NWSLC

NORTH WARWICKSHIRE & SOUTH LEICESTERSHIRE COLLEGE

Inclusive Language Guidelines



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At North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College, we embrace and celebrate difference and respect, recognising that prejudice and discrimination through language, whether intended or not, causes offence, patronises and may also be unlawful. The most important thing is to use language to include everyone and be prepared to change it as and when our understanding evolves. We aim to increase awareness of the role that language plays in all aspects of our lives.

We have produced this guide to avoid inadvertently making people feel excluded or offended. It is a guide: it is by no means exhaustive or definitive. Language is always changing, and in some instances, there will not be a single 'right' way to use it. In recognising that language creates a common understanding where prejudices can be reinforced, we must all make an effort to increase our understanding of respectful and inclusive words and phrases.

As an educational institution and a responsible employer, we urge our staff, students and visitors to use language which contributes to extending equality, understanding and respect. If such effort is not made, language may instead discriminate and exclude people from aspects of college life and it may, regardless of intent, cause offence and patronise.

Be a great role model and show, by virtue of the language you use and the choices you make, that you understand the power of words and the evolving nature of language. We may not always get it right but be explicit in your intentions to try and be as inclusive as possible.



Disability

- We don't define a person or group according to their disabilities or conditions. We use language that focuses on their abilities, rather than limitations. For example, we use terms such as: disabled person, person with a disability, people living with cancer, people with diabetes, wheelchair user
- We avoid passive, victim words, for example phrases like 'suffers from' which suggest discomfort, constant pain and a sense of hopelessness. We do not say: diabetics, wheelchair-bound, able-bodied or victim of dementia
- We avoid common phrases that may associate impairments with negative things, for example 'deaf to our pleas' or 'blind drunk'
- When we talk about facilities, we use the word 'accessible' rather than 'disabled' – e.g. accessible car park, accessible toilets.

Use

Disabled people/person

Wheelchair user

People with visual impairments, blind people, partially sighted people

People with hearing impairments, deaf people

Person with diabetes

Person living with dementia

Seizures

Accessible car park

Avoid

The disabled, handicapped people

Wheelchair-bound, confined to a wheelchair

The blind

The deaf

Diabetic, suffers with diabetes

Victim of dementia, battling with dementia

Fits, spells, attacks

Disabled car park



Mental Health

Everyone has mental health and the ways in which we experience it are unique to each of us.

- We use person-centred language to reflect this sensitivity and to avoid positive or negative labelling. We do not describe people as mentally ill or defined by a condition
- We say: mental health conditions, mental health problems, people with anxiety, a person with depression.

Use

Mental health conditions, mental health problems

People with anxiety

A person with depression Struggles with depression

Avoid

Mental disorder, mental illness

Suffers with anxiety

Struggles with depression

Socioeconomic Language

People who live or grew up in an area with less resources can often be stigmatised simply because of this. The words used to describe an area or community can influence how the people that live there are viewed and how these people then view themselves. Language is one of the ways that we can maintain people's dignity and prevent blame for the situation being apportioned to residents, either by others or themselves.

Use

Under-resourced

Low-opportunity

Communities with high-poverty rates

Communities with access to fewer opportunities

People experiencing homelessness

Clients

Avoid

Disadvantaged

Hard-to-reach

(The) homeless

Recipients

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity relates to the fact that no two brains are exactly alike – this variety in our biological make-up results in natural differences in communication skills, problem-solving and creative insights. Autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) are all included in the range of neurodivergence seen in around 10% of the population. Understanding and appreciating these normal differences emphasises the importance of not using medicalised or negative language in association with neurodiversity.

Use

Person with dyslexia

Neurodiverse person

Person with autism

Autism spectrum

Avoid

Dyslexic

Autistic

Autism Spectrum Disorder
(Note: referring to the Autism Spectrum is fine, but 'Disorder' is offensive to some autistic people)
High-functioning, low-functioning
(unless an autistic person is using it about themselves)

Age

We only use age if it is relevant, for example, with initiatives that are only available for a particular age group(s).

