

Inclusive & Antiracist Writing Resources: Overview¹

Inclusive and antiracist writing means paying attention to the ways that language can be, and has been, used to exclude people or groups of people. Exclusive language is often used unintentionally, out of both habit and assumption. So, if you want to write in an inclusive way, you have to **intentionally** think about the perspectives, peoples, and groups that might be excluded and even harmed through careless word choice.

Inclusive writing is also about understanding that language, language-use, writing, and all forms of communicating are always changing. Inclusive writing is not about memorizing a list of the perceived best terms. In fact, there are lots of terms that were once standard that are now understood as exclusionary. Here are some examples:

Exclusive of women and non-binary people	Inclusive of women and non-binary people
Chairman	chairpeople, chairperson, the chair
Manpower	muscle power, human labour
Mankind	Humankind
man-made	handmade, human/person engineered
man the table	staff the table
Fireman	firefighter

The goal of inclusive writing is to make our work relevant and interesting to as many people as possible, including those who are like us and those who are different from us. Inclusivity means respecting our readership and not accidentally turning them away, excluding them, or harming them with our language. Writing inclusively also creates opportunities for creativity, increased understanding, and solidarity. Antiracist writing means that we clearly and intentional express antiracist ideas through our writing.

Many people have been taught that being straight, white, middle-to-upper-class, neurotypical, cisgender, and without disability (or some combination thereof) is the norm and anything else is abnormal (see Glossary for explanation of these and other terms used in the inclusive writing resources). Inclusivity pushes us to question what we have been taught and what we assume,

¹These writing resources were developed on the unceded lands of the Coast Salish peoples, specifically those of the x^mməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sḵwəxwú7mesh (Squamish), k^wik^wəłəm (Kwikwetlem), and Səlliwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples. We hope that these resources will be valuable to all those working to do decolonizing and empowering work in the academy and beyond.



and to understand that difference and diversity are, in fact, the norms of what it means to be human. Inclusive writing makes sure that no one is depicted as or made to feel abnormal.

The Steps of Inclusive Writing:

- Question assumptions – even the ones we have never noticed before.²
- Choose words thoughtfully and carefully.³
- Revise critically.
- Express clear and intentional antiracist ideas, recognizing that no work is “race neutral” and there is no such thing as “not racist,” only racist and antiracist (Kendi, 2019).
- Recognize and respect diversity in all its forms! Sometimes people who are not part of a particular group can make sweeping generalizations about those who are part of that group (for example, “all women are emotional,” “all queer men are liberal,” etc.). People cannot be defined or categorized according to one aspect of their identity alone, and all groups of people are made up of individuals who have their own thoughts, opinions, experiences, etc.
- Seek feedback from external readers, especially those whose experiences differ from our own – these readers can help us to understand our work in new ways and to keep questioning our assumptions.
- Learn from feedback! As we do this work, we will probably make mistakes, but mistakes are not an excuse to stop trying. Instead, when someone gives us feedback – especially critical feedback – we can thank them for giving us an opportunity to learn more than we knew before.
- Think not just about your content (i.e., your ideas), but also about **how** you are presenting your content. For example, think about the readability of your document (some fonts are easier to read than others), about whether you can simplify your language, and whether you have provided alt-text for any images included with your work (see Glossary for explanation). Did you know that you can run an [accessibility check](#) on Word documents and Powerpoint slides?

² Note: This step can be pretty challenging, both practically and emotionally. On a practical level: read widely, listen to those whose perspectives differ from your own, and share your work, paying close attention to the feedback you receive. On an emotional level: be gentle with yourself and get support from others, especially if you find yourself questioning previously important beliefs.

³ The word careful is often used to mean cautious. Here the word carefully literally means with care and in a caring way. This is an important distinction because sometimes inclusivity is thought of as a way of not upsetting anyone. That idea is often referred to as being politically correct. The focus in these resources is on extending care and consideration for the impact of our work and our words.



Inclusive Academic Writing:

In academic writing contexts, we are sometimes intentionally exclusionary as a way of narrowing the focus of our work. For example, we might design a study that **only** looks at the experiences of [lesbian and bisexual Muslim women](#). The focus of these resources is writing that is **unintentionally** exclusionary because it uses inappropriate and harmful language.

In some kinds of academic writing, we are expected to report demographic information about people (for example, gender identity, race, ethnicity, age, ability/disability, class, etc.). This requirement often comes up when we are writing about research we have conducted, such as interviews, participant-observer research, surveys (if information about the respondents is known), etc. In such cases, here are two important principles to keep in mind:

1. Include only information that is **relevant** to the study and the interpretation of results. This focus on relevance is important because research reports often include personal information about participants simply because they are different from the researcher or from what the researcher considers normal. This *others* (see glossary for explanation of this term) the participants and presents them as abnormal, which is the opposite of inclusive writing. Inclusive writing avoids using the in-group of the author as a reference point, thereby implying that people who are like the author are normal or superior, and people who are not like the author are abnormal or inferior.
2. Always use terminology that the participants themselves find respectful and appropriate. Whenever possible, ask participants how they would like to be described in the research, including providing them with options for which aspects of their identities they wish to include or exclude from research reports. When participants have provided specific terms to describe themselves, we need to use those terms, even if we don't preferred them ourselves. For example, people may self-identify using any of the following terms: queer, bisexual, lesbian, gay, Two-Spirit (and, of course, there are more). It is not okay to treat these terms as interchangeable when describing a particular person, unless that person agrees that they are interchangeable. As described in Tip 2 below, it is important to specifically ask if the terminology someone uses to describe themselves is a way they are comfortable being described by others, including others who may not be members of their own community.

Specificity and precision are qualities that characterize both academic and inclusive, antiracist writing. The following are tips for developing a more inclusive and antiracist writing practice:



Tip 1: Some writers use [*sic*] from the Latin, meaning “so, thus,” when quoting work that uses inappropriate, incorrect, or non-inclusive language. [*sic*] is usually used following part of a direct quotation to signal an error (for example, a typo or a grammar error) as a way of telling the reader that the error appeared in the original source. Using [*sic*] is therefore a powerful – if potentially controversial – way of indicating that the writer disagrees with the language-use in a quotation.

Tip 2: The concepts of insider and outsider languages are important for inclusive writing. There are many reclaimed labels and terms that individuals/groups may choose to refer to themselves but which are still harmful if used by others. For example, someone may refer to themselves as a dyke, but prefer to be written about as a lesbian or a queer person.

Tip 3: In almost no case is it acceptable to use an adjective to refer to a person or group of people (for example, the gays, the Blacks, the homeless). Furthermore, it is not acceptable to write about an individual as though they speak for or represent an entire group or category of people, or the entirety of a particular experience.

