WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

Inclusive
Language Guide

2023

Western Sydney University students and staff come from very diverse backgrounds. We celebrate this rich diversity within our University and recognise the great value this brings to the University community.

Western's values promote diversity, equal opportunity and inclusion and work to ensure that each and every member of our student and staff community feels welcome, respected and supported.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocol and out of recognition that our campuses occupy their traditional lands, Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal and Wiradjuri peoples. We thank them for their support of our work in their lands.

INTRODUCTION

Western Sydney University students and staff come from very diverse backgrounds. We celebrate this rich diversity within our University and recognise the great value this brings to the University community.

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WHAT IS INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE?

"The way we speak to each other creates a culture in which everyone can feel valued, respected, and one of the team (included), rather than under-valued, disrespected, and out of place (excluded)."

Diversity Council of Australia

Inclusive language is an important way to create space and meaningful opportunity within a community for people of all backgrounds to participate and feel welcomed. In 2021, Amnesty International described inclusive language as "language that is free from words, phrases or tones that reflect prejudiced, stereotyped or discriminatory view of particular people or groups. It does not deliberately or inadvertently exclude people from feeling accepted."

WHY INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT

Language can be very powerful and can help to either address or reinforce inequalities that exist within our communities. Language choices across all forms of communication within the University are very important and provide an ongoing opportunity to live our values and uphold our principles in all of our work with students, staff and the broader community.

Inclusive language is about creating space and opportunity for all people and ensuring that all are included. Inclusive language covers both direct and indirect communication – this means inclusive language matters both when we are talking directly with someone and when we are talking about a person or a group of people that are not present.

Our values define who we are and what we expect and encourage in each other. They are lived and embedded in the behaviours of everyone within the University community. Our values represent a commitment to our students, people and communities, both local and global. Our values are: **Boldness, Fairness, Integrity, Excellence**

Western Sydney University, Sustaining Success: Strategic Plan, 2021 – 2026

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide covers general principles and practices of inclusive language. We offer a few examples and suggested guidelines for communicating with some key groups as a Western student or staff member.

The guide includes examples and advice related to:
→ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
→ cultural and linguistic diversity
→ disability inclusion
→ gender equity and diversity
→ sexuality diversity

You may wish to use this guide when:
→ developing University policy or programs
→ interacting with students, staff, partners and visitors
→ designing communications and marketing materials for internal and external audiences
→ preparing a presentation or event
→ creating academic or other professional writing
→ reflecting on your own professional practice and/or engaging in professional development work.

For ease of understanding and application, this guide is divided into sections to address inclusive language choices in relation to different aspects of a person's identity. It is important to acknowledge that there are many different layers to a person's identity or circumstances which should not be segmented or considered in isolation. Language choices must be made with consideration of the person as a whole.

Language evolves over time and while this guide reflects recommended inclusive practice at the time of writing, it may include content that is still in contention or under debate. We encourage respectful dialogue at Western and welcome feedback from the Western Sydney University community about this guide. The information and examples provided in this guide are not meant to be exhaustive or definitive. They are illustrative examples of inclusive practice relevant to the current context. We will continue to revise it as appropriate.

Finally, this guide should not override the preferences of individual students or staff. The specific context and the preferences of the individual is always at the forefront of inclusive language. Everybody has different ways in which they would prefer to be spoken to, or about. If you are unsure of a person's preferences, it is important to respectfully ask them.

CONTENT WARNING

This document contains examples of offensive / inappropriate language. The language exists in this document only as an example of language to avoid so as to help progress change, our behaviour and language we use. Please keep this in mind when reading.

5 Steps to Inclusive Language *

1. Keep an Open Mind

Be open to changing what you have always thought is "normal", respectful and appropriate to say.

2. Focus on the Person

Focus on the person first, rather than the demographic group they may belong to. Only refer to an individual's age, cultural background, gender, etc., if it is relevant.

3. Consider the Context

Consider the context that you are communicating in. The effects of language can be highly contextual. The appropriateness of language can vary depending on the situation and the setting.

4. If in Doubt, Ask

You don't need to know all the answers. If you're not sure what terminology someone would like you to use, just ask them.