- We do not use age as a means to describe an individual or group where it is not relevant, such as 'mature workforce' or 'young and vibrant team'

- We actively avoid ageist terms such as 'elderly', 'OAPs', 'pensioners' or 'youngsters', instead using terms that are objective, such as:
  - Child (4–12 years)
  - Teenager (13–19 years)
  - Young people/adults (16–24)
  - Adults (19–64)
  - Older people/adults
  - Over-65s, 75s and so on.

Use

Older people

Young people, learners, teenagers

Avoid

The elderly, OAPs, pensioners

Kids, youngsters, guys

Ethnicity

Race and ethnicity are often regarded as the same thing – both are social constructs used to categorise and characterise at an individual and group level. While there can be overlap between the two terms, it is helpful to understand the difference and how this impacts inclusive language. 'Race' is used to describe shared physical traits, particularly skin colour and hair texture, and a shared ancestry or historical experience as a result. While race is inherent, 'ethnicity' is more frequently chosen by the individual and linked to cultural expression.

The term is used to describe shared cultural or national identity, such as language, nationality, religious expression and other customs. We only refer to people's race or ethnicity if it's relevant to the information we are communicating.
In those cases use the following broad rules:

- To describe broad ethnicity: Black, Asian and White (rather than Caucasian), written in upper case

- To describe specific ethnicity: Black African, Chinese, Indian, White British, 'People of South Asian heritage', 'People of East Asian heritage', 'Middle East and North African people'

- Remember that terms such as 'Black British' or 'British Asian' do not make it clear whether they include those living in the UK or those born in the UK. Instead, we use phrases like 'people of X heritage/diaspora' which includes migrant people without erasure

- We do not use the words 'mixed heritage' – instead we specify – e.g. 'people of African and White heritage'

- We actively avoid and challenge racial and ethnic slurs and any language that infers or endorses stereotypes based upon racial or ethnic associations

- If we don't know – we ask – 'How do you describe your ethnicity?'

We DO NOT use the terms BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) and BME (black and minority ethnic) because they emphasise certain ethnic minority groups (Asian and black) and exclude others (mixed, other and white ethnic minority groups). The terms can also mask disparities between different ethnic groups and create misleading interpretations of data.

In March 2021, the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities recommended that the government stop using the term BAME.

One of the recommendations in the final report on COVID-19 disparities, published in December 2021, was to refer to ethnic minority groups individually, rather than as a single group.

This was supported by research commissioned by the Race Disparity Unit (RDU), which found that people from ethnic minorities were 3 times more likely to agree than disagree that the term 'BAME' was unhelpful.

Use

People from a black or Asian ethnic group

Asian people, Black people, White people

Ethnic groups

People of Black Caribbean heritage

White Gypsy, Roma, Irish Traveller ethnic group

Avoid

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)
Non-white people, coloured people

(The) Asians, Blacks, Whites
Ethnic minorities, minority groups
Mixed, mixed heritage, mixed race

Sex and gender identity

The language around sex and gender identity is evolving constantly and it is important to understand the difference between them. 'Sex' is biological (male, female or intersex) and relates to genes, internal/external reproductive organs and hormones assigned at birth. 'Gender' can be fixed or fluid and refers to our internal sense of who we are , relates to a person's sense of femininity and masculinity and how we see and describe ourselves. Binary gender terms (man/woman, girl/boy) have traditional associations with sex, but we now recognise that some people identify with a gender opposite to that assigned to them at birth (trans) and others identify neither as men nor women (non-binary). For some people the state of gender identity can be in flux throughout their lives, this is called genderfluid). There are also people who consider themselves to be transsexual, for whom their gender identity (and expression of it) is in flux and subject to change throughout their lives.



