

The Language of Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion

SATW DEAI Committee

Current Practices Regarding Individual Communities

Language evolves. What we may have gotten used to—as children, as adults, as writers, and as editors—changes over time. In the interest of tracking what is current practice regarding individual communities, SATW’s DEAI Committee has provided this list. It is not comprehensive, and some publications’ style guides may have different treatments. A helpful rule: Follow an individual’s preference if known, and be specific and relevant when possible.

AAPI (Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders): AAPIs include individuals with roots in countries like India, Korea, and the Philippines, representing vastly different cultures, backgrounds, and worldviews. The acronym is widely used by people within these communities, but is not as well known outside of them. Spell out the full term; use AAPI only in direct quotations and explain the term.

ableism: Discrimination or prejudice against people with disabilities. The belief that typical abilities--those of people who aren’t disabled--are superior.

accessible: Clarify to whom the subject is accessible. This is often used as a blanket term to denote accessibility to people with some disabilities, but is in truth, not accessible to all.

African American: Acceptable for an American Black person of African descent, but follow a person’s preference because not all Black people identify as African American. In Canada, just say Canadian.

agender: Can describe a person who does not identify as any gender, however it’s best to ask the person how they identify themselves before assigning labels.

America/American: Can be used to refer to the United States and U.S. Citizens if the meaning is clear in its context, however also note that these words can be loaded for many people, as it also can include people in North and South America, as well as the Caribbean. Use the modifier U.S. if referring to the federal government and its officials in the United States.

antisemitism, antisemitic: Prejudice or discrimination against Jews. In April 2021, the AP recently changed to this style from the previous anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic.

Arab: An ethno-linguistic category, identifying people who speak the Arabic language as their mother tongue, or in the case of immigrants, whose parents or grandparents spoke Arabic as

their native language. Persians speak Persian, and are not Arabs, despite some folks incorrectly using the terms interchangeably.

Asian/Asians: Use Asian or Asians when referring to inhabitants of Asian nations and their peoples, not Asiatic, which can be offensive when applied to people. Note that while Asian may be widely inclusive, many folks intend to include only East Asian peoples in this reference (and forget that India and Pakistan are also in Asia, as well as some Pacific Island nations). Ultimately, direction here is to consider your context and to what groups you intend to refer. Be specific whenever possible. Avoid using Asian as shorthand for Asian American when possible.

Asian American: Acceptable for an American of Asian descent. When possible, refer to a person's country of origin (for example, *Japanese American*) or follow the person's preference. In Canada, use Canadian or Asian-born Canadian.

BAME: Term (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) used in the UK to denote non-white communities.

Bedouin: Nomadic people of Arab descent.

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, People of Color. An inclusive term that is sometimes preferred over POC (People of Color), however not all people prefer this, either. Because it can be considered lazy to lump all these groups together as if they face the same challenges, and it is not yet widely used, it can create confusion. As in other cases, follow the person's preference and list out the groups about whom you're speaking. AP Styleguide is reviewing their determination of this term's usage and should have a ruling in Q3 2020. (Please also see: *people of color*.)

biracial/multiracial: Acceptable, when relevant, in describing people with more than one racial heritage, however this is more useful when talking about groups. When describing an individual, it's better to be specific.

bisexual: Describes people attracted to more than one gender. Some people prefer *pansexual*.

Black: As of June 2020, the AP Stylebook capitalizes the "B" in the term Black when referring to people in a racial, ethnic, or cultural context. This conveys an essential and shared sense of history, identity, and community. African American (no hyphen) is also acceptable for those in the U.S., but the terms are not necessarily interchangeable. Americans of Caribbean heritage, for example, generally refer to themselves as Caribbean American.

blind: Describes a person with complete or nearly complete loss of sight. For others, use *visually impaired* or *person with low vision* (the last is an example of person-first language).

brown: AP Stylebook's call is to avoid this term in racial, ethnic, or cultural references unless it's part of a direct quotation because it's broad and imprecise.

Caucasian: Avoid as a synonym for *white*, unless in quotation. Considered an antiquated term.