5. Keep Calm and Respond

Sometimes we can say things that exclude others even when we do not intend to. If you have accidentally caused offence, you should stay calm, apologise, try to understand how and why offence was caused, and how you can learn from it. Where possible, use that learning to help you to avoid making the same mistake in future.

* Adapted from the Diversity Council of Australia's "Five Steps to Inclusive Language".

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Diversity Council of Australia

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

Across all University activities, Western acknowledges the peoples of the Darug, Dharawal, Eora and Wiradjuri nations. We acknowledge that the teaching, learning and research undertaken across our campuses continues the teaching, learning and research that has occurred on these lands for tens of thousands of years.

The University is very proud to be part of a community that is home to the largest Indigenous population in the country. Language used at Western regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples should celebrate Indigenous people, pay tribute to the deep learning that has occurred on these lands for tens of thousands of years, position Indigenous knowledges as an integral part of our business and, ultimately, work towards a sustainable future that nurtures emerging generations.

WELCOME TO COUNTRY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Incorporating Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country into meetings, gatherings, and events shows respect by upholding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols.

Welcome to Country

Welcome to Country occurs at the beginning of a formal event and can take many forms including singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies, and/or speech.

Welcome to Country is delivered by Traditional Owners, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been given permission from Traditional Owners, to welcome visitors to their Country.

Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity for any person to show respect to Traditional lands and for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be offered by any person (they do not need to be Indigenous) and similar to a Welcome to Country, is given at the beginning of a meeting, speech or event.

An Elder can be engaged to perform a Welcome to Country and an Acknowledgement of Country when appropriate:

Indigenous Engagement and Education (westernsydney.edu.au)

RECOMMENDED LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

→ Western Sydney University supports First Peoples in having the freedom to identify however they feel most comfortable. The use of terminology such as 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' or 'First Nations' are all acceptable terms.

→ Pluralisation should extend to generalised references to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander "histories", "perspectives", "ways of being", "contributions" and so forth. This acknowledges the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

→ The abbreviation "ATSI" should be avoided, and instead the term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander should always be used in its entirety. "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander" should always be capitalised. Capitalisation should also be extended to terms such as First Peoples / Nations / Australians, Indigenous, Elders, Traditional Owners / Custodians, Country, Acknowledgement of Country, Welcome to Country, and the names of other cultural practices.

→ Where possible, it is important to consult with the local Traditional Owner groups to ensure that the language and practices are reflective of the community. When communicating with an Indigenous Australian, be as specific as possible when referring to their cultural identity or language group. It is important to ask the person for their guidance on these details and their preferred way to acknowledge their specific cultural background.

→ Ensure that the following terms are avoided when describing / referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as they perpetuate negative stereotypes and draw on outdated and disrespectful language:
  → Disadvantaged
  → Aborigines
  → Native / native Australians
  → Lost (eg. lost language, cultures)

CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Western Sydney University is proud to be one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse universities in Australia. Western's students and staff reflect the diversity of the local Greater Western Sydney Region, with at least 175 countries and 160 languages represented across our student and staff community.

Our University actively embraces the diversity of our many cultures and languages. Using inclusive language to positively reflect this diversity and challenge racism, vilification and other forms of cultural biases is an important part of our institution's practice.

RECOMMENDED LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

→ Making reference to a person's cultural and/or religious background is best done only when this element of a person's identity is directly relevant to the situation and context. Seek the person's permission before doing so.

→ When it is suitable to refer to a person's cultural and/or linguistic background, be as specific as possible about the person's particular culture, nationality or language, rather than referring to generalised terms such as 'Asian', 'European', Culturally and Linguistically Diverse/CALD, or Person of Colour/POC. As always, be sure to ask the person how they prefer to describe their cultural, religious and/or linguistic background.

→ Take the time to know how to correctly pronounce a person's name wherever possible. If you are uncertain about the pronunciation, you can ask the person. In written contexts, you may also add a phonetic spelling of your name and/or add an option for others to add a phonetic spelling of their name to assist with correct pronunciation.

