

Inclusive Language Guide
Living Document – Updates made frequently

What this document is: This is a living resource compiled by the Inclusive Communications Task Force at Colorado State University. The document is intended to serve as a best practices guide. It is provided and will be updated with the intention of sharing meaningful and useful language suggestions. It is worth noting that **language is always evolving so this document will be updated periodically.**

What this document is not: This is not an official policy or required practice. This document is intended as a resource to help our campus community reflect our Principles of Community particularly inclusion, respect, and social justice. The language in the guide may not apply to every individual and it is critical to take personal preference into account. The guide is not about political-correctness or policing grammar, but rather helping communicators practice inclusive language and helping everyone on our campus feel welcomed, respected, and valued.

A few general best practices:

- **Use people-first language (i.e. person with a disability vs. disabled or person of color vs. colored) unless the person indicates another preference.**
- **Never assume a person’s gender identity based on their name or their appearance – if you don’t know, use gender inclusive pronouns or ask for their pronouns**
- **Use gender inclusive language when speaking in generalities or about groups of people that you do not know the individual pronouns of (i.e. everyone vs. ladies and gentlemen and they/them/theirs vs. he/him/his and she/her/hers).**

WORD/PHRASE TO AVOID	WORD/PHRASE MEANING OR REASON PHRASE SHOULD BE AVOIDED	SUGGESTION FOR REPLACEMENT
Addicted / Like Crack	Oftentimes used to describe something that the person uses often, “I’m addicted to Netflix” or “These candies are like crack”. While addicted can be appropriate in some situations, it can also cause harm to those who are truly experiencing drug addiction or are in recovery, or have friends/relatives who have experienced addiction.	I’m hooked / I’m a devoted fan of Delicious / excellent
American/America	The Americas encompass a lot more than the United States. There is South America, Central America, Mexico, Canada, and the Caribbean just to name a few of 42 countries in total. That’s why the word <u>"americano" in Spanish</u> can refer to anything on the American continent. Yet, when we talk about "Americans" in the United States, we’re usually just referring to people from the United States. This erases other cultures and depicts the United States as the dominant American country.	U.S. citizen; person from the U.S.
Basket Case	The term originally referred to a person, usually a soldier from World War I, who has lost all four limbs. The	I’m nervous

	<i>basket</i> in this sense refers to the basket that the person would need to be carried around in and has negative historic meaning.	
Birth Defect	Generalizes the population and minimizes personhood, which should be acknowledged first (often called people-first language); The word "defect" implies a person is sub-par or somehow incomplete.	Person with a congenital disability or person with a birth anomaly
The Blind / The Deaf / Eye for an Eye	Generalizes the population and minimizes personhood, which should be acknowledged first (often called people-first language). In addition, using phrases that associate blindness or deafness as negative ("an eye for an eye") can be problematic for folks with these disabilities. Some people may identify with and prefer terms like deaf and blind so it is important to ask preference.	Person who is blind, or Person who is deaf or hard of hearing
Cake Walk/Takes the cake	Slaves would covertly mock White slave owners through exaggerated dance to mimic White aristocrats. Perhaps unaware of the subversive origin of the dancing, slave owners began holding "balls" for entertainment, where slaves would perform these dances to win a cake. Cakewalks became popular through the racism of 19th century minstrel shows, which portrayed Black people as clumsily aspiring to be and dance like White people.	That was easy
Colored	Highly offensive racial slur that was often used during segregation to separate people of color, particularly Blacks, from "Whites Only" restaurants, bathrooms, drinking fountains, and seats on public transportation while designated "Colored" spaces were the least-desirable locations and least-maintained spaces.	Person of color
CP victim / Spastic / Spaz	Generalizes the population and minimizes personhood, which should be acknowledged first (often called people-first language). Using these terms to describe a hyper-active person is offensive as it implies that people with cerebral palsy are somehow not "normal".	Person with cerebral palsy, or person with spastic cerebral palsy; if your intent is to describe something that is unpredictable you can use that term or wild
Crazy / Nuts / Maniac / Lunatic / Insane / Deranged / Psycho / Demented Depressed / OCD	Originally referring to mental illness, the terms "crazy" and "nuts" referred to people who were often institutionalized against their will. Using these terms to describe something that is surprising or unexpected implies that people	Surprising / Wild Sad Overly organized / Particular