Chicano: This term is sometimes used by Mexican Americans in the U.S. Southwest to describe their heritage. Use if it's a person's preference.

cisgender: Describes people whose gender identity matches the one they were assigned at birth.

deaf: Describes a person with total or major hearing loss. For others, use *partial hearing loss* or *partially deaf*.

disabled, disabilities: A general term for a physical, mental, developmental, or intellectual disability. Avoid writing that implies ableism, the belief that typical abilities (those who aren't disabled) are superior. Do not describe an individual as having a disability unless it's pertinent to the story. When possible, ask people how they want to be described. Be specific about the type of disability, or symptoms.

gay, lesbian: Used to describe people attracted to the same sex, though lesbian is the more common term for women. *Gay* should not be used as an umbrella term for LGBTQ.

gender: Often defined as a social construct of norms, behaviors, and roles that varies between societies and over time. Consider what you mean, whether socially-constructed gender (such as: woman, man, non-binary) vs. biologically determined sex (such as: male, female, cisgender, transgender).

gender expression: How a person presents gender outwardly, through behavior, clothing, voice, or other perceived characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine or feminine, although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture.

gender identity: One's own internal sense of self and their gender, whether that is man, woman, neither, or both. Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not outwardly visible to others.

Hispanic: Used to describe a person from, or whose ancestors were from, a Spanish-speaking land or culture, or from Latin America. This term tends to be used more by the people who the terms describe over the more modern alternatives (Latino/Latina/Latinx) at this time.

homeless people: Center the challenge of homelessness on affected people, rather than using a catchall label like *the homeless*. Also acceptable are *people without housing* or *people without homes*.

Indigenous: As of June 2020, AP Stylebook capitalizes the "I" in Indigenous in reference to original inhabitants of a place. Note also that Native American and American Indian are acceptable terms (according to AP) in general references for those in the U.S. when referring to

two or more people in different tribal affiliations. In Canada, *Indigenous peoples* is inclusive of the three indigenous nations (First Nations, Inuit, and Metis communities). Overall: Follow an individual's preference, as it may distinguish their community or nation.

inspirational: When used to refer to travelers with disabilities, consider using only if what the subjects are doing are inspirational or not, on the merit of the action/experience, but not because they are doing so with a disability.

intersex: Describes people born with genitalia, chromosomes, or reproductive organs that don't fit typical definitions for males or females. Also see **gender**.

Jewish: Describes a person of Jewish heritage and/or religion. Preferred term over *Jew*, which has been used as a slur and can be offensive.

Latina/Latino/Latinx: Latino is a term for a person from, or whose ancestors were from, a Spanish-speaking land or culture, or from Latin America. Latina is the feminine form, and Latinx is gender-neutral. Note that while these terms have been used widely, they are not used widely by the people who the terms describe, who largely prefer *Hispanic* at this time.

LGBT, LGBTQ: Acceptable in all references for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning and/or queer. In other forms such as LGBTQIA, LGBTQ2S+ and other variations are also acceptable with the other letters explained.

mental illness: A general term. Specific conditions should be used whenever possible.

nonbinary: People are nonbinary if their gender identity is not strictly male or female. This is not synonymous with *transgender*.

Pacific Islander: Describes the Indigenous people of the Pacific Islands, including but not limited to Hawaii, Guam, and Samoa. Be specific about which communities you're referring to when possible. Should be used for people who are ethnically Pacific Islander, not those who happen to live in Pacific Islands.

person-first language: People-first language emphasizes the individuality, equality, and dignity of people with disabilities. Rather than defining people primarily by their disability, people-first language conveys respect by emphasizing the fact that people with disabilities are first and foremost just that—people.

people of color: Generally acceptable to describe people of races other than white in the United States and Canada. AP Stylebook doesn't use POC as an abbreviation. Some use the more inclusive BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), however note that not all prefer this, as it can be considered lazy to lump all these groups together as if they face the same challenges. Also, consider that all colors may not be visible, so *racialized people* can be an appropriate use.

people with disabilities/person with a disability: Person-first language is preferred over wheelchair-first language, like wheelchair bound.

pronouns: Follow the person's preference. Don't presume binary (either male or female) based only on appearance, as some people prefer non-binary pronouns (they/them/their). Do not presume maleness in constructing a sentence by defaulting to he/his/him, as it's preferable to reword the sentence to avoid gender.

racialized people: Race as a social construct vs. "visible minority," which sets white or Causasian people as the norm, and indicates that the group that is visibly different from that norm is smaller or fewer in number, which is not always the case.

sex: Refers to a person's biological status and is typically assigned at birth, usually on the basis of external anatomy. Typically categorized as male, female, or intersex.

special needs, special education: While these terms remain in wide use in some cases, many view them as offensive. When possible, avoid these terms and be specific about the needs or services in question.

transgender: Describes people whose gender identity does not match the sex they were identified as having at birth. Use the name and pronoun by which a transgender person now lives.

tribe: Refers to a sovereign political entity; communities sharing a common ancestry, culture, or language; and a social group of linked families who may be part of an ethnic group—not people with whom you share a common goal or love of a certain type of lifestyle. In Canada, this is not a term used for Indigenous communities or nations (those two terms are preferable).

white: AP Stylebook does not capitalize *white* as a distinction of race or ethnicity. (In July 2020, AP Stylebook confirmed this decision and "will continue to lowercase the term white in racial, ethnic and cultural senses.")