→ How people introduce themselves, expect to be addressed, the number of parts their name consists of and the order of their names varies across different cultures. For example, in some cultures, the family name comes first, whilst in others a given name may have multiple parts or people may have two or more family names. There are many variations in naming conventions. If you are unsure of the correct way to address the person, use the persons full name and ask them to advise how you can properly address them in the future.

→ Be conscious to avoid derogatory terms sometimes used to describe particular cultural backgrounds, even if they are used by people who are from that specific cultural background. These terms are not appropriate and are likely to offend.

→ When referring to cultural and linguistic diversity, use the full phrase rather than the acronym "CALD".

→ Use the term "Australian" in an inclusive way by referring to any Australian citizen or permanent resident in this way, irrespective of the person's ethnic or racial background or country of birth.

→ Stereotypes based on race, culture or religion tend to ascribe fixed and universal traits to a specific group based on assumed racial, cultural or religious identity. These stereotypes invisibilise individuality and diversity within cultural, linguistic and religious groups and often draw on derogatory and/or outdated attitudes. Stereotyping can happen unconsciously and should be actively avoided.

→ Remember that cultural stereotypes, even positive ones, can lead to false assumptions about people from particular cultural backgrounds. For example, common stereotypes include the view that 'Asian students are diligent and hardworking', ''Australians are always laid back and highly sociable'.

→ Avoid making assumptions about a person's citizenship /visa status and/or cultural, religious, and/or linguistic background based on physical appearance, name, accent or place of birth. These attributes do not reliably indicate a person's cultural background, and assumptions are often incorrect, and may even be offensive to the person.

DISABILITY INCLUSION

Western strongly supports the view that people with disability make a valuable contribution to community and that it is their right to receive all reasonable supports to fully participate in all areas of life.

Person-first language is one way of showing our commitment to disability inclusion. Person-first language puts the person before the disability. Historically, people with disability have often been described in ways that are discriminative, demeaning or that over-emphasise sympathy or pity. Person-first language is one way to overcome and challenge these assumptions.

RECOMMENDED LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

→ Examples of recommended person-first language include:
  → person with disability / people with disability
  → Jane uses a wheelchair
  → Tom has cerebral palsy
  → Lynette has a psychosocial disability or a mental health condition.

→ It is important to remember that while person-first language is often preferred, there are some specific communities (eg. the Deaf community) and many people with disability who prefer identity-first language, that is language that puts a person's condition or disability before the person. People with disability often have a strong preference for one term or another. If you are uncertain which term is preferred, just ask the person.

→ Most disabilities are not visible to others. Therefore, remember when speaking to individuals or groups that it is quite possible that you are talking with a person with disability, even if you cannot see a disability.

→ People with disability will not necessarily always be comfortable disclosing their disability or speaking openly about their life with disability. It is okay to ask a person if they have any accessibility requirements directly relevant to a situation, but best to avoid asking about personal or unnecessary details about their disability and its effects on their life.

→ Avoid referring to people with disability using collective terms (such as "The Disabled") as this denies individuality and depersonalises people with disability.

→ Do not use language which suggests pity or sympathy or implies that a person with disability is suffering or has a reduced quality of life.

→ Avoid language that implies people with disabilities are victims, or are inspiring, simply for living with disability.

→ If a person with a disability is accompanied by another person, such as a support worker, interpreter or family member, you should always speak directly to the person with disability.

GENDER EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

Gendered language has been changing for many years. The University is increasingly adopting gender neutral language to ensure inclusivity for people of all genders in our everyday communications. For example, gendered terminology including nouns that once ended in "man" such as Chairman, Policeman, and mankind, are no longer commonly used. We now have gender neutral equivalents such as Chairperson, Police Officer, and humankind.

Despite this progress, there is still much to be done to remove gender bias from our language, terminology and underlying assumptions.

At Western, we acknowledge and value that gender is increasingly understood as being on a non-binary spectrum, that some people's gender identity is fluid and that one's gender identity may differ from the gender assigned at birth. This growing recognition of gender diversity reinforces the importance of gender neutral language and further challenges us to adjust our language to be less binary than the he/she frame of reference. Gender inclusive language is one way we can create a welcoming and inclusive space for people of all genders.