Tip 4: Writers sometimes use provocative language to make a particular point, in a quotation, or with the expressed permission of an interviewee or research participant (for example, including provocative language that they used to refer to themselves). In such cases, writers need to make it clear that this language use is intentional and may also need to justify its use.

See the SLC’s suite of inclusive and antiracist writing handouts for more specific support, examples, and resources.⁵ Note: these resources are intended to provide a starting point for engaging with the principles of inclusive writing. They are not, and do not seek to be, comprehensive guides to all of matters of inclusivity. As with all inclusive writing, they are also subject to change, as patterns of language use change. If you have a recommendation for a resource, a new inclusive writing topic, or a change that should be made to the existing materials, please contact us at learning-commons@sfu.ca. We are always open to feedback and willing to make changes to improve these resources for writers.

The following writing resources are currently available:

- Glossary of terms
- Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation
- Black Peoples, Indigenous Peoples, People(s) of Colour (BIPOC)
- Ableism, Disability, Mental Health, and Neurodiversity
- Exercises and possible revisions



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While these resources have been broken apart to provide focus, the concept of intersectionality (a term coined by law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, see glossary for description) helps us to understand that these aspects of identity do not necessarily occur independently from one another and can be embodied by one person. The divisions in these resources are in no way meant to suggest that these identities or experiences are exclusive of one another.

⁵ Thank you to Ashley Brooks, Coordinator of Out On Campus at SFU; Vivian Ly, President of SFU Autistics United; and David Le and Mitchell Stoddard from SFU's Centre for Accessible Learning for their feedback and suggestions on all of these writing resources.



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Inclusive & Antiracist Writing Resources: Glossary (non-exhaustive)

Alt-text: Stands for alternative text. Alt-text can be inserted into presentations, word documents, websites, etc. The purpose of including alt-text is to provide a description, in words, of any images in your work. Alt-text ensures that screen readers can support users to engage with images. In many cases, you can add alt-text by clicking on “format picture.” For example, for the Student Learning Commons logo found on the Inclusive Writing Resources Overview, I included the alt-text “Student Learning Commons Logo. Text in image reads ‘SFU Library, Student Learning Commons.’” You can also provide descriptions of images. For example, if you had an image of a frog in a top hat, you could write in the alt-text that the image shows a cartoon frog in a top hat.

Intersectionality: A term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Crenshaw’s work on critical race theory and intersectionality provides a framework for understanding that the facets of our identities are not “detachable” from one another, and that inequalities can compound. Individuals who embody multiple marginalized identities (for example, Black trans women, disabled queer people, women of colour) are exposed to multiple forms of systemic oppression, and these experiences of oppression compound one another.

Other/Othering: Used to refer to the ways that we can view, treat, and write about people (or experiences) as fundamentally different from and alien to ourselves. The concept of othering someone is connected to an “us vs. them” mentality, in which people align themselves with members of a perceived in-group and against members of a perceived out-group. The members of the out-group are often described as inferior and sometimes, even, as sub-human.

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation:

Breastfeeding/chestfeeding: This resource discusses the need to de-couple biological functions from gender identity and expression. One example given is that of breastfeeding. It is worthy of note that many people do not identify with the terms breast or breastfeeding, as these have a long history of being gendered female. Some people will therefore refer to the activity of feeding an infant as chestfeeding in order to be more inclusive and respectful.

Cisgender: Used to refer to people who identify exclusively with the biological sex they were assigned at birth. Cismale and cisfemale therefore refer to people who identify with maleness and femaleness in a way that corresponds with the biological sex they were assigned at birth.



Folks/folxs: Both of these terms are gender neutral ways to refer to groups of people. The term folxs provides a way of signaling that you are specifically and explicitly including trans and non-binary people.

Genderqueer: Sometimes used interchangeably with the term non-binary (see description below). This term combines the words gender and queer and is often used by people who are actively engaged in queering gender. Queering gender often involves engaging with gender identity and expression in ways that challenge the gender binary.

Gender binary: Refers to the understanding that there are only two genders – male and female. Furthermore, according to the gender binary, these two genders are separate and opposite. The gender binary is a cultural understanding and has powerfully informed many social structures and institutions. Consider, for example, the prevalence of gender segregated washrooms. Such washrooms require people to identify as either male or female before they can use a toilet.

Heteronormative: Used to refer to the social assumption that it is normal to be heterosexual and cisgender. Some examples of heteronormativity include gender segregated washrooms and the frequent depiction of families as “normally”⁶ including a (cisgender) mother and father who have a direct biological relationship with their children.

2SLGBTQIA2S: 2 Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Trans, Bisexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual & Aromantic.⁷ There are many variations of this acronym. For more information on the term 2 Spirit (or Two-Spirit) and how to use it respectfully and accurately, see Harlan Pruden’s [Two-Spirit Conversations and Work](#).

Non-binary: Used to challenge the idea that there are only two genders (i.e., male and female). Non-binary folks (or folxs, see glossary entry above) use this term to signal that their gender-identity and/or gender-expression does not align with a binary understanding of gender, regardless of the biological sex they were assigned at birth.

Outing: Used to refer to instances where aspects of someone’s identity are discussed **without** their permission. The term comes from the expression that LGBTQIA2S people are “in the

⁶ Quotation marks are used here as a way of signaling the issues with this term. Quotation marks used in this way are called scare quotes.

⁷ For definitions of these and other terms, see the [LGBTQIA Resource Centre Glossary](https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary) here: <https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary>



closet” about aspects of their identities, until they “come out.”⁸ Being outed refers to situations where an individual has not chosen to come out about aspects of their identity, but that information is revealed by someone else. It is worth noting that the narrative of coming out is a challenging one. The term coming out seems to imply an event that happens only once. However, many people have pointed out that we actually choose what information to provide about ourselves in many different circumstances, and over the course of our lives. Furthermore, many have challenged the notion that queer people, and only queer people, should disclose information about their sexual or romantic identities. This very process rests on heteronormative assumptions.

Straight: Straight is used to refer to people who self-identify as heterosexual.

Trans and Transgender: Used to refer to people who do not identify their gender exclusively with the biological sex they were assigned at birth. The term trans is often associated with transitioning from one recognized gender identity to another. For example, a person may self-identify as trans or transgender if they were assigned male at birth and have since transitioned to a female gender-identity and expression. Some related terms include AFAB (Assigned Female at Birth) and AMAB (Assigned Male at Birth). Note that a gender transition can involve many stages and may or may not include things like hormone therapy and surgery.

Black Peoples, Indigenous Peoples, People(s) of Colour (BIPOC):

Antiracist: "One who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea" (Kendi, 2019, p. 13).

