



APSU Writing Center

Biased Language

The information on this page comes from the documents referenced at the end of this handout.

Why is it important to write with social responsibility?

- It is important for writers to make informed choices about their language and take responsibility for those choice. This can be done by focusing more on the principle issues of the times rather than by predicting others reactions. Always remember that no individual can ever speak for an entire community. Your audience may no longer pay attention to your arguments if you make blanket statements, speak for others, use outdated or exclusive language, or preserve stereotypes.
- Below are some ways in which you can write with social responsibility (there is no guide that can include every area of this subject but here are some general ideas):
- Always focus on remaining considerate and sensitive of others in your writing.

Writing Practices

- **Use people-first language**
 - Do not use victimizing language such as afflicted, restricted, stricken, suffering and unfortunate.
 - Do not call someone ‘brave’ or ‘heroic’ simply for living with a disability.

Say:	Instead of:
people with mental illness	mentally ill
she has autism (or a diagnosis of...)	she is autistic
brain injury	brain damage
Children without disabilities	normal or healthy kids
- **Use Gender-Neutral Language**
 - Do not alienate those who do not identify with a particular gender.
 - PROBLEMATIC: I know I can count on you guys to do a good job on this report.
 - SOLUTION: I know I can count on all of you (or y'all) to a good job on this report.
- **Socioeconomic Status**
 - Avoid using terms such as lower class, poor, homeless, welfare reliant, etc. Instead, report as much information as possible about income, household size, education, employee circumstances, or occupations. Focus on creating a bias-free language and avoid stereotyping terms. Avoid language that focuses on blaming the individual or on individual deficits; instead, focus on what people have, not what they lack.
- **Racial and Ethnic Identity**
 - Be more specific by providing nation and region of origin.
 - **Race** refers to physical differences that groups and cultures consider socially significant.
 - **Ethnicity** refers to shared cultural characteristics such as language, ancestry, practices, and beliefs.

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- Hispanic, Latinx, Spanish Origin
 - When writing about people who identify as Hispanic, Latino (or Latinx, etc.), Chicano, or another related designation, authors should consult with their participants to determine the appropriate choice. Note that “Hispanic” is not necessarily an all-encompassing term, and the labels “Hispanic” and “Latino” have different connotations.
 - People from Mexico, Cuba, and Guatemala who speak Spanish are both Hispanic and Latinx.
 - Brazilians who speak Portuguese are Latinx but not Hispanic.
 - Spanish-speaking people in Spain and outside Latin America are Hispanic but not Latinx.
- African Origin
 - People of African descent have widely varied cultural backgrounds, family histories, and family experiences.
- Asian Origin
 - “Asian” refers to Asians in Asia, not in the United States, and should not be used to refer to Asian Americans.
 - “Oriental” is primarily used to refer to cultural objects such as carpets and is pejorative when used to refer to people. To provide more specificity, “Asian origin” may be divided regionally.
- European Origin
 - When writing about people of European ancestry, the terms “White” and “European American” are acceptable. Adjust the latter term as needed for location, for example, “European,” “European American,” and “European Australian” for people of European descent living in Europe, the United States, and Australia, respectively.
- Middle Eastern Origin
 - When writing about people of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) descent, state the nation of origin (e.g., Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel) when possible. In some cases, people of MENA descent who claim Arab ancestry and reside in the United States may be referred to as “Arab Americans.” In all cases, it is best to allow individuals to self-identify.
- Hyphens in Multiword Names
 - Write “Asian American participants” instead of “Asian-American participants”
- People belonging to multiple racial or ethnic groups
 - the terms “multiracial,” “biracial,” and “multi-ethnic” are lowercase.



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Terms to Use	Terms to Avoid Using
Person with a disability	Handicapped, Disabled, Abnormal, Defected, Differently-abled, mental, low-functioning, high-functioning
Person without a disability, Does not have a disability	Normal, Healthy, Able-bodied
Gay, Lesbian, Queer, Bisexual, Nonbinary, Sexual Orientation, etc.	Homosexual, Gays, Sexual Preference, Lifestyle Choice, WSW, MSM,
Addiction, Substance Abuse Disorder, Misuse, person with an alcohol addiction	Abuse, Problem, Alcoholic, Addict, User, Abuser
people whose incomes are above the federal poverty threshold, people whose self-reported income were in the highest income bracket	high class, upper class, rich
people whose incomes are below the federal poverty threshold, people whose self-reported income were in the lowest income bracket	low class, lower class, poor
people experiencing homelessness people who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, or in transitional housing people without fixed, regular, or adequate nighttime residence low-income housing, low-income areas of the city	the homeless, the projects, the inner city
people who have completed 11th grade, people without a high school education, those with less opportunities	high-school dropouts, achievement gap



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people, humanity, humankind, workforce, humans	man, mankind, man a project, manpower, man's search for knowledge, males, females,
identified pronouns, self-identified pronouns, pronouns	preferred pronouns
parenting, nurturing	mothering, fathering
spouses and children	wives and children
homemaker, postal worker, courier, letter carrier, flight attendant, server, supervisor, sales associate, salesperson, police officer	housewife, mailman, stewardess, waitress, foreman, salesmen, policeman
chairperson, chair, moderator, discussion leader	chairman
another sex, mixed-gender couples	opposite sex, opposite-gender couples
African America, Black, Jamaican, Kenyan, Bahamian, Nigerian, etc.	black, blacks, colored, Afro-American, negro
Japanese, Chinese, Nepalis, Asian American, etc. people from South Asia (India, Nepal, and Bangladesh), people from Southeast Asia (Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam), Pacific Islander, people from East Asia (China, South Korea, and Japan).	Oriental, Asians
White, European American,	Caucasian, white, occidental
Indigenous People, Inuk or Inuit, Native American	Indians, Eskimos



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Marginalized, Minoritized, under represented, underserved	Minorities, Non-whites, undocumented,
Puerto Rican, Peruvian, Guatemalan American, Quechuan, Mexican American, Cuban, Brazilian, etc.	Hispanic, Spanish, Latino (Be more specific)
Undocumented individuals	Illegal Immigrant, Illegal Alien
older adults, older people, the older population, persons 65 years and older, men between the ages of 65 and 75	the elderly, the aged, seniors, senior citizens, elders, aging dependents, old men
people who are receiving social security or Medicare benefits and are over the age of 62, people who are receiving social security or Medicare benefits	social security recipients, social security beneficiaries



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