



The importance of word choices

Journalists' word choices communicate a mix of literal and connotative meanings. And those meanings might be received differently than they are intended. By being more aware of and cautious about their word choices, journalists can avoid sending accidental signals about their own views on the story and about whose values the content is reflecting. Here are some things to watch out for. Learn more at TrustingNews.org/pluralism.

Language that might spice up a story but can also convey a perspective or attitude. Is it accurate? If so, do you need to back it up? Thwarts Claims Caves Railing Beleaguered Sweeping Crows/boasts Acknowledges Ambitious Baseless	Don't forget small words that can give away your own assumptions Supposed So-called Only Just Even Nonetheless Very Many Surprising Controversial Little-known	Other pitfalls Putting a phrase in quotes signals that the writer doesn't agree with the characterization or needs to qualify it. ("cancel culture," "disturbing"). Use specific data rather than characterizations when possible. • "Sweeping changes" — back it up with facts • "Sailed to victory" — back it up with data
Be cautious with words that reflect a state of war conflict Bracing for what's coming Showdown Battle Loser Winner Opposition Up for the fight	Consider whose language you're adopting Be thoughtful & consistent with language around issues like: • Abortion (Pro- and anti-abortion, "partial birth") • Guns ("assault rifle" doesn't have a real definition) • Immigration • Unofficial names for legislation • Riot or protest? • Unprovoked	Double check any generalization or label applied to a group of people Bigoted Racist Crooks "Neighbors believe" "Republicans say" Extreme Far right/left

Created in collaboration with Trusting News partner newsrooms, to pair with [our Anti-Polarization Checklist](#). Learn more about this work at TrustingNews.org/pluralism. Have feedback? Suggestions? Reach our team at info@trustingnews.org.



Here are additional resources related to word choice. We'll keep adding more. And this document is open to comments from anyone — feel free to suggest resources.

- [To tell stronger stories, limit subjective adjectives](#) (AI Tompkins, Poynter)
- [Language, Please](#): A living resource around coverage of evolving social, cultural and identity related issues (Vox Media)
- [Diversity Style Guide](#)
- [Dialogue](#): an initiative from Southern California Public Radio to redesign its style guide informed by the desires of our communities and staff
- [Research into person-centered language](#) (Modifier and Center for Media Engagement)
- [Let's talk about hurtful corporate speak](#) (Sincerely, Leaders of Color)
- [Caregiving coverage style guide](#) (New York and Michigan Solutions Journalism Collaborative)
- [Washington Post's styleguide for gender identify](#) is a good evergreen explanation of language decisions
- [Stylebot newsletter](#) helps journalists with style and sometimes specifically covers topics of ethical and inclusive language
- [Trans Journalist Association Styleguide](#) on language and how to improve overall coverage
- [Disability Matters](#) (Hannah Wise) is a toolkit for newsrooms to better serve disability community
- [Revisions newsletter](#) (Modifier)
- [Global Press Style Guide](#)
- [America Amplified guide to language around guns](#)

Created in collaboration with Trusting News partner newsrooms, to pair with [our Anti-Polarization Checklist](#). Learn more about this work at TrustingNews.org/pluralism. Have feedback? Suggestions? Reach our team at info@trustingnews.org.