Black: Used to refer to people with black skin, and to a racial identity. In some cases, the term Black can also be used to refer to a specific cultural identity. In the context of white supremacy (as described below), the term Black is often associated with naming, calling out, and analyzing anti-Black racism.

BIPOC: Black Peoples, Indigenous Peoples, People(s) of Colour. Variations of this acronym are also sometimes used. **IBPOC:** Indigenous Peoples, Black Peoples, and Peoples of Colour. This order is often used to recognize the presence of Indigenous Peoples in a place prior to occupation by non-Indigenous Peoples. **BIMPOC:** Black, Indigenous, Multiracial, People(s) of Colour. **QTIBIPOC:** Queer, Trans, and Intersex, Black, Indigenous, People(s) of Colour.

⁸ For more information, see the [LGBTQIA Resource Centre Glossary](https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary) entry on coming out: <https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary>



QTIBIMPOC: Queer, Trans, and Intersex, Black, Indigenous, Multiracial, People(s) of Colour. Several of these variations make the intersections of identities clear. See glossary description for the term intersectionality. It should be further noted that identity labelling is complex and often contested. The acronym BIPOC (and its variations) has been challenged for its tendency to collapse the unique experiences of Indigenous Peoples, Black Peoples, and Peoples of Colour. Recalling that specificity is a core principle of inclusive writing, it is preferable to write specifically and directly about the experiences of particular people or groups of people, rather than trying to generalize across a wide swath of experiences.

Culture of white supremacy: Used to refer to a culture in which white people are systematically privileged at the direct expense of all peoples who are not white or white presenting.

Indigenous: The term Indigenous is a collective noun used to refer to the Peoples and Nations that existed on Turtle Island prior to colonization, and continue to exist here now. Many people prefer the term Indigenous to other terms like Indian, Aboriginal, First Nations, or Native; however, the terms Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis are all currently used in Canadian law. More information about how to use these terms respectfully in your writing can be found in the Black, Indigenous, People(s) of Colour (BIPOC) guide and in Dr. Gregory Younging's Book [*Elements of Indigenous Style*](#) (2018).

People(s) of Colour: Used to refer to all people who are not white.⁹ This term is often used to signal shared experiences of systemic oppression and racism in a culture of white supremacy. The term is pluralized (i.e., People(s) of Colour) to highlight the many people and experiences that are encompassed by it. While the term is controversial, especially when it is used in ways that erase the specific experiences of Black people and anti-Black racism, it is often preferred to terms like non-white, which continue to explicitly centre and normalize whiteness as a dominant experience.

Racist: "One who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction or expressing a racist idea" (Kendi, 2019, p. 13). In *How to be Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi clearly explains that there is no such thing as "not racist," only racist and antiracist. Academic institutions have long colonial and racist histories. We are therefore challenged to actively take up antiracist writing practices that change received conventions.

⁹ Terminology related to race and skin colour has a long and challenging history, which you can research if you are interested. This Oxford Bibliography entry on [Language and Race](https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0183.xml) provides a starting point: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0183.xml>



Settler: Used to refer to those who are not Indigenous to a place and who either chose or had ancestors who chose to settle there. The term references the concept of [settler colonialism](#). Because settler colonialism implies choice on the part of the individual settler (acknowledging that choices are often limited by a variety of socio-political and economic factors), the term is [problematized](#) in the case of those who are not Indigenous to a place, but whose ancestors were brought there forcibly.

Turtle Island: Used to refer to the lands that are now collectively known as North America without referencing the colonial names that have been given to these places (for example, Canada, the United States of America, North America). The term Turtle Island is a reference to an [Anishinaabe creation story](#).

Unceded: To concede something means to give it up. For example, in an argument I might say “I conceded that point,” as a way of saying that I see the other person’s perspective and have been convinced to give up my argument. Unceded means never given up, transferred or surrendered. The term unceded is often used in land or territorial acknowledgments to refer to lands or territories that were never given up and for which there are no treaties. Note: where there are treaties, lands and territories would not be considered unceded, though there are many contemporary legal challenges about the appropriateness of the treaties, the ways that they have been interpreted and applied, and the processes that were used to make them. The presence of specific treaties does not close the conversation on Indigenous land rights or sovereignty. However, the term unceded makes it clear that the ongoing occupation is illegal under international laws, such as the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#). Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships on unceded territories require unique forms of reconciliation and restitution.

White: Used to refer to people with white skin. The context of white supremacy (as defined above) means that the term white is also often associated with significant socio-cultural privilege.

White presenting: Used to refer to people who have a cultural and/or racial identity that is not white, but who experience what has been called “white skin privilege” because of how they look.



Ableism, Disability, Mental Health, and Neurodiversity:

The definitions for terms in this section were substantially informed by the following sources:

- Materials for the workshop “All Brains Are Beautiful” (cited below as “All Brains”). This workshop was created by Autistics United Vancouver and SFU Autistics United;
- Nick Walker’s [Neurocosmopolitanism](#) blog post “Neurodiversity: Some Basic Terms and Definitions.”

Able-bodied: This term is sometimes used to signal people who do not have physical disabilities. However, this term is considered harmful, since it implies that people with disabilities do not have “able bodies.” If you need to describe someone as not experiencing a physical disability, it is preferable to say that explicitly.

Neurodiversity: coined by Judy Singer in 1998, this term combines neurological and diversity and refers to “natural variation of human brains and minds” (“All Brains”). Neurodiversity recognizes that human neurology is both complex and diverse, and the term can be used to challenge the ableist view that there is one “normal,” “right,” or “healthy” form of human cognition.

The Neurodiversity Movement is a social justice movement focused on advocating for civil rights and full social inclusion for the neurodivergent (“All Brains”). The Neurodiversity Movement began with the Autism Rights Movement and the two movements are often still closely associated. However, the Neurodiversity Movement has a broader focus, advocating for all neurominorities (Walker). More information about both the Neurodiversity Movement and neurominorities can be found on Nick Walker’s blog [Neurocosmopolitanism](#).

Neurodiverse: an adjective that can be used to recognize the neurodiversity of a group or context. Neurodiverse and neurodiversity are not terms to describe people. Instead, they describe groups and/or situations in which diverse forms of neurocognition are present. If a group has more than one neurocognitive style represented within it, it can be described as neurodiverse. The more neurocognitive styles that are represented, the more neurodiverse the group (Walker).

Neurodivergence/neurodivergent/neuroatypical: used to describe a person or people who diverge from the social standards for typical neurocognition. As Walker states, “groups are diverse; individuals diverge” (n.p.). The terms neurodivergent and neurodivergence were coined by Kassiane Asasumasu (Walker).