We use gender-neutral terms, rather than those that make sex distinction:

- You or they/their/them, not he/she or him/her
- People/person or individual(s), rather than man/men or woman/women
- Everyone/colleagues, rather than ladies and gentlemen/guys
- Parent or guardian, rather than mother or father
- Partner, rather than husband or wife
- Sibling, rather than brother or sister
- Artificial or synthetic, rather than man-made
- Humankind, not mankind
- Workforce, not manpower
- Occupations/roles are not genderdefined: e.g. chair, not chairman, police officer, not policeman/woman, spokesperson, not spokesman
- We consider using non-gendered titles such as Mx (pronounced Mix) rather than Mr/Mrs Where it is not clear what, if any, gendered pronouns or nouns are appropriate for an individual, we ask and respect their wishes – what are your pronouns? We avoid gender-biased expressions or expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes e.g. in a manly way, that's a woman's job.
- A section of the intersex community doesn't consider itself part of the LGBT+ community, you should not assume that if someone discloses their intersex identity that they would necessarily consider themselves part of the wider LGBT+ identity.

Use

Everyone, friends and colleagues

The person's name

They, them, theirs [if other pronouns haven't been specified; if however pronouns (e.g. she, her, hers) have been specified, then use those instead]

Mx (pronounced 'mix') is a gender-neutral alternative to gender-specific titles such as Mr, Mrs, Miss, and Ms

Partner, spouse

Trans people

Men, women and people who identify as non-binary

People, humankind

Chair

Quality of work

Intersex

Avoid

Ladies and gentlemen, guys

Girl, son, mate, love

She, her, hers; he, him, his [unless these have been specified]

Girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, husband, other / better half

Transgender

Hermaphrodite

Men and women, male and female (i.e. a binary choice)

Mankind

Chairman

Workmanship

Manpower

A female doctor, a male nurse

A policeman, a fireman



Sexual orientation

When talking about sexuality, we use the term 'sexual orientation', not 'sexual preference'.

We mention sexuality where and when it is relevant to the context. We use LGB+ inclusive language such as:

- We don't question or make assumptions about someone's gender, sexuality or relationship. Accept and respect how people define their gender and sexuality, and take the lead from the person you are communicating with. Remember that stereotypes for anyone irregardless of identity are unhelpful
- If someone discloses that they're from one of the LGBTIQ communities, we respectfully ask what terms they use to describe themselves and we then use those terms
- When we first meet people, we specify our pronouns if we have and use them, to remind everyone that it may not always be immediately obvious what pronouns someone uses. We ask others to let us know which pronouns they use (not 'prefer'). Where this is not appropriate or a person's gender identity is not known, we use the pronoun 'they'
- We use singular 'their' instead of 'his/her' in letters and other forms of writing – e.g. 'when a colleague finishes their work' as opposed to 'when a colleague finishes his/her work'.

Use

Lesbian, gay, bisexual Note: 'Queer' can be used as an adjective to describe individuals who don't identify as straight or is or as a wider term which encompasses the entire LGBTIQ community, but historically it has also had negative connotations so, if used, should be used with care

Heterosexual people, straight people
Sexual orientation

Partner, spouse

Only use 'LGBTQ+' when referring to both sexual orientation and gender identity-based communities

Straight cis gendered, ally

Avoid

Lesbians, gays, bisexual

Heterosexuals

Sexual preference

Girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, husband
Don't use 'LGBTQ+' if you are only talking about gender or gender identity

Don't use 'straight' as the opposite of LGBTQ+' (transgender people can be any sexual orientation, including 'straight')
Straight can absolutely be used for the non LGB community, and is the correct term, particularly if used by the LBG community itself



Religion

We only refer to people's religion if it's relevant to the information we are communicating.
In those cases we use the following:

- First name, forename or given name, not Christian name
- Names of religions and religious groups take an upper case
- Groups of individuals from the same religion should be referred to as a community, such as members of the Muslim community or Jewish people
- We do not assume a person's religious belief by their name or country of origin.

Use

First name, given name

Religion, belief

Christian people, Hindu people, Jewish people, Muslim people etc.

Avoid

Christian name

Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims etc.



What if I make a mistake?

People may worry that they will offend or be embarrassed if they use the wrong term.
It's important to try to use respectful language and some mistakes are understandable. If you make a mistake, apologise promptly and move on.
Don't dwell on it, and don't give up – keep trying to get it right.

We are always open to sharing good ideas and collaborating to make progress on what is important. It's essential for all of us working and serving our diverse communities that we work hard to get this right. If you have any suggestions for how this guide could be further improved please contact:

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