Words and Phrases with Racist (and Other) Origins

Racism is embedded in almost every institution in the United States, and language is no exception. Plenty of everyday words and phrases have had their racist origins obscured by time. As with the list addressing individual communities, this list is not comprehensive (there are words that are obviously known to be offensive that are not included), but serves as a starting point for us all to examine our own language.

Aborigine: Outdated term referring to aboriginal people in Australia, and is considered offensive.

aggressive: Appropriate when used to describe someone characterized by or resulting from aggression. Please note when using this term that women are often described as aggressive in situations when men would not be described similarly, and check to determine if you're using the term fairly across genders and cultural backgrounds.

antebellum: Acceptable if you're using this term to describe something as it existed before a war, but not to describe the allure of a privileged segment of a society before a war without considering the larger societal picture.

Berber: Deformation of the word "Barbarian," originally used by Greeks to designate non-Greek peoples. Preferred term by this community in North Africa is Amazigh, meaning "free people," and the language is Tamazight.

black sheep: This, along with other words including blacklist and blackmail, highlight black or darkness as negative and white or light as positive. It's an example of how racism is subtly built into the English language to remind groups that there's a hierarchy of preference.

blacklist: As with other words including black sheep and blackmail, this word stresses black as negative and white as positive. Suggested alternatives to blacklist are block/blocked and blocklist.

blackmail: See comments under **black sheep**.

blind-spot: Both this term and blindsided accurately describe the limitations of sight, however can lack sensitivity to people with low vision.

blindsided: Both this term and blind-spot accurately describe the limitations of sight, however can lack sensitivity to people with low vision.

brainstorm: This term for spontaneous group discussion to produce ideas may be considered insensitive to those with brain injuries.

bugger: Many use this word informally as an insult like *jerk*, but it has also been used as a more offensive vulgar term for *sodomy*.

cheap: Can imply low quality, and "what is cheap to some is actually standard or even more expensive to others. When looking outside of one country or even on a completely different continent, the relative cost of living varies due to the global economy." (Source: <https://www.fodors.com/news/travel-tips/consider-ditching-these-11-words-when-talking-about-our-travels>)

colonial: Often used “too freely to evoke images of a bygone era... without any context as to who built it, why they built it, who benefited from it, or what conditions it was built in.” (Source: <https://www.fodors.com/news/travel-tips/consider-ditching-these-11-words-when-talking-about-our-travels>)

Confederate: (Not the same as small-c *confederate*.) This term is acceptable to describe an adherent of the Confederate States of America or their cause, but not to describe a pre- or post-Civil War South.

conquer: Like discover and explore, this word used in a travel context is “heavily influenced by both the European leisure class and the military... rather than adopting the narrative stance of people we don’t wish to emulate, how about we try on some new ways of describing travel.” (Source: <https://www.fodors.com/news/travel-tips/consider-ditching-these-11-words-when-talking-about-our-travels>)

crazy: Derogatory term (as well as *insane*, *nuts*, *deranged*) to describe someone with mental illness.

cripple: Outdated and offensive term to describe a person who is disabled. However, some people with spinal cord injuries use this term to describe themselves. Ask your subject their preference.

deaf and dumb: Offensive term for people with total or major hearing loss and who cannot speak.

derelict: Considered a disparaging term when used to describe a person, as it tends to place expectations on a certain look and ignores societal factors (like economy and affordability of homes) that may affect people.

discover: The colonial use of this word often highlights the “discovery” of a place that was already known to its Indigenous peoples and residents.

eenie meenie miney mo: This rhyme to make a “random” selection originally used the n-word in place of “tiger” in “catch a tiger by the toe.”

Eskimo: Coined by a Danish word borrowed from Algonquin, meaning “eaters of raw meat.” But instead of referring to an entire group of people by their perceived behaviors, we should use the proper terms, like Inuit.

exotic: In describing people of non-white ethnicities, this term implies that Western standards of beauty are the norm and reduces those described as “exotic” to a stereotype.

explore: Like conquer and discover, this word used in a travel context is “heavily influenced by both the European leisure class and the military... rather than adopting the narrative stance of people we don’t wish to emulate, how about we try on some new ways of describing travel.”