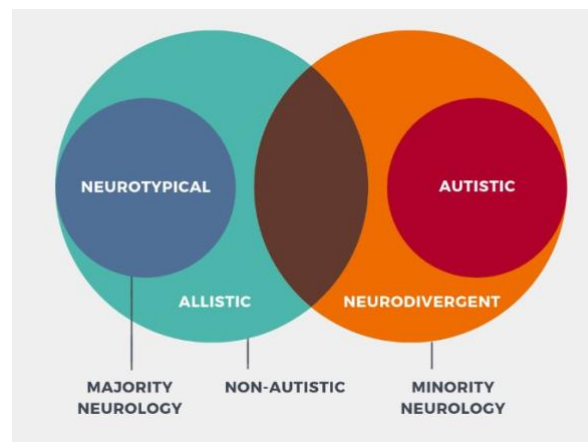


Neurodivergence can be innate (examples include dyslexia and epilepsy) or produced through brain-altering experiences (examples include the neurological changes brought on through devoted meditation practice, or through drug use). Some neurodivergence results from a combination of genetics (innate) and brain-altering experiences. Neurodivergence is not inherently positive or negative.

Neurotypical: the opposite of neurodivergent. This term is used to refer to people whose neurocognitive function meets the dominant social standards (Walker). The study of neurology has tended to focus on functions that have been deemed typical. Researchers and writers have therefore created the categories of typical and atypical. These categories are neither neutral nor inherent.

Writers use the term neurotypical to refer to people whose experiences tend to fall in line with the typical or normative study of neurology. This approach avoids reproducing the social standards of normal and abnormal cognition. Inclusive writing recognizes that there are many kinds of neurological experiences, and so neurodiversity is actually the norm of human cognition.

The following Venn Diagram, reproduced from the “All Brains Are Beautiful” workshop (with permission)¹, visualizes the relationship between neurotypical and neurodivergent experiences. Note the overlapping spaces in the diagram: many people are allistic (non-autistic) and neurodivergent. Furthermore, the boundaries between each of these categories are less distinct and more flexible than any diagram can represent.



¹ Thank you to Vivian Ly for allowing use of this diagram. It was inspired by [another diagram](#) to visualize neurodivergence, created by Martin Silvertant.



Neurology Venn Diagram

The image shows two large overlapping circles labelled Neurodivergent (minority neurology) and Allistic (non-autistic). Within each large circle is a smaller circle. The small circle on the Neurodivergent side is labelled Autistic. The small circle on the Allistic side is labelled Neurotypical (majority neurology). The diagram shows that there is significant overlap between the two large circles, indicating that the distinctions between neurotypical and neurodivergent are not as clear or simple as is often assumed.

Stimming: Stimming is short for self-stimulation, which often includes repetitive body movements, actions, or spoken words/phrases. Everyone stims! Common examples include whistling, biting nails, tapping a pen or feet, twirling hair, rocking, and pacing. Autistic stimming differs based on frequency and social acceptability. While often misunderstood by allistic/neurotypical people, stimming helps with management of both internal and external sensations and emotions (“All Brains”). Stimming is also a way of communicating; the All Brains Are Beautiful workshop describes stimming as “Autistic body language.”



Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation¹¹

When writing about gender identity and sexual orientation, a principle to keep in mind is that **all people** have a gender identity (or identities) and a sexual orientation (or orientations), inclusive of asexuality. Many societies are heteronormative, making it “normal” to be straight and cisgender. In these societies, writers sometimes make the inaccurate assumption that the terms gender identity and sexual orientation are only relevant for people who self-identify outside of this heteronormative paradigm (for example, who self-identify as queer or gay or who express a non-binary or trans gender identity). The term cisgender highlights that folks whose expressed gender identities match or fit with the biological sex they were assigned at birth have a gender identity that can be named and discussed.

Steps for Inclusive Writing about Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation:

- **Question heteronormative assumptions**

Here is an example of the ways that heteronormativity shapes our ideas about family:

Heterosexist Language	Possible Revisions
“Each child must return his or her permission form with a signature from his or her mother or father.”	“Children must return their permission forms with a signature from a parent or guardian.” “Each child must return a signed permission form.”

- **Think critically about relevance**

It can be hard to figure out if something is relevant or not, but it is important to think critically about it because, historically, writers have included information about people’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity without their consent. This is a way of outing someone (see glossary for description).

Whether intentionally or not, writing in heteronormative societies often suggests that LGBTQIA2S (Lesbian, Gay, Trans/Transgender, Bisexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual/Aromantic, 2 Spirit) identities are abnormal and so **always** noteworthy. Inclusive writing recognizes that all gender identities and sexual orientations are normal and none are more or less noteworthy.

¹¹ Thank you to Noah Jensen, Administrative Assistant at Out On Campus, for his feedback and suggestions on this resource.



- **Respect identities**

Respecting identities means that we can't dismiss them as preferences. Here are some common expressions that use the word preferences, and some suggestions for how to re-write them:

- Sexual preferences → Sexual orientations, attractions, sexuality
- Preferred pronouns → Pronouns, personal pronouns

- **Remove unnecessarily gendered language from our writing**

Some writers use s/he or him and her for greater inclusivity. However, these gendered pronouns reinforce a binary understanding of gender. Inclusive writing aims to avoid gender bias and overtly gendered language, unless gender is a specific area of discussion. When writing about gender, recognize trans and non-binary gender identities and expressions (see glossary for description). Here are some terms that are unnecessarily gendered:

Gendered Term	Revised Term
Policeman	Police officer
Fireman	Firefighter
Chairman	Chairperson, Chair
Steward/stewardess	Flight attendant
Waiter/waitress	Server

Other terms have a long association with a gender and are sexist. For example, the term prostitute is sexist and is considered by many to be disrespectful. More respectful terms include sex worker, sex trade worker, sex professional, and adult entertainment industry professional.¹²

- **Use pronouns properly and respectfully**

When writing about individuals, we need to find out which pronouns they use. When we do not know or cannot find out about pronouns (for example, when we are writing about an author whose work we've read but whom we do not know and cannot consult), we should not assume based on names, photos, etc. Doing research about the author to see what pronouns others use to refer to them can sometimes be helpful. However, this can be both inconsistent and inaccurate. When we cannot confirm someone's pronouns, the best practice is to avoid using pronouns by referring to the person's name (either full name or last name) or by referring specifically to their work or ideas.

¹² For more information, see the infosheet "[Language Matters: Talking about Sex Work](https://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/StellaInfoSheetLanguageMatters.pdf)" <https://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/StellaInfoSheetLanguageMatters.pdf>



- **Separate biology/anatomy from gender**

When writing about bodily functions such as menstruation, lactation, or ejaculation, a direct link is often made to a cisgender identity. Inclusive writing focuses, where relevant, on bodily functions and body parts, and does not make assumptions about gender.