	experiencing mental health challenges are somehow not “normal”. Likewise, “depressed” and “OCD” are sometimes inappropriately used to describe a mood/appreciation of things being organized.	
Dumb / Mute	The word dumb or mute was once widely used to describe a person who could not speak and implied the person was incapable of expressing themselves. Deaf-mute was used to refer to people who could neither speak or hear. People living with speech and hearing disabilities are capable of expressing themselves in many other ways including writing and sign language.	Person who cannot speak, has difficulty speaking, uses synthetic speech, is non-vocal or non-verbal
Dwarf / Midget	Dwarfism is a medical or genetic condition that results in a stature below 4’10,” according to Little People of America . The average height of a dwarf is 4’0.” When used in a non-medical sense, it can be considered offensive, but many view it as the acceptable term for the condition. The term midget was used in the past to describe an unusually short and proportionate person. It is now widely considered derogatory.	Person of short stature, little person
Eenie meenie miney moe	The original song replaces Tiger with an offensive word aimed at African-Americans.	Randomly selected
Epileptic	Generalizes the population and minimizes personhood, which should be acknowledged first (often called people-first language).	Person with epilepsy, person with seizure disorder
Eskimo	Comes from the same Danish word borrowed from Algonquin, "ashkimeq," which literally means "eaters of raw meat." Other etymological research suggests it could mean "snowshoe-netter" too. The term has historically been used to stereotype and demean indigenous and Inuit people.	Indigenous / Refer to a person’s specific tribe
Freshman	Using “man” terms excludes women and non-binary gender identities. Inclusive language acknowledges that people with many different identities can fill the role and can contribute.	First-year
Ghetto / Barrio	Has a long history, but eventually came to indicate any socially segregated non-White urban neighborhood.	Use official name of the neighborhood you are referring to
Gyp / Gip	Most likely evolved as a shortened version of "gypsy" — more correctly known as the Romani, an ethnic group now mostly in Europe and the American continents. The Romani typically traveled a lot and made their	Use Romani to refer to a person of Romani descent and use cheat to refer to a person who is dishonest

	money by selling goods. Business disputes naturally arose, and the masses started thinking of Romani as swindlers. Today, "gyp" has become synonymous with cheating someone.	
Handicapped / Disabled / Crippled / Suffers from, Afflicted with, Victim of / Invalid / Lamé / Deformed Handicap parking	These terms generalize the population and minimize personhood, which should be acknowledged first (often called people-first language); they also imply that people with disabilities are not capable.	Person with a disability/people with disabilities, uses leg braces, etc. Accessible parking, parking for people with disabilities
He or She Ladies and Gentlemen	These terms imply that gender is binary (i.e. either man or woman) and does not acknowledge that people may identify anywhere along the gender spectrum and/or their biological sex may not match their gender identity. Inclusive language ensures that all people in a room or at an event are acknowledged.	Everyone, students, Rams, people They / them / theirs / Ze / hir / hir Person's name
Hip hip hooray!	"Hip-hip hooray" developed from the German "hep hep," (which was a harmless, adorable call shepherds would use when herding their sheep). But <u>during the Holocaust</u> , German citizens started using it as a rallying cry when they would hunt down the Jewish citizens who were living in the ghettos. And the phrase's anti-Semitic undertones go as far back as 1819, with the <u>Hep Hep riots</u> — a time of both Jewish emancipation from the German Confederation and communal violence against German Jews.	Hooray
Hispanic	Widely used term to describe individuals from Spanish-speaking countries. It is problematic because of its origins in colonialization and the implication that to be Hispanic or Latinx/Latine/Latino, one needs to be Spanish-speaking. It is also problematic when people are called Hispanic based on their name or appearance without first checking to see how they identify.	Latinx / Latine / Latino Using person's country of origin such as Cuban-American
Hold Down the Fort / Defend the Fort	In the U.S. the historical connotation refers to guarding against Native American "intruders" and feeds into the stereotype of "savages".	Cover the office / Left in charge
Homosexual	Because of the clinical history of the word "homosexual," it is used in an offensive way to suggest that gay people are somehow not "normal" or psychologically/emotionally disordered — notions discredited by the American Psychological Association and the	Gay / Lesbian / Bisexual / Pansexual / Queer It is important to ask what term a person prefers and not assign arbitrarily