RECOMMENDED GENDER NEUTRAL LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

→ Unless gender is directly relevant, aim to use gender neutral expressions.

→ Use professional titles equally across genders, even if it requires repeating the title when referring to multiple people. For example, "Professor John Wong and Professor Jane Singh will be attending" is more inclusive than "Professor John Wong and Jane Singh will be attending".

→ Wherever possible, ask women their preferred title. Use "Ms" over "Mrs" if a woman's title preference is unknown. "Ms" is more inclusive because it can refer to any woman regardless of marital status.

→ When using gendered titles such as "Mr", "Mrs" or "Ms", the title Mx (pronounced "M-X" or "mix") can be used as an additional title option to denote gender neutrality or non-binary gender identities. Avoid making assumptions about a person's gender identity / title based on physical appearance, voice, name, or other attributes. Wherever possible, ask an individual their preference or if possible avoid using gendered titles.

→ Be aware of gender stereotyping and of unconsciously using discriminatory language when referring to gender. A way to check unconscious gender bias in your language is to swap the gender used in the sentence to a different gender and reflect on whether it feels uncomfortable. For example, "Women tend to have less technical skill and problem solving ability needed to be construction engineers." swapped to "Men tend to have less technical skill and problem solving ability needed to be construction engineers." or "Men are not naturally caring enough to work in roles such as nursing." swapped to "Women are not naturally caring enough to work in roles such as nursing."

→ Using gender neutral terminology helps to include people from all genders, families and sexualities. For example, using "partner/spouse/significant other" instead of "boyfriend/girlfriend/wife/husband", "parent" instead of "mother/father", or "person/people" instead of "man/woman/men/women". Of course, there are times when gendered terminology is quite appropriate and not exclusionary, this depends on the context of the language being used.

RECOMMENDED GENDER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

→ Knowing and using appropriate personal pronouns is a positive way to support and be inclusive of gender diverse people you interact with. Doing this signals respect for a person's gender identity.

→ Refer to a person by the pronouns they use to identify themselves. Pronouns are one way in which people refer to each other and to themselves. People who don't identify with the binary male/female gender categorisations may use pronouns such as they/them/theirs or another non-binary pronoun. The most common pronouns used are:

  → she/her/hers;
  → he/him/his;
  → they/them/theirs.

→ Asking a person about their pronouns can be an inclusive way to allow a gender diverse person a chance to describe their pronouns and the way they identify. But, directly asking about a person's pronouns when you first meet or asking in a group environment (including in class), may not be an appropriate opportunity. This could make the person feel uncomfortable or involuntarily 'outed' by your question. It is important to consider the situation and the context before asking a person's pronouns.

→ If you are unsure of a person's pronouns, you can use gender neutral they/them/theirs until you have more information. You could introduce yourself with your pronouns if you feel comfortable to do so. This may allow others an opportunity to feel comfortable to do the same, although reciprocation should never be expected.

→ A trans person or a person of non-binary gender may use a chosen name that aligns with their gender identity, other than their "legal name". This other name should be used, unless there is a specific procedural requirement to use a person's "legal name". In many University records this name is recorded as 'preferred name'.

→ Be aware that using an individual's legal name may unintentionally disclose their identification as a gender different to the one assigned at birth. This is called 'dead-naming' and can have a significant impact on a transgender or non-binary individual.

→ Inclusive language about being transgender or non-binary is still evolving as social progress is made. When you are unsure of how to use inclusive language when referring to gender diversity, it is useful to check established guidance, such as LGBTIQ Inclusive Language Guide – Victorian Public Service (VPS) and TransHub - ACON

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SEXUALITY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Explicitly including people of all sexualities is an important part of inclusive language. Western Sydney University is proud of the sexuality diversity of our students and staff and actively seeks to create a safe and welcoming space for people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or queer within the University community.

Sexuality-based discrimination and harassment and/or fear of these experiences, can significantly affect the health and wellbeing of people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or queer. Students and staff can help challenge the underlying biases which drive these harmful experiences and help to make an inclusive culture at Western.