Breastfeeding mothers often found it helpful to have a quiet place on campus	→	Parents often found it helpful to have a quiet place on campus in which to feed their babies
Pregnant women	→	Pregnant people, pregnant bodies*
Feminine hygiene products, such as tampons	→	Hygiene products for menstruation (or monthly bleeding), such as tampons

* There are male, female-identified, and non-binary people who have wombs and can experience pregnancy. We therefore need to check our gendered assumption that pregnancy is a female experience. See the glossary for a related note on the language of breastfeeding.

The overall principle is to be as specific, accurate, and clear as possible. If you are referring to a bodily function or a part of anatomy, keep the emphasis there, rather than making gendered assumptions about who has that anatomy or experiences those bodily functions.

In these ways, inclusive writing actively avoids implying that there are some “real” or “normal” men and women. Instead, it recognizes that there are many real, normal, and different ways to experience bodies and gender and validates this diversity of experiences.

Additional Resources:

Downloadable [Style Guide for Writing about Transgender People](#) by the Radical Copyeditor.

The Style Guide for Writing about Transgender People by the Radical Copyeditor, updates:

[Avoiding Language Traps](#)

[Bodies and Anatomy](#)

[They as a Personal Pronoun](#)



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Additional Resources (continued):

[Trans-Pride Canada Style Guide](#)

[“No Big Deal” Campaign - Singular they](#)

[LGBTQIA Resource Centre glossary for terminology](#)

[Link to GLAAD Glossary](#)



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Black Peoples, Indigenous Peoples, and People(s) of Colour (BIPOC)

The terms People(s) of Colour (POC) and Black Peoples, Indigenous Peoples, and People(s) of Colour (BIPOC) have become popular in activist and academic writing. These terms allow for collective activism and recognition that, while differences clearly exist, living in a culture of white supremacy impacts all folks of colour. These terms are also useful ways of focusing on being “of colour,” rather than being defined as “non-white,” as used to be standard.

However, some writers reject the term [People\(s\) of Colour](#) and the [acronym BIPOC](#) (and its variations, see Glossary for more), because they conflate issues across all people who are not white. As a result, these terms and acronyms can be used to erase important differences in the historical and contemporary experiences of the peoples identified with that label, including Black and Indigenous peoples. Recalling that specificity is a core principle of inclusive writing, it is preferable to write specifically and directly about the experiences of particular people or groups of people, rather than trying to generalize across a wide swath of experiences. [One recommendation](#) when you do need to generalize is to use the term "racialized people(s)," rather than using the acronym BIPOC. One of the benefits of the term "racialized" is that it recognizes that race is not an inherent quality of an individual, but rather a complex socio-cultural process.

A Case in Point:

Colonization provides a challenging example of the need to differentiate between the peoples and experiences that might get lumped together with a term like BIPOC. Clearly, Indigenous peoples experience colonization differently from other People of Colour, who may self-identify as Settlers, Immigrants, Refugees, etc. (see glossary for description).

There is a [further distinction](#) to be made, as well, recognizing that many Black people and some other People of Colour were stolen from their homelands and brought into colonial contexts unwillingly, as slaves. This experience needs to be distinguished from the context usually described by the term Settler.

Steps for Inclusive Writing about Peoples of Colour, and/or Black Peoples, and/or Indigenous Peoples:

- **Learn more**

Especially because of the ways that Black, Indigenous, and People(s) of Colour have historically been misrepresented in and harmed by written texts (of all kinds), writers need to work hard to



learn about language, terminology, and relevant style conventions.

This step is especially important for white writers (writers who are not Black, Indigenous, or People of Colour), who may unintentionally make assumptions or use language in ways that perpetuate harm.

- **Check your verb tense**

Non-Indigenous writers sometimes write about Indigenous peoples using the past tense, which suggests that Indigenous peoples belong in/to the past. This way of writing also suggests that Indigenous peoples have been conquered or assimilated and are not connected to living cultures in the present. For more on this aspect of inclusive writing, see [Elements of Indigenous Style](#) (2018) written by Dr. Gregory Younging, a member of the Opsakwayak Cree Nation in Northern Manitoba.

- **Be specific**

Many non-Indigenous writers refer non-specifically to Indigenous, Native, Aboriginal, or First Nations peoples in their writing. These are collective terms and can be used to refer to Indigenous peoples broadly.² However, writing about a specific Indigenous Person or Nation should use the name of that specific Nation.

Non-specific writing about Indigenous Peoples has been widely criticized as being pan-Indian or pan-Indigenous. It implies, even if unintentionally, that the writer thinks all Indigenous Nations and even all Indigenous Peoples are the same as each other. It also erases important cultural, linguistic, and other differences.³

Writing about Indigenous Peoples and/or Nations should therefore make every effort to name the specific Nation. Note, too, that many Indigenous Nations are [reclaiming their names](#) for themselves/their Nations. This reclamation effort allows them to refer to themselves in their own Indigenous languages, even where Anglicized or otherwise colonial names have been used for a long time. For example, the name for the Cree Nation, in [Nehiyawewin \(the Cree language\)](#), is Nehiyawak and an individual person is Nehiyaw.

Some writers will include information about an Indigenous author's Nation when referencing

² Many Indigenous Peoples prefer the term Indigenous to other terms like Indian, Aboriginal, or Native; however, the terms Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis are all currently used in Canadian law.

³ Using terms like People(s) of Colour can also be a way of being non-specific, especially when writing about an individual, a particular culture or Nation



their work. This practice is a way of acknowledging that an author's Indigenous Knowledge is a relevant part of their expertise. For two examples of how this acknowledgement can be done, see the references to Dr. Gregory Younging's work above and below.

- **Choose words with care**

Non-Black writers sometimes use the term African American to refer to any Black person living in North America (or Turtle Island, see glossary for description). Such a careless use of language can erase individual identities and differences and may also impose two cultural identities (African and American) on a person based exclusively on how they look. Many Black people living in North America would not choose to self-identify as either African or American and may trace their cultural identity to other places in the world, or prefer to self-identify in entirely different ways.

Many other terms exist that are both outdated and racist and should not be used. For example, the term Oriental was once commonly used to describe Asian peoples, but is now widely recognized as racist.

Think carefully about your words to avoid using terms out of habit. Of course, it is always best to find out how someone self-identifies before describing them in writing.

- **Choose capital letters with care, too!**

The choice to either capitalize or not capitalize a term can signal a particular stance to a reader. It is therefore important to make a conscious choice about the terms that we capitalize in our writing. Sometimes, we may even want to include a reference to how/why we have made this choice in the text or in a footnote.

For example, many writers capitalize the word Black when writing about Black people. Some of those writers will also capitalize the word White when writing about White people. However, some will capitalize **only** the word Black as a way of focusing on the experience of Black people and of showing awareness of white privilege. That being said, style guides have different rules about capitalization.