(Source:

<https://www.fodors.com/news/travel-tips/consider-ditching-these-11-words-when-talking-about-your-travels>)

first-world problem: This antiquated term (first world) developed during the 1950s to distinguish countries aligned with the United States and other western nations in opposition to the Soviet Union and its allies, leaving less well-off, troubled countries as “third world.” Since these terms have evolved, it’s preferable to describe what the particular privileged is, rather than call it a first-world problem.

fuzzy-wuzzy: Used by British soldiers as a term for Black people (from Africa, Australia, or Papua New Guinea), stereotyped for their hair texture.

ghetto: The term has a connotation that government decree has forced people to live in a certain area. Do not use indiscriminately as a synonym for the sections of cities inhabited by ethnic minorities or poor people.

globalism: Generally, a national policy of treating the whole world as a proper sphere for political influence and that economic and foreign policy should be planned in an international way. But it’s also used as a pejorative and anti-Semitic “dog-whistle.”

grandfathered in: A “grandfather clause” existed after the 15th Amendment was passed that allowed for white people to avoid poll taxes or literacy tests that were designed to make voting more difficult for Black people.

Gyp/Gypped/Jipped: Comes from the word *Gypsy*, which is a derogatory name for the Romani people (also known as the Roma).

half-: Avoid as a substitute (as in: half-Black) for biracial or multiracial.

hood: Like ghetto, this is racially loaded terminology that should be avoided.

hysterical: It means “uncontrollably emotional,” but comes from the Greek word for *womb* and it was once believed that hysteria was a disorder only suffered by women. Thus, women often get slapped with this label.

Jew down: A derogatory term to describe negotiation. Appropriate substitute: negotiate.

Indian: If your subject is from India, this is appropriate. In the U.S., *American Indian* is sometimes used, but in Canada, this term is not appropriate to describe Indigenous peoples.

inner city: Like ghetto, this term has a history of being used indiscriminately as a synonym for the sections of cities inhabited by ethnic minorities or poor people.

impoverished: Like poor and underprivileged, this term “originated from the colonial mindset that has become the norm in the tourism industry. Not only do these words perpetuate the disempowerment and harmful stereotypes of the people at the destination but they also yield to the commodification of the status of being poor, underprivileged, or impoverished, which further promotes the “white savior” mentality among tourists.” (Source: <https://www.fodors.com/news/travel-tips/consider-ditching-these-11-words-when-talking-about-our-travels>)

lame: Are you describing someone who has limited movement? If so, a better term would employ person-first language, such as “person with a disability.” If you’re describing something that lacks excitement, there are plenty of more accurate choices you can make.

locals: Can be “used in a way that overgeneralizes a whole group of diverse people.” Consider using the proper name of the groups to whom you’re referring, and when you use “locals” vs. “citizens” or “residents.” (Source: <https://www.fodors.com/news/travel-tips/consider-ditching-these-11-words-when-talking-about-our-travels>)

long time, no see: Both origin stories for this phrase address different ethnicities, but essentially, the phrase mimics non-native English speakers’ attempts to speak English.

looter: Apply this word carefully and specifically to those who engage in looting, do not overuse, and avoid the labeling and the stigmatizing of larger communities, groups or all protesters. The word *looters* applied to large groups has carried racial overtones in the past.

loud: Appropriate when used to describe someone or something with a great deal of volume. Please note when using this term that women are often described as loud in situations when men would not be described similarly, and check to determine if you’re using the term fairly across genders.

lowest on the totem pole: This phrase for something that’s less important is incorrect as it relates to some First Nations communities, who may place important carvings low on monumental poles. Consider being more specific in your description without culturally appropriating someone else’s cultural symbols.

lynch: By definition, this term means that someone was put to death without a legal process. It usually refers to death by hanging, but not necessarily (and death by hanging is not synonymous with *lynch*). The word in the U.S. is often associated with a history of extrajudicial killing of black people, usually by racist organizations.

minority: This term, along with *marginalized*, is no longer preferred, even though it may still be used in academia. Minority can be synonymous with inferiority, emphasizes quantity over quality, and creates and perpetuates negative stereotypes. It also emphasizes the power differential between *majority* and *minority*.

mixed-race: Avoid as a substitute for biracial or multiracial, unless the subject prefers it.

moron: Originally coined by a eugenicist to describe people he categorized as having low intelligence and behavioral deviance.

nag/shrew/harpy: All these terms to describe someone who complains have historically been used disproportionately toward women in order to shame and silence. Consider your subject, your context, and whether other descriptive words that say the same thing can be used.

nasty: Appropriate when used to describe something or someone highly unpleasant. Please note when using this term that women are often described as nasty in situations when men would not be described similarly, and check to determine if you're using the term fairly across genders, or perhaps find a more descriptive word.

no can do: The phrase mimics non-native English speakers' attempts to speak English.

off the reservation: Originally used in U.S. government reports on whether Native Americans were complying with orders to stay within their designated living areas.