RECOMMENDED LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

→ Western Sydney University uses the acronym LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Gender Diverse, Intersex and Queer) as an inclusive umbrella term to represent a range of diverse sexualities, genders and sex characteristics. People may fit more than one of these terms. Other acronyms such as LGBTI, LGBTIQ+ and phrases such as "Queer community" may also be used by people in different contexts across the University.

When only referring to sexuality diversity it is best to use the term LGBQ as Intersex and Transgender are related to sex characteristics and gender, respectively, and not to sexuality.

→ As with all inclusive language, it is important to ask people what terms they use and then use these terms accordingly.

→ Referring to a person's sexuality should only occur when this aspect of a person's identity is directly relevant to the context or situation. Over-emphasising a person's sexuality is not appropriate, can create personal discomfort, and can even cause a person to feel targeted or at risk.

→ Avoid assuming everyone is heterosexual, which is an unconscious bias that many people unwittingly hold. Using language which assumes universal heterosexuality excludes non-heterosexual people and invisibilises their experiences and important relationships. Words and phrases such as 'partner', 'spouse', 'parents', 'relationship', 'in a relationship' are examples of inclusive language which signal an understanding that relationships and families include people of diverse sexualities, not only heterosexual people.

→ The term "sexuality" and phrase "sexual orientation" are appropriate terminology. "Sexual preference" and "lifestyle choice" are inaccurate and are important to avoid. This kind of language referring to sexuality as a preference or choice indicates a lack of understanding or appreciation of the inherent nature of a person's sexuality.

→ Avoid the use of terminology in a derogatory way, e.g., the word "gay" when used in a negative way to refer to a situation or event unrelated to sexuality. You should also never use words you have heard being used to put down or attack LGBQ people.

FURTHER ADVICE

→ Be aware that language changes over time and varies across communities. Language used to describe different LGBQ people and by different parts of LGBQ communities is constantly evolving and may differ across cultures and generations. To learn more about inclusive language when referring to sexuality diversity and inclusion, it can be useful to check established guidance, such as LGBTIQ Inclusive Language Guide – Victorian Public Service (VPS) and TransHub - ACON

RESOURCES

The following resources may be useful in providing more detailed information:

Diversity Council of Australia – Words at Work
https://www.dca.org.au/sites/default/files/dca_wordsatwork_overall_guide.pdf

Australian Government Style Manual – Inclusive Language
https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/inclusive-language

PWDA Language Guide: A guide to language about disability
https://pwd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/PWDA-Language-Guide-v2-2021.pdf

LGBTIQ Inclusive Language Guide – Victorian Public Service (VPS)
https://res.cloudinary.com/minus18/image/upload/v1585712745/LBGTIQ-Inclusive-Language-Guide_bqdbiv.pdf

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We acknowledge the excellent work of the following organisations and their contribution to the development of this resource.

RMIT Diversity and Inclusion: Guide to Inclusive Language
https://www.rmit.edu.au/content/dam/rmit/au/en/students/documents/services-support/lgbtiq/guide-inclusive-language.pdf

United Nations: Gender-inclusive Language Guidelines
https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml

Amnesty International Australia: Inclusive Language and Events Guide
https://www.amnesty.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AIA-Inclusive-Language-and-Events-Guide-3.pdf

Australian Government: Style Manual on Inclusive Language
https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/inclusive-language

Reconciliation Australia: Reconciliation Action Plan Drafting Resource
https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/inclusive-and-respectful-language.pdf

Australian Federation of Disability Organisations: Language Guide
https://www.afdo.org.au/news/language-guide

Victoria Government: LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Language Guide
https://www.vic.gov.au/inclusive-language-guide

Diversity Council Australia: Words at Work – Building Inclusion through the Power of Language
https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/wordsatwork-building-inclusion-through-power-language

Reconciliation Australia: Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country
Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country - Reconciliation Australia

QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK

For further advice on inclusive language and communication or inclusive practice, you can contact the Equity and Diversity team on 9678 7374 or via email: equityanddiversity@westernsydney.edu.au