APA prefers capital letters and CMA prefers lower case. When being graded on conformity to a specific style guide, consult that guide's standards for capitalization. As writers we can, of course, choose to challenge the style guide. If we do, though, we should include a note (either in text or in a footnote) explaining why, so that the instructor doesn't think we simply did notice the style guide's rules.



In [Elements of Indigenous Style](#) (2018), Younging (Nehiyaw) provides clear guidelines for terms that should be capitalized when writing about Indigenous Peoples or Nations: “terms for Indigenous identities; Indigenous governmental, social, spiritual, and religious institutions; and Indigenous collective rights should be capitalized” (p. 102).

- **Think about pluralization**

Many writers choose to pluralize terms (for example peoples in “Indigenous Peoples” above) as a way of signaling both the diversity represented by the term and, sometimes, a tendency for the term to be used in problematic ways. For example, Indigenous Peoples is often used as a way of indicating an awareness of the pan-Indian or pan-Indigenous approach. The term Peoples correctly identifies that there are many Indigenous Nations and Peoples in the world and, while they may identify with one another and work together to oppose shared elements of oppression, they do not share a singular identity or culture.

- **Write the metanarrative**

Metanarrative means “the narrative about the narrative.” In academic writing, it is used to explain decisions we have made as writers and researchers. Because there is no one size fits all terminology that we can use for inclusive writing, the most respectful and inclusive approach is to stay curious and find out as much as we can about the people(s) and group(s) we are writing about, and then to use the terminology that is right for them. Writing the metanarrative gives us a way to explain how we have decided on the terms we are using and why they are the most respectful and appropriate terms to use in this case.

- **Cite appropriately**

Teachings from Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers should be cited both in text and in your references list. Neither APA or MLA currently has formal guidelines for this citation, but guidelines have been created by [NorQuest College Library](#), and can be found linked on the SFU Library website, [Citations and Style Guide](#) page.

If you want to approach an Elder or Knowledge Keeper for teachings, you will need to follow the appropriate protocol. If you do not know what the protocol is, please ask before proceeding. You can ask the Elder or Knowledge Keeper themselves or another person from the same Nation. Note: protocols are culturally specific!



Additional Resources:

Radical Copyeditor's blog post: [Black with a Capital "B"](#)

["Black is the New Black"](#) – article in The Bulletin

Christi Belcourt's article: [Reclaiming Ourselves by Name](#)

Dr. Gregory Younging's [Elements of Indigenous Style](#) (2018) provides clear and thorough explanations for 22 principles for writing "by and about Indigenous Peoples." These include principles related to inappropriate terminology, the names of Indigenous Peoples, inappropriate possessives, compensation, and Indigenous language translation. It is an indispensable resource for anyone doing research or writing related to Indigenous issues.



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Ableism, Disability, Mental Health, and Neurodiversity

Talila “TL” Lewis provides the following working definition of ableism:

A system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence and excellence. These constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence and excellence are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics and capitalism. This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on people’s appearance and/or their ability to satisfactorily produce, excel and ‘behave.’ You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.¹⁵

This working definition, grounded in community work and discussion, is a good starting point because it emphasizes both the intersectional nature of oppression (see glossary) and the ways that a harmful status quo, like ableism, becomes normalized and perpetuated. Practicing inclusivity in writing means intentionally looking at constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, and excellence and actively questioning these ideas as we write and in our writing.

When we do not question our assumptions, it is likely that ableist ideas and language will appear in our writing because these ideas circulate in our societies all the time. This resource cannot provide a comprehensive checklist for writing about disability, mental health, and neurodiversity, but it aims to raise certain common issues and concerns, and to provide additional resources for further learning.

Steps for Inclusive Writing Ableism, Disability, Mental Health, and Neurodiversity:

- **Think critically about relevance**

First and foremost, it is crucial to consider whether it is relevant to mention disability, mental health, and/or neurodiversity in our writing. The question of relevance can cut two ways:

Often an individual person’s disability, mental health, or neurodiverse status is mentioned in writing where it is not, in fact, relevant to the matter being discussed. The inclusion of such information where it is not pertinent serves to other the person and maintains ableist ideas of

¹⁵ Lewis, TL. (2019, March 5). Longmore lecture: Context, clarity & grounding. [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.talilalewis.com/blog/longmore-lecture-context-clarity-grounding>
Another blog post, [Disability Ain’t for Ya Dozens \(or Demons\): 10 Ableist Phrases Black Folks Should Retire Immediately](#), includes a number of terms to **stop** using and links for more information on each.



normalcy by suggesting that the presence of a disability, mental health concern, or neurodivergent status is inherently abnormal and worthy of particular notice.

However, writers are sometimes nervous about mentioning disability, mental health, and/or neurodivergence, because they think they will “get it wrong” or “say the wrong thing.” Of course, as writers we do have a responsibility to do our best to get it right, and the way that we do that is by learning more and doing more research. Being nervous about getting it wrong is not a good excuse to avoid or ignore a relevant topic.

Avoiding these topics or using euphemistic language is harmful, can entrench the idea that these topics are taboo, and can result in an erasure – not only of the subject matter, but also of people. This erasure, too, supports ableist ideas of normalcy by implying that anything that falls outside of an (ill-defined) understanding of the “normal human experience” cannot be mentioned except, perhaps, by “experts.”¹⁶ In this way, the social stigma associated with disability, mental health issues, and neurodivergence is reinforced.

- **Frame ideas carefully**

A common ableist pitfall in writing about disability, mental health, and neurodivergence is to frame these aspects of the human experience as deficits or defects. The deficit framework perpetuates the stereotype that there is a “normal” way to be human, which does not include disability, mental health concerns, or neurodivergence. Below are some common words associated with the deficit framework:

- Abnormal, abnormality
- Defect (ex. “birth defect”)
- Suffers from
- Families affected by or touched by (ex. Disability, Autism)
- Victim
- Infirmary
- Confined to (ex. a bed, a wheelchair, home)
- Burden
- Struggle
- Need to overcome

¹⁶ Here, the use of scare quotes is intended to problematize the idea of expertise. Often, experts in these contexts are considered medical experts and/or researchers. The expertise of people who have lived experience is too frequently overlooked and dismissed.



- Search for a cure
- Illness*

*When writing specifically about illnesses and/or chronic illnesses, this word is clearly appropriate and, indeed, necessary. However, the term can also be misapplied to the context of disability, mental health, and neurodivergence. Writers need to be careful not to conflate disability, neurodivergence, and even many mental health concerns with illness. This includes discussing the need for a cure for disabilities or neurodivergence, which suggests that these ways of being human are not normal or even okay.