	American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s.	
Illegal immigrant / alien	The term “illegal immigrant” was first used in 1939 as a slur towards Jews who were fleeing the Nazis and entered Palestine without authorization. Saying that a person is “illegal” dehumanizes them and implies that they are a criminal, not taking into account that they may be a refugee seeking asylum. The term also suggests that the individual, and not the potential actions they have taken, are unlawful.	Born in [insert country], immigrant / undocumented immigrant / refugee, if a person has been forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster
Indian	The term "Indian" in the U.S. is associated with Christopher Columbus who mistook the Caribbean islands for those of the Indian Ocean, which were known as the Indies. As a result of the error, people indigenous to the Americas were dubbed “Indians” and the term has stuck and is associated with the subjugation and decimation of Native Americans after Europeans arrived in the Americas.	Native American / Indigenous / Refer to a person's specific tribe
Lame / Retarded / Stupid / Slow Learner / Moron / Idiot / Imbecile / Down’s person	Originally referring to mental illness and used as an insult.	Use person with a mental illness or person with a learning disability when referring to an individual with a mental illness; and use boring or uncool as a replacement when describing something that is not engaging
Long Time No See	Originally mocking Native Americans or Chinese pidgin English.	I haven’t seen you in a long time.
Man the Booth / Mankind/ Manmade You Guys Policeman / Fireman / Chairman	Using “man” terms excludes women and non-binary gender identities and overlooks their contributions and roles in society. Inclusive language acknowledges that people with many different identities can fill the role and can contribute.	Staff the Booth, humankind, human made or made by hand Police officer, fire fighter, chairperson, etc. Friends / colleagues / everyone / all / folks
Male / Female	Male and female refers to biological sex and not gender. In terms of communication methods (articles, social media, etc.), we very rarely need to identify or know a person’s biological sex and more often are referring to gender. In these cases, using gender identity terms is preferred.	Man / Woman / Gender Non-Binary / Gender Non-Conforming
Mr. / Mrs. / Ms.	While generally acceptable, using titles can be problematic when you are not aware of a person’s gender identity and try to guess or when the use of the title is against a person’s personal preference. These terms also exclude folks outside of the man/woman	First or last name / Mx / If they are a Dr., use that title

	binary. When possible, and when it is not a personal preference to use one of these titles, refer to folks by first or last name. Mx is a gender-neutral title that can also be used.	
No Can Do	Originally a way to mock Chinese people.	I can't do it.
Normal Person	Implies that "other" people (often people of color or people with disabilities, mental illness, or disease) are not whole or regular people; all humans deserve the respect of being normal	No replacement as it is never appropriate to use this phrase to describe a person
Oriental	The term "Oriental" is associated with a time period when Asians had a subordinate status and were excluded from the U.S. It is offensive as a term to describe people because it is also used to describe objects, such as rugs.	Person of Asian descent or use a person's identified race or ethnicity
Paraplegic / Quadriplegic	These terms can generalize the population and minimize personhood, which should be acknowledged first (often called people-first language); some people may identify with these terms so it is important to ask preference.	Person with a spinal cord injury, person with paraplegia, person who is paralyzed
Paddy Wagon	Paddy originated in the late 1700s as a shortened form of Patrick and then later a pejorative term for any Irishman. Wagon naturally refers to a vehicle. "Paddy wagon" either stemmed from the large number of Irish police officers or the perception that rowdy, drunken Irishmen constantly ended up in the back of police cars.	Police car
Peanut Gallery	This phrase intends to reference hecklers or critics, usually ill-informed ones. In reality, the " <u>peanut gallery</u> " names a section in theaters, usually the cheapest and worst, where many Black people sat during the era of Vaudeville.	Crowd, Audience
Pow Wow	This term is appropriate if you are referring to an actual Native American pow wow, which is a traditional and modern sacred gathering or ceremony involving one or more tribes. Applying the term as a verb (i.e. let's pow wow) or using it to describe a business meeting or social gathering outside the Native American culture is inappropriate.	Use if referring directly to a Native American pow wow, use meet or get-together if referring to any gatherings outside Native American culture
"Preferred" Pronouns	Using the word "preferred" in front of pronouns suggests that gender identity, especially outside of the binary, is a choice and that the pronouns don't really belong to the	Pronouns What pronouns do you use?