Orient, Oriental: Do not use when referring to East Asian nations and their peoples. Asian is the acceptable term in this case.

peanut gallery: In the Vaudeville era, the peanut gallery was the cheapest section of seats, and criticism from those who sat there (often Black theatergoers) was considered unwarranted or ill-informed.

poor: Like impoverished and underprivileged, this term "originated from the colonial mindset that has become the norm in the tourism industry. Not only do these words perpetuate the disempowerment and harmful stereotypes of the people at the destination but they also yield to the commodification of the status of being poor, underprivileged, or impoverished, which further promotes the "white savior" mentality among tourists." (Source: <https://www.fodors.com/news/travel-tips/consider-ditching-these-11-words-when-talking-about-our-travels>)

powwow: If you're using this term to describe a social gathering or meeting that has nothing to do with Indigenous peoples, consider another term that conveys your meaning without appropriating someone else's culture.

pushy: Appropriate when used to describe someone excessively or unpleasantly self-assertive. Please note when using this term that women are often described as pushy in situations when men would not be described similarly, and check to determine if you're using the term fairly across genders.

savage: While this term is often used to describe someone who does something particularly ruthless, it has a long history of being used to dehumanize Indigenous peoples.

slave/slave owner/slave master: Separating a person's identity from their circumstance changes these terms to *enslaved* or *enslaved people* and *enslaver*, which are the current preferred terms. Also, the usage of *owner* or *master* in this context empowers the enslaver and dehumanizes the enslaved person reducing them to a commodity rather than a person who has had slavery imposed upon them.

sold down the river: This is a reference to enslaved people being sold and transported “down the river” (Mississippi or Ohio rivers, specifically) to a plantation.

spirit animal: Some Native American tribes believe in spirit animals or totems—spirits that guide and protect them. Using this term outside that reference (especially if you are not Native American) is a form of cultural appropriation and cheapens the true meaning.

spook(y): While this word is accurately used to describe creepy or sly things, like ghosts or spies, it's also been used as a World War II-era anti-Black slur.

Third World: During the Cold War, this term was originally intended to refer to any country not squarely in either the Western or Soviet camp. It has since come to be used to refer to the poor world. A better term, in some cases, is *developing countries*, however that's not without controversy, because it paints a picture of Western societies as ideal and perpetuates stereotypes about people who come from the so-called developing world. Best bet: Be specific about your reference.

thug: This word has a checkered history from its origins as a 19th-century Hindi word for thief to its present-day status as a racist dog whistle and stand-in for the n-word.

tone-deaf: This term may be insensitive to those with hearing loss, even though it has been used to describe people who can't distinguish musical pitch.

tribe: Under United States law, “tribe” is a bureaucratic term, connected to outdated cultural evolutionary theories and colonial viewpoints by European colonists. If referring to a collection of Indigenous peoples, ask what term they prefer before arbitrarily assigning “tribe.” If you intend to speak of a group of like-minded people, consider choosing another term.

underprivileged: Like impoverished and poor, this term “originated from the colonial mindset that has become the norm in the tourism industry. Not only do these words perpetuate the

disempowerment and harmful stereotypes of the people at the destination but they also yield to the commodification of the status of being poor, underprivileged, or impoverished, which further promotes the “white savior” mentality among tourists.” (Source: <https://www.fodors.com/news/travel-tips/consider-ditching-these-11-words-when-talking-about-your-travels>)

uppity: This term has been used over the years to describe Black people who have violated expectations of deference.

urban: While this term is correctly used relating to a town or city, it’s also been used negatively to refer to poor, Black, Latinx, and Jewish populations.

vagrant: Considered a disparaging term when used to describe a person, as it tends to place expectations on a certain look and ignores societal factors (like economy and affordability of homes) that may affect people.

wheelchair bound/confined to a wheelchair: Limited way to describe people with disabilities who use wheelchairs. They are not bound or strapped into them.