



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Guide

Tips for more inclusive communication



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

ABILITIES/DISABILITIES

AGE

GENDER

HOMELESSNESS/
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

IMAGERY

RACE AND ETHNICITY

SOCIAL JUSTICE

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How to Use This Guide

A.wordsmith partners with and supports organizations that are working to make our communities healthier, happier and more inclusive for all, and the language we use is a critical part of that partnership. This guide is intended to enable our team and our clients to communicate in a more diverse, inclusive manner.

This document is not meant to be exhaustive but rather serve as a guide we can use for our own communications and those of our clients. It is also meant to be a living document as usage evolves and issues come to the forefront.



In addition to the guidelines that follow, a few key principles guide us—and can help guide our clients:

- **A steadfast commitment to promoting diversity, equity and inclusion:**
A.wordsmith operates on the belief that amplifying others’ voices is the most powerful form of allyship. Every day we gather to share a diverse range of opinions, experiences and perspectives. Our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion cascades throughout the organization and touches every aspect of our brand, from culture and marketing to client service and professional development. We are proud to partner with Portland Means Progress to further our DEI efforts through accountable planning and reporting. Since our inception, we have committed time and resources to organizations in our community that are dedicated to greater inclusivity and access for underrepresented and minority populations. Through our own media platforms, we work to promote diverse people and places that deserve recognition. Above all, our team is what makes us great, and we continually strive to build and retain the most talented and diverse workforce possible through equitable recruitment, pay and advancement opportunities. We recognize we have much to learn, and we will not shy away from doing the hard and necessary work to ensure diverse, equitable and inclusive representation and operations, both within our walls and beyond.



- **A people-first orientation:** The language we use can shape people’s perceptions of others, so we always strive to focus on the person, considering descriptive social identities (e.g., disabled, homeless) as secondary. Because labels are often used to marginalize minorities, we use the terms preferred by the people we are describing whenever possible.
- **Authenticity and integrity:** At A.wordsmith, we are guided by our internal values as well as AP style in choosing how we speak about DEI issues, and our clients should be too. That means that the actions we (and our clients) take and the culture we embrace should align with our words—language on its own can’t make up for a company culture that does not embrace diversity.
- **Adaptability:** As mentioned above, DEI awareness continues to evolve, and the language we use must evolve as well.

As a general rule, A.wordsmith follows AP Style guidelines where applicable, particularly for media materials and outreach, except where they conflict with clients’ in-house style or preferences or in cases in which we as a team feel that AP Style has not evolved quickly enough.



Abilities/Disabilities

The AP Stylebook uses “disabled” as a general term for a physical, mental, developmental or intellectual disability. Generally speaking, don’t describe someone as disabled or having a handicap unless it’s clearly relevant—and when detail is warranted, be as specific as possible.

Keep in mind that a group of people who have the same disability is not homogenous; just as you’d avoid referring to an ethnic group en masse (e.g., “the Cuban Americans”), you should avoid grouping people together as “the disabled.”

DO

- refer to people respectfully, using people-first language rather than defining them by their disabilities.

DON’T

- use terms that connote pity, such as “suffers from” or “confined to a wheelchair.”
- describe someone as “handicapped.”



Age

Be careful about imbuing personality trait to specific generations—while we often talk about trends related to Boomers and millennials, ensure that the traits you reference do more than simply reinforce stereotypes based on age.

It's generally acceptable to describe people under the age of 18 as boys or girls, but be aware that referring to Black males of any age as "boys" can be perceived as demeaning due to historical use. In addition, the use of "girls" for women over the age of 18 is seen as sexist as it reinforces traditionally gendered styles, roles, behaviors and perceptions that can be harmful to women.

DO

be aware that certain phrases can be used as coded language that can come across as ageist, for example using "fresh," "high-energy" or "digital native" in a company's recruiting materials.

DON'T

refer to Black men as "boys" or adult women as "girls."



Gender

As mentioned above, A.wordsmith follows AP Style on pronoun usage except where it conflicts with a clients' preferred style. According to the AP Stylebook, gender refers to a person's social identity, while sex refers to biological characteristics.

Use of the singular *they* (as well as *them/their*) as a gender-neutral pronoun is acceptable when *he/she* or *her/him* is not accurate. If you can reword a sentence to avoid gender, please do so. If that's not possible, use "*they*" or "*their*."

Gendered descriptors like "mother of three" are often only relevant when talking about family or marriage or in profile pieces (for example, a blog focused on an employee biography). Consider whether you'd include the same detail if the person being described were a different gender.

DO

reword sentences to avoid using the singular "they" if it's possible to do so elegantly.

DON'T

use gendered terms like chairman, manned or women's health rights (as opposed to reproductive rights).



Homelessness/ Socioeconomic Status

Use person-first language:
people experiencing
homelessness in place
of “homeless people”
or “the homeless.”

DO

- use collective, not individual language (e.g., “Our community is healthier when....”).

