

How to Write Inclusively

First, why use inclusive language in your content? The top reasons include:

- It acknowledges and celebrates diversity
- It conveys respect for everyone
- Eliminates the chance you may offend someone
- It promotes equal opportunities
- Helps avoid legal issues that might arise from discriminatory or insensitive language
- Fosters belonging
- It's the right thing to do

Writing inclusively is mostly about choosing inclusive language. Use this quick guide to search and replace any non-inclusive or potentially offensive language in your content.

Gendered language

Avoid using gender-specific terms like "he" or "she" when referring to an individual when you aren't certain of the gender they identify with. Use gender-neutral alternatives like "they" or rephrase sentences to eliminate the need for gendered pronouns.

Instead of "mankind" or "man," use terms like "humanity," "people," or "humans."

Use gender-neutral job titles such as "firefighter," "police officer," and "chairperson."

Greetings (as may be used in a proposal or newsletter)

When addressing individuals, use "Mr." or "Ms." followed by the person's last name or use the person's full name without titles. (Do not ever use Mrs. or Miss.)

Instead of "Dear Sir/Madam," use a neutral greeting like "To Whom It May Concern" or address the recipient by their name if known.

Disabled or handicapped

Use "people with disabilities" or "individuals with disabilities" instead of labels like "disabled" or "handicapped."

Mental health

Avoid using derogatory terms related to mental health like “psycho”, “nuts”, “lunatic”, “crazy”, or “insane” when describing chaotic or strange situations. Instead, use "unusual," "intense," or "unconventional."

Also, please never use terms like “bipolar”, “schizophrenic”, or “manic” to describe chaotic situations, and never refer to a situation as “suicidal”.

Neurodivergence

Words like “spastic” can be offensive to neurodivergent or autistic people. Use “chaotic” instead.

Age references

Instead of "elderly" or "senior citizens," use "older adults". Also, be mindful of age-related stereotypes and avoid language that discriminates against or stigmatizes people based on their age.

Race references

Instead of using “blacklist” use “boycott” Similarly, say “allowlist” instead of whitelist. Other examples include “blackball” or “master list”. (“Master” suggests slaveholder.) In these cases use “ostracize” and just “list”.

Do not ever use "Oriental" to refer to Asian people, "Negro" or "Colored" to refer to Black people, or "Indian" to refer to Indigenous people. Even better to avoid these umbrella terms, because they may exclude other ethnicities or still be incorrect. Specificity is better: Korean, African-American, or Cherokee.

Nationality and immigration status

Instead of saying “foreigners”, “illegals”, or “illegal aliens” use "undocumented immigrant" or "asylum seeker". Instead of "foreigner" use "individuals from other countries" or "foreign nationals."

Normal or Abnormal

Avoid labeling people or conditions as "normal" or "abnormal." Use more descriptive and non-judgmental terms like “typical”.

Marital status

Instead of assuming or referring to any specific marital status such as “husband” or “wife”, use gender-neutral terms like "spouse" or "partner."

Non-Native Speakers of a Language

Instead of “limited language skills”, “non-proficient” or "non-native speaker," use "native language", "multilingual speaker" or “language learner” to avoid implying that it’s superior or preferable to speak the local language.

Ethnicity and religion

Be cautious when discussing race, ethnicity, or religion to avoid unintentionally offensive language. Or just avoid these topics.

Weight

Instead of saying “fat” or “obese”, use "overweight" or "people with obesity" when discussing weight-related issues, and be mindful of body-shaming language.

Sexual Orientation

Respect individuals' sexual orientation by using terms like "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," or "queer" as preferred by the individuals.