- **Respect experiences and identities**

While some people may describe their experiences of disability, mental health concerns, or neurodivergence as a struggle, many others claim these aspects of their identities as valuable. Many people challenge the deficit framework by claiming their disabilities, their experiences of mental health, and/or their neurodivergence as parts of their cultural identities. These reclamation efforts make it clear that these are **not** challenges to be overcome, but instead are valued parts of people’s identities, cultures, and communities. Here are some examples:

- Disability gain → a term used to counter narratives of loss (ex. hearing loss)
- Culturally Deaf → “I identify as culturally Deaf”
- Blind community → “I am a proud member of the blind community”
- Disability cultural centres → “We are advocating for a disability cultural centre at the university to promote acceptance”
- Autistic culture and expression → “Stimming is part of Autistic culture and expression”

- **Learn about the medical and social models of disability¹⁷**

There are different perspectives about what constitutes ability, disability, health, illness, and neurodivergence. The conventional view of disability is often referred to as the “medical model.” In this model, individuals are understood to be disabled because of their physical, mental, or sensory impairments. In other words, the individual and their experiences are seen as the problem. It is referred to as the medical model, because discussions often focus on the

¹⁷ This section was substantially informed by the Autistics United workshop materials for “All Brains Are Beautiful” and by Erin Human’s infographic [Medical Model Vs. Social Model](https://erinhuman.com/2017/08/05/disability-101-medical-model-vs-social-model/) (2017).

<https://erinhuman.com/2017/08/05/disability-101-medical-model-vs-social-model/>



individual's medical issues and ways that these issues might be cured or removed. This way of thinking is in line with the deficit framework described above.

There is also a social model of disability though! This model focuses on the social barriers that cause people to **experience** disability. In this model, it becomes clear that inflexible, prejudiced, and oppressive conditions are the problem, and that any given person might be disabled by encountering these conditions, which have not been set up for their needs.

A Case in Point:

Our society does not, generally, think of people who wear glasses as being disabled; however, when they find themselves without their glasses certain everyday experiences (for example, reading a menu in a restaurant) may present barriers for them. Furthermore, we do not usually think of people using strollers as being disabled, but they encounter barriers when there are no alternatives to stairs and where curb cuts have not been made.

Chronic illnesses are also worth considering. While chronic illnesses are often not categorized as disabilities, many social expectations can make experiencing a chronic illness disabling for people. Chronic illnesses are also often associated with social stigma and so writing about them and, especially, about people who live with such illnesses also requires significant care and attention to language.

Using the social model of disability, we can think of disabling as a verb – something that is **done to people** by conditions that make their experiences more challenging than they need to be. This is a big shift from the medical model, which suggests that disabled is an adjective that applied (often in what is assumed to be a static way) to some people, whose bodies, minds, or ways of experiencing the world are the problems.

- **Learn about person-first and identity-first language**

Person-first writing is often presented as the most respectful and inclusive approach because, as the term suggests, it focuses on the person before providing a label. Writing “disabled person,” for example, puts the label first. In person-first writing, suggests revising to “person with” or “person who has” a disability. Literally, it puts the word person first. Symbolically, many people find this more respectful, because it does not suggest that a person can be described or understood through a single identity label like disabled.

While there are benefits to person-first writing, many advocates and scholars from within disability, mental health, and neurodiverse communities argue for **identity**-first language. While



person-first language aims to ensure that we do not define a person entirely by one aspect of their experience (for example, a disability), strict adherence to this approach can undermine an individual's work to claim that aspect of their lived experience as a part of their identity.

Many writers therefore argue that person-first language relegates an important aspect of their identity to something that they merely possess (for example, I **have** autism). Some have also drawn comparisons to the way we write about cultural identities: it is usually not seen as problematic to write that someone is, for example, Vietnamese. However, a person-first approach would imply that we have to write that they are a "person of Vietnamese descent" or a "person with Vietnamese heritage."

Identity-first writing requires us as writers to find out how a person self-identifies and to respect that self-identification. Many autistic activists, for example, choose to self-identify as autistic and **not** as "a person with autism." Insisting on person-first language where an individual has expressed a different preference is **not** inclusive writing.

Additional Resources:

[Autistics United Resource List](#)

[Autistic Self-Advocacy Network Resource List](#)

[Inclusive Language Style Guide](#)

Identity-First Language & Disability Terminology:

["Journalists should learn to carefully traverse a variety of disability terminology"](#)

["Which terms should be used to describe autism?"](#) (academic article)

[Radical Copyeditor blog post about the issues with "person-first" language](#)

[The "Puzzle Piece" image often associated with autism and why it is not inclusive](#)



Exercises

First, identify the non-inclusive element(s) in the sentence. Then revise the language in the sentence to be more inclusive. See some suggested revisions and notes about the language use on reverse.

1. Every artist learns from those who came before him or her.
2. My cousin has been on stage all her life and proudly describes herself as an older actress.
3. The Nisga'a have spent a century demanding Indigenous title to their traditional territory.¹
4. The fur trade swept up Indigenous Peoples in a new economy based on supplying beaver pelts to French and English traders.²
5. Asian students can expect to see the greatest success in the fields of Business, Computer Science, and Engineering.³
6. Did SFU's designers consider the disabled when they decided to build so many stairs?
7. Trump's alleged ban on transgenders in the military is a political ploy.⁴
8. They/them/theirs are Simeon's preferred pronouns.
9. Many women never come forward to report abuse, rape, violence and assault because the trauma of the legal process is sometimes seen as exacerbating the original crime, rather than punishing it.⁵
10. Neighbourhood resistance to temporary modular housing sends a hostile message to the homeless.
11. I acknowledge that SFU is on unceded traditional Indigenous territory.
12. These slides will also include captions for the hearing-impaired.
13. Autistic people may suffer from a variety of symptoms, all of which may make it challenging for them to participate normally in class.

¹ From Gregory Younging, *Elements of Indigenous Style*, p. 76.

² Ibid.

³ From <https://www.mcgill.ca/senate-subcommittee-women/files/senate-subcommittee-women/INCLUSIVELANGUAGEGUIDELINES2010.pdf> (p. 12)

⁴ From The Radical Copyeditor: <https://radicalcopyeditor.com/2017/08/31/transgender-style-guide/>

⁵ From <https://www.nelsonnet.com.au/cproot/1273/2/ENG10LAIN00046.pdf>



Exercises - Possible Revisions

1. Every artist learns from those who came before *him or her*.

This is gendered language and excludes anyone who does not identify within the gender binary. Some possible revisions include

Every artist learns from those who came before *them*.*

All artists learn from those who came before *them*.

* The use of the singular *them* has a long history but is still controversial for some. If you prefer, you can always make your subject plural to match the plural pronoun.