DON'T

- use sports-based metaphors (e.g., “leveling the playing field”) that suggest winners and losers.
- refer to lower-income areas as inner city, high poverty or disadvantaged (consider phrases like neighborhoods with high poverty rates, low-income communities, etc.).



Imagery

The imagery we use to represent firm values and our clients' brands should be relevant, authentic and inclusive. Accurately reflecting a diverse population builds meaningful connections and trust. Many stock image sites contain large libraries of imagery rife with stereotypes and clichés, so it is our job to thoughtfully and diligently seek out high-quality imagery that humanizes and celebrates the diversity in our communities.

DO

- seek imagery that includes varied skin tones, races and ethnicities, ages, body shapes, abilities and gender representations.
- consider using an abstract photo or graphic if people-based imagery could distract from the content or alienate specific groups.
- search and source from [diverse stock libraries](#).

DON'T

- use stock imagery of homogenous groups.
- use imagery that perpetuates stereotypes.
- use diverse group imagery whose composition, cropping or lighting centers whiteness.



Race and Ethnicity

The AP Stylebook sums it up well: “Reporting and writing about issues involving race calls for thoughtful consideration, precise language, and an openness to discussions with others of diverse backgrounds about how to frame coverage or what language is most appropriate, accurate and fair.

... In all coverage — not just race-related coverage — strive to accurately represent the world, or a particular community, and its diversity through the people you quote and depict in all formats. Omissions and lack of inclusion can render people invisible and cause anguish.”

Ensure that you are using the most current, accurate and respectful term for people of that background. Consider whether you really need to use race as a qualifier.



Common race- and ethnicity-related terms and their usage, per AP style, are as follows (this list is not meant to be exhaustive; [a full list can be found online](#)):

- **American Indians, Native Americans:** Acceptable when referring to two or more people of differing tribal affiliations. When referring to an individual, use the name of his or her tribe.
- **Asian American:** Acceptable for an American of Asian descent.
- **BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color):** BIPOC is a noun, and as an acronym that already includes “people,” it’s redundant to say “BIPOC people.”
- **Black (adj.):** Capitalize Black as an adjective in a racial, ethnic or cultural sense: Black people, Black culture, Black literature, Black studies, Black colleges. Do not use Black as a standalone noun.
- **Dual heritage terms:** African American is acceptable for Black Americans, but “African American” and “Black” are not necessarily interchangeable. Do not hyphenate this or any other dual heritage terms.
- **Indigenous:** Capitalize this term in referring to the original inhabitants of a place.



Common race- and ethnicity-related terms and their usage, per AP style, are as follows (this list is not meant to be exhaustive; [a full list can be found online](#)):

- **Latino/Latina/Latinx:** Latino (or Latina, when writing about women only) is often the preferred term for a person from Spanish-speaking land or culture or from Latin America. Latinx is preferred by some people as a gender-inclusive way to refer to people of Latin American descent, but AP Style stipulates that use of Latinx should be accompanied by an explanation (Rodriguez prefers the gender-neutral term Latinx). Hispanic is also generally acceptable for people in the U.S.
- **People of color, racial minority:** Generally acceptable to describe people of races other than white in the U.S. Be aware that some Native Americans say the terms “people of color” and “racial minority” fall short by not encompassing their sovereign status.
- **white:** Lower case “white” when used to describe a person’s race. Do not use “white” as a standalone noun when referring to a person or group of people.



DO

- avoid broad generalizations and labels; race and ethnicity are just one part of a person's identity.
- use specifics to describe words or actions instead of using terms like "racially charged," "racially motivated" or "racially tinged," euphemisms that convey little meaning. Terms like "xenophobic," "biased," "nativist" or "racially divisive" may be clearer, depending on the context.
- be aware words like "tribe" are racially sensitive due to historical use.

DON'T

- use ambiguous terms to describe race/ethnicity, such as "brown."
- refer to an individual as a *minority* unless it's used in a quotation.
- use "diverse" to describe an individual (though it's OK to use it to describe a group of individuals, e.g., a diverse group of customers).



Social Justice

AP Style discourages use of the word “riot” to describe a violent protest because the term has historically been used to stigmatize certain populations and detract from legitimate grievances of protestors seeking social justice.

DO

- use “unrest” when referring to the destruction of property during a protest.
- use “protest” or “demonstration” to refer to violent or nonviolent gatherings.

DON'T

- use “riot” in written or verbal communications.





“

Effective diversity efforts must represent mirrors and windows: a space where *all* people see themselves [mirrors] *and* connect with others [windows] in ways that support fostering an equitable society.”

DR. DERRICK GAY

APPENDIX /

Diverse Stock Image Libraries

[TONL](#)

[Nappy.co](#)

[Broadly Gender Photos](#)

[by Vice](#)

[CreateHER](#)

[Jopwell Collection](#)

[Getty – Show Us
\(women as they really are\)](#)

[Reclaimphoto.com](#)

[RawPixel.com](#)

[Diversify.photo](#)

[Blackfemalephotographers](#)

[WomenPhotograph](#)

[Representation Matters:
Body Liberation](#)

[NativeAgency.org](#)

[Stocksy](#)

