

# Service Excellence

@UWindsor

## Words Matter

### USING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN OUR INTERACTIONS

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Language is a powerful tool for communicating inclusivity both verbally and in writing. Language is not neutral; it is closely tied to the personality of the communicator and the culture and society in which it is used.

Inclusive communication that respects and embraces all people is free from sexist, racist and other discriminatory language. Inclusive communication does not inadvertently exclude groups; it avoids stereotypes, loaded words and patronizing descriptors.

Preferred terms change as language evolves. That is why it is a good practice when communicating to ask students/stakeholders how they would like to be identified as their preferred pronouns and/or name might not match official records.

### INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The language/terminology should be guided by the preference of the individual(s) concerned.

The following are some guidelines:

- Capitalize terms referring to a specific Indigenous group (e.g. First Nations).
- Indigenous is usually the preferred term. It is widely seen to recognize a global community of Indigenous Peoples and includes a wider range of people than those who are specifically governed by colonial legislation in Canada.
- Aboriginal Peoples is a term used in legislation to refer to the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada and is legally inclusive of Métis, First Nations and Inuit.
- Avoid using terms of ownership of people, such as “our indigenous people”.

The University of Windsor sits on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie.  
[www.uwindsor.ca/indigenous-peoples](http://www.uwindsor.ca/indigenous-peoples)

### SEXUALITY, GENDER IDENTITY AND GENDER EXPRESSION

Male, female and intersex are sex categories, while gender categories include men, women, trans, non-binary and two spirit, among others.

The following are some guidelines:

- During all interactions, be guided by the preference of those concerned.
- Ask the individual what their preferred pronoun is (e.g. he, she, they, zie). Avoid exclusionary defaults such as using the masculine pronoun as a generic pronoun.
- Use inclusive terms rather than those that make sex distinctions. For example, humankind rather than mankind.
- Use parallel references to sexes (women and men; husband and wife) only where all-inclusive terms such as people, spouses or partners are not appropriate based on context.
- Avoid using s/he, he/she or him/her. Consider the use of plural nouns or pronouns instead (e.g. they, them).
- “Gay” is often used to refer only to gay men but can also include others. Additional preferred terms include lesbian, bi or bisexual, transgender, transsexual, trans, trans man, trans woman, intersex, two spirit, queer, genderqueer, gender-questioning and bigender.
- When referring to partners, “same-sex partners” is preferable to homosexual or gay.



## Service Excellence Vision

Together, we foster a culture of success and support by making every interaction an exceptional experience.

For more information go to [www.uwindsor.ca/serviceexcellence](http://www.uwindsor.ca/serviceexcellence)



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- Transgender is used to embrace both transgendered and transsexual people and is often abbreviated as “*trans*” or combined with other gender terms (e.g. trans man, trans woman).
- Avoid the term “*sexual preference*” as preference suggests a choice and most people do not see their sexuality as a choice. Many prefer to speak of sexual orientation or sexuality.

## MENTAL AND PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

- Be guided by the preference of those concerned.
- Avoid defining people by their disorders or depersonalizing people by turning descriptors into nouns (e.g. “*the disabled*,” “*the blind*,” “*an epileptic*,” “*a schizophrenic*”).
- Use people centric language, the disability does not define the person (e.g. person with a visual impairment, individual diagnosed with a mental illness).
- “*Visual impairment*” or “*sight impairment*” are often used to indicate some loss of vision or as alternatives to “*blind*.” Be aware that some individuals or groups may dislike the use of “*impaired*.” Preferred terms are “*deaf*” or “*hard of hearing*” rather than “*hearing impaired*.”
- Use factual rather than negative or value-laden references. A person may have a condition but may not necessarily “*suffer*” from it. For example: “*wheelchair user*” rather than “*wheelchair-bound person*”, “*someone who had a stroke*” rather than “*stroke victim*”.
- There is often a societal stigma attached to mental illness or disability which makes some people wary of disclosing

their condition or referring to it as a mental or psychiatric disability. Some prefer the terms “*invisible*,” “*unapparent*,” “*non-apparent*” or “*non-physical disabilities*.”

## RACE AND ETHNICITY

- Be guided by the preference of those concerned.
- Only reference someone’s ethnic/cultural background when it is appropriate for the context. If you need to make reference, use people-centric language (e.g. a person of Lebanese background).
- Avoid making someone’s culture invisible by using umbrella terms (e.g. Asians). Instead refer to the person’s ethnicity where appropriate (e.g. Chinese, Indonesian).
- For race, some people prefer the terms “*racialized women and men*” or “*person of colour*.” The term “*racialized*” is useful when referring to individuals or groups who question or reject the validity of the concept of “*race*” imposed upon them as a category of identity.
- The use of the term “*visible minority*” is complicated, because minority status is relative and depends on which geographic area a person is in. Those in Canada who may be considered a racialized or visible minority are likely to be considered in the majority in some parts of the country or other parts of the world.

## AGE

- Only refer to age when it is relevant to the context. If you need to make reference to age, use people-centric language (e.g. older adults or younger people).

INSTEAD OF:	USE:
Disabled, handicapped	Person who is disabled
Blind, visually impaired	Person with a visual disability
Physically challenged	Person with a physical disability
Deaf, hearing impaired	Person who is hard of hearing
Mentally retarded	Person with an intellectual disability
Normal	Person without a disability
Handicapped parking/washrooms	Accessible parking/washrooms