2. My cousin has been on stage all her life and proudly describes herself as an *older actress*.

The term *actress* is also gendered language, though it is language that is still commonly used by many involved in theatre. This is an instance where you may want to quote the speaker directly. For example, My cousin has been on stage all her life and proudly describes herself as “an *older actress*.”

You may also consider explaining to your reader the relevance/significance of your cousin’s age and her use of this gendered language to describe herself. As described in the SLC Inclusive Writing resources, this is known as writing the metanarrative.

3. The Nisga’a have spent a century *demanding* Indigenous title to their traditional territory.

This language implies a non-Indigenous perspective about Indigenous title. Here is a possible revision

The Nisga’a have spent a century *demanding that the colonial government recognize* their Indigenous title to their traditional territory, *which was never extinguished*.

4. The fur trade *swept up* Indigenous Peoples in a new economy based on supplying beaver pelts to French and English traders.

While the fur trade with French and English traders did, indeed, represent a new economy for many Indigenous Peoples, the language of “swept up” casts the Indigenous peoples involved as passive players within, rather than active creators of, this new economy. Here is a possible revision

The fur trade represented a new economy based on beaver *pelts for the French, English, and Indigenous traders involved*.

Note, too, that Indigenous Peoples is a sweeping term. Not *all* Indigenous Peoples were involved in the fur trade, or traded specifically in beaver pelts with the French and English. Ideally, be more specific about which Indigenous Nations you are specifically writing about.



5. Asian students can expect to see the greatest success in the fields of Business, Computer Science, and Engineering.

This entire sentence seems to be based on a stereotypical association between Asian students and success in specific academic subjects. To revise, consider the evidence you are drawing on and the specific claim you want to make. For example, “*According to statistics from a recent SFU survey, international students from Japan, China, and Vietnam indicated that they experienced the most success in their Business, Computer Science, and Engineering classes.*”

*Note: no such survey actually exists, and so this wouldn’t be a compelling claim to make!

6. Did SFU’s designers consider *the disabled* when they decided to build so many stairs?

While this is an understandable question for anyone who has experienced a challenge navigating SFU, the issue here is that the sentence uses an adjective (disabled) as a stand in for an entire group of people. Additionally, disability is another umbrella term and is often used to refer to, for example, learning disabilities and mental health concerns, which may have little to no impact on someone’s use of stairs. Here, again, you may want to be more specific when you revise:

“Did SFU’s designers consider *people using mobility aids, such as wheelchairs, walkers, and even strollers*, when they decided to build so many stairs?”

7. Trump’s alleged ban on *transgenders* in the military is a political ploy.

Again, the issue here is that the sentence uses an adjective (transgender) as a stand in for an entire group of people. Instead, keep the adjective as an adjective and use it to describe a noun (ex., people or soldiers): “Trump’s alleged ban on *transgender soldiers* in the military is a political ploy.”

8. They/them/theirs are Simeon’s *preferred* pronouns.

Our identities are not preferences. Calling Simeon’s pronouns preferred suggests that it is optional to use them or not. Here is a possible revision, “They/them/their *are* Simeon’s pronouns.”

9. Many *women* never come forward to report abuse, rape, violence, and assault because the trauma of the legal process is sometimes *seen as* exacerbating the original crime, rather than punishing it.

Two central issues arise in this sentence: 1. It implies that only women experience abuse, rape, violence, and assault (or that only women do not come forward about these experiences), and 2. the language “seen as” casts doubt as to whether or not the legal process is intimidating and foreboding for those who chose not to come forward. Given that a central challenge for those who *do* report such incidents is being believed, any language that introduces doubt is problematic and potentially alienating. Here is a possible revision, “Many *people* never come forward to report abuse, rape, violence, and assault because the trauma of the legal process *can exacerbate [or simply, exacerbates]* the original crime, rather than punishing it.”



10. Neighbourhood resistance to temporary modular housing sends a hostile message to the homeless.

Another example of an adjective representing a group. As in the other examples, this also creates a generalization where more specificity is in order. Here is a possible revision, “Neighbourhood resistance to temporary modular housing sends a hostile message to *those who need that housing, including those experiencing homelessness and housing instability.*”

11. I acknowledge that SFU is on unceded traditional Indigenous territory.

It is great to offer a land acknowledgment, although some Indigenous peoples have expressed concerns that these acknowledgments are sometimes being done without proper care and consideration. Doing a land acknowledgment well requires us to learn about the Nations whose territories we are occupying. Resources like this online Native Land map (<https://native-land.ca/>) can help.

A more inclusive land acknowledgment would read: “I acknowledge that SFU’s Burnaby campus is on the unceded shared territories of the *xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam)*, *Sḵw̓x̓w̓ú7mesh (Squamish)*, *Səlíz l̓wətəʔ (Tsleil-Waututh)*, and *kʷikʷəłəm (Kwkwetlem)* peoples.

* Unceded means never transferred or surrendered and indicates that much of the land in British Columbia is untreated and yet remains occupied. Lands for which there are Treaties are not unceded and should not be described as such. See the Inclusive Writing Resources Glossary for more information.

Land acknowledgements are most effective when they are made with a personal connection and understanding, rather than simply by following an accepted script.

12. These slides will also include captions for the hearing-impaired.

While some people still use it, many people find the term hearing-impaired harmful, since it comes from a deficit framework that focuses on an impairment. Deaf and hard of hearing are often more acceptable.

It is also worth asking whether only those who are hearing-impaired (or deaf or hard of hearing) will benefit from the captions. Indeed, many people use captions for many different reasons. Captions can be considered an example of universal design for that reason.

This revision would probably effectively communicate your message, without using a term that some find harmful and exclusionary: “These slides will also include captions.”

13. Autistic students may suffer from a variety of symptoms, all of which may make it challenging for them to participate normally in class.

The term suffer indicates that someone is in distress, which may or may not be the case for specific Autistic students in specific classes. In addition to being potentially inaccurate, many Autistic people dismiss this kind of language as pitying. Use non-judgmental descriptive language in its place.

Words that imply that some people are “normal” or have a normal experience and that others are “abnormal” or have abnormal experiences are inaccurate and harmful. In this case, for



example, it would be more helpful to get specific about what kinds of class participation may be challenging for Autistic people. As always, inclusive writing asks us to consider what we really want to say and why it is relevant.

Here is a possible revision of this sentence:

“Autistic students may find it helpful to stim during class.”

Stimming can refer to a broad range of behaviours, and usually consists of repetitive actions or movements. Many people, whether or Autistic or not, find stimming calming and find that it helps them to focus. Because stimming can increase focus, it should be viewed as improving and not distracting from classroom participation and engagement. See the Glossary for more.

