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Diversity at Work

Inclusive language guidelines

The glossary of terms below is a point of reference but is not meant to be exhaustive or definitive. Language evolves and appropriate terminology changes as Canadian culture and society shifts. As much as using the 'right' terms or words is something we all work towards, it is equally important to foster a climate of open, effective communication and demonstrate a willingness to learn.

Whenever possible, the preferred terms or phrases of the person or group of people should be respected, and the difference between respectful and appropriate language by those belonging to a group (in-group) and those who don't belong (out-group) respected. As language is constantly evolving, it may be necessary to seek advice or more information for situations that are unclear.

Generally, descriptors that refer to personal attributes such as race, gender, sexual orientation, disability or age, for example, tend to over-emphasize and draw undue attention to the distinguishing attribute. Avoid the use of such descriptors unless they are relevant and valid.

Use

Greg is new to the department and has expressed an interest in taking on this project.

Don't use

Greg, who uses a wheelchair, is new to the department and has expressed an interest in taking on this project.

Employees with disabilities

- Use language that focuses on the person, not the disability
- Always put the person before the disability
- Use language that emphasizes abilities rather than limitations
- Avoid negative or value-laden terms that overextend the severity of a disability
- Do not label people by their disability

Use

Person with a disability

Employees with disabilities

A person with cerebral palsy

Barbara uses a wheelchair for mobility

Marcy is living with epilepsy

Individuals with schizophrenia

Don't Use

the disabled

Robert is confined to a wheelchair

Marcy is afflicted with epilepsy

Schizophrenics



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While in most circumstances there will be no need to refer to a person's disability, if the need does arise, acceptable terminology for the specific disability or using the term preferred by the individual should be chosen. One person with a visual disability may prefer 'blind' while another person with a similar disability may prefer 'person with low or limited loss of vision.' Avoid outdated and derogatory terms such as 'handicapped,' 'crippled,' or 'physically challenged.'

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Race and ethnicity

- Capitalize the proper names of nationalities, peoples, and race: Aboriginal Peoples, Arab, Caucasian, French-Canadian, Inuit, Jew, Latin, Asian, Cree
- Avoid references that draw undue attention to ethnic or racial backgrounds. When references are valid, learn the most appropriate specific terminology or use the term preferred by the person or group concerned
- When it is necessary to describe people collectively, the term 'racialized person' or 'racialized community' is preferred by more and more organizations, as these terms express race as a social construct and do not promote broad 'other than white' categorizations. Racialized groups include people who might experience differential treatment on the basis of race, ethnicity, language, religion or culture
- Using 'minority' may imply inferior social position and is often relative to geographic location. When needed, the use of "minority ethnic group" is preferred over 'minority group'

Ancestry

- The use of 'Aboriginal Peoples' is preferred as it emphasizes the diversity of people within the group. Aboriginal Peoples refers to the Aboriginal population in Canada collectively, including First Nation, Métis, and Inuit
- 'Native Peoples' is a collective term to describe the descendants of the original people of North America. The term is increasingly seen as outdated
- The term 'First Nation(s)' is widely used and has for the most part replaced the term 'Indian.' 'First Nations People(s)' refers to both status and non-status individuals but excludes Métis and Inuit people. 'First Nation' has also been adopted to replace the word 'band' in some communities
- Aboriginal Peoples come from different nations with separate languages, cultures and customs. When possible, they should not be referred to as a homogenous group. The specific nation, community or band should be used when possible. For band names, use the spelling the band prefers and that is used by the federal government. The term 'Eskimo' is outdated and has been replaced by 'Inuit.' 'Inuk' is the singular of 'Inuit'
- Avoid vocabulary and usage that carries hierarchical valuation, describes Aboriginal Peoples as 'belonging' to Canada and other usages that may denote inferiority

Use

Aboriginal Peoples in Canada

Don't use

Canada's Aboriginal people

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Gender and sexual orientation

Gender neutral terms and phrasing are preferred. In general, it is not necessary to specify the gender of a person in a particular role as most occupations are not gender defined. Terms that show gender bias in the profession should be avoided. Use parallel terms or terms of equal status, and avoid terms that denote gender inferiority.

Use

Whoever is promoted will get a raise

Employees should read their packets carefully

Invite your spouse or partner

Cleaner, Police Officer, Chair

Husband and wife, staff in the office

Don't Use

Whoever gets promoted will have his or her pay increased

Each employee should read his packet carefully

Invite your boyfriend or husband

Cleaning Lady, Policeman, Chairman

Man and wife, girls in the office

- Gender is not binary, but a continuum. Trans, transgendered, transsexual refers to gender identity, not to sexual orientation. Preferred pronouns should be used
- Heterosexism are the beliefs and practices that assume heterosexuality is the only natural, normal and acceptable sexual orientation. With it comes the common assumption that everyone is straight—until proven otherwise. Heterosexual orientation should never be assumed. Where appropriate, use examples of same-sex partners and families, and GLBTTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited and queer) lives and experiences
- Avoid defaulting to umbrella terms like 'gay' or 'homosexual.' Use LGBT or GLBTTQ to refer to a broad community or be specific when relevant: lesbian, gay man, bisexual woman, etc.
- 'Sexual orientation' is a preferred term over 'sexual preference' or 'lifestyle choice' (which suggests a degree of voluntary

choice that is not necessarily the case)

- There is a difference between a person's gender and sexual orientation; the use of 'gender' is preferred over 'sex'
- Be mindful of appropriate and respectful in-group versus out-group naming. 'Queer' is an acceptable in-group term but it is often better to refer to 'queer communities' rather than calling an individual 'queer' unless they have already indicated that this is how they identify
- Terms like homosexual, transvestite and hermaphrodite are outdated, clinical and imply deviance—and therefore should not be used
- Homophobia is a fear or misunderstanding of homosexuality and GLBTTQ people, often expressed by offensive, discriminatory language and actions

When communicating in the workplace it is best to avoid using jargon, slang, idiomatic expressions or colloquialisms. Communication is enhanced when the time is taken to clarify that people have correctly understood what has been said or asked of them.

It is also important to be aware of how jokes or general comments may be perceived by others in the workplace. What may be funny to one individual could be offensive to another. In the workplace, certain jokes could be considered a form of harassment or cross legal boundaries.

Other helpful language and terminology references:

- Department of Justice's section on [Gender-neutral Language](#)
- Government of Canada's [Guidelines for gender-neutral language](#)
- PFLAG Canada's [glossary of terms](#)
- Government of Canada's [Guidelines for eliminating ethnic and racial stereotypes](#)

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