and participate in society and are often described as liberating, not confining*

- When talking about places with accommodations for people with disability, use the term 'accessible' rather than 'disabled' or 'handicapped' - eg refer to an 'accessible' parking space rather than a 'disabled' or 'handicapped' parking space. *Change the focus from disability to accessibility*
- Avoid using language that implies a person with disability is inspirational (or courageous, special or brave) simply because they experience disability. *People with disability are the same as everyone else. It is not unusual or unique for someone with disability to have talents, skills and abilities*
- Avoid emotive portrayals of people which imply they are to be pitied for living with such a 'tragedy' or that they 'suffer' from, are 'afflicted' with, or are a 'victim' of disability. *The reality is that for many people with disability, their disability is a fact of life and not something to be sensationalised*
- When talking about people without disability, it is preferable to say 'people without disability'. Avoid referring to them as 'normal', 'healthy, or 'able-bodied'. *These terms can make people with disability feel as though there is something wrong with them and that they are 'abnormal'*
- It is okay to use words or phrases such as 'disabled,' 'disability' or 'people with disability' (rather than 'handicapped', 'differently-abled', 'crippled', 'victim', 'stricken', 'unfortunate' or 'special needs') when talking about disability issues. *Ask the people you are with which term they prefer if they have disability.*

## Gender

Unless gender is relevant, always use gender-neutral words rather than gender-specific ones. For example, use 'workforce' instead of 'manpower', 'artificial' instead of 'man made' and 'police officer' instead of 'policeman'.

Most occupational terms are already generic, so there is no need for qualifiers like 'female academic', 'male nurse' or 'actress'.

Remember also that sexual orientation is not a given, so don't make assumptions. Unless you are sure, use 'partner' rather than a gender-specific term such as 'boyfriend' or 'wife'.

## Pronouns

Do not default to a generic gendered pronoun like 'he' or 'she' to talk about a generic person. It is not acceptable to present material with the disclaimer that all masculine pronouns and pronouns are to be taken as referring to both.

Note that using 'they', 'their' and 'them' to refer to singular subjects is increasingly regarded as [grammatically correct](#). It allows you to speak to a broader audience of men, women, and other identifying genders.

Instead of:	Use:
The lecturer will display his timetable on his door.	Lecturer will display their timetable on their office door.
Each student is responsible for the material on loan to him.	Students are responsible for material they borrow.
He must return it by the due date.	It must be returned by the due date.
Anyone who wants his work evaluated...	Those who want their work evaluated...

## Personal pronouns and gender identity

It is important to respect a person's gender identity and chosen personal pronoun – even if they do not look or sound like we might expect from someone of that gender. While some transgender, intersex or gender diverse people do identify as male or female, other people may identify as *both* male and female or *neither* male nor female. Some use the usual pronouns like 'she' or 'he', while others may prefer non-binary pronouns such as 'they' or other gender-neutral pronouns like 'zie'.

Recognise the dignity of each individual by respecting their wishes about personal pronouns. If there's any confusion, politely check someone's preferred pronoun by asking in a direct but sensitive way.

## **Further References**

[Equal Opportunity Policy](#)

[Equal Opportunity Commission](#)

[Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies](#)

[Diversity Council Australia](#)

[Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

**If you feel discriminated against because of the language someone is using or their behaviour please contact:**

Students – [Student Grievance Advisor](#)

Staff – Raise the concern with your supervisor or seek independent advice from a [Fair Treatment Contact Officer](#)