	person, they are just “preferring” them over their “true” pronouns.	
Rule of Thumb	The 'rule of thumb' has been said to derive from the belief that English law allowed a man to beat his wife with a stick so long as it is was no thicker than his thumb.	Standard or general rule
Senile / Demented	Demented is slang for dementia which is often not the intended use of the word, and senile is often used incorrectly to denote dementia.	Person with Alzheimer’s disease, person who has dementia
Sold down the river	During slavery in the U.S., masters in the North often sold their misbehaving slaves, sending them down the Mississippi river to plantations in Mississippi, where conditions were much harsher.	Betray
Starving / I’m Starving / I’m Broke	When used in place of simple saying “I’m hungry” or “I’m low on cash right now”, these terms appropriate real situations of hardship and can cause harm to individuals who are experiencing extreme poverty or hunger crisis.	I’m hungry I’m low on cash
Straight	When used to describe heterosexuals, the term straight implies that anyone LGBT is “crooked” or not normal.	Heterosexual
The Grandfather Clause / Grandfathered In	Originated in the American South, way back in the 1890s. At that time, several Southern states developed and enforced the clause as a way to defy the 15th Amendment, and thus prevent Black Americans from utilizing their then-newfound right to vote. The "grandfather clause" stated that Black men could only vote if their parents or grandparents were able to vote before the year 1867 — which was, conveniently for the White supremacist lawmakers, many years before Black Americans were permitted access to voting rights.	Exempt from the new rule
The itis / Food Coma	More commonly known now as a "food coma," this phrase directly alludes to the stereotype of laziness associated with African-Americans. It stems from a longer (and incredibly offensive) version. Modern vernacular dropped the racial slur, leaving a faux-scientific diagnosis for the tired feeling you get after eating way too much food.	I ate too much
Thug	Thug refers to a violent person or criminal, but it often takes on a racist connotation in the media and political rhetoric.	If your reference is to a charged or convicted criminal, use the term suspect or criminal; if the reference is to a person who appears to be violent or dangerous based on their skin color or identity it is never appropriate to assume violence or criminal intent.

Transgendered	The word transgender never needs the extraneous “ed” at the end of the word. In fact, such a construction is grammatically incorrect. Only verbs can be transformed into participles by adding “ed” to the end of the word, and transgender is an adjective, not a verb or a noun. For example, it would be incorrect to say, ‘Tony is a transgender,’ or ‘The parade included many transgenders.’ Instead say, ‘Tony is a transgender person,’ or ‘The parade included many transgender people.’	Transgender
Tribe / Spirit Animal	The term tribe, while used in a variety of contexts, is oftentimes used to describe a group of close-knit friends or colleagues. The term can be seen as an appropriation of Native American culture, especially in the U.S. context. This term is appropriate if you are referring to an actual Native American tribe. Spirit animal is problematic for very similar reasons – appropriating a piece of culture.	Friends / Network
Uppity	During segregation, Southerners used "uppity" to describe African-Americans who didn't know their socioeconomic place. Originally, the <u>term started</u> within the Black community, but White supremist adopted it pretty quickly.	Snotty or stuck up
War / Go to War / At War / War Zone / Battle	When used to describe actual war, these terms are appropriate. Otherwise, when used to describe difficult situations or meetings (“I have to go to war today at this meeting”), they evoke very real tragedy that can be problematic for survivors of war or Veterans.	Hostile environment Toxic / difficult / confrontation / dispute Get after it / Go get em
Wheelchair bound, confined or restricted to a wheelchair	Generalizes the population and minimizes personhood, which should be acknowledged first (often called people-first language).	Person who uses a wheelchair, wheelchair user

References

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