

Including Identity*

- Only mention a person's age, race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, (dis)ability, etc. if
 - it is pertinent to the story or discussion (e.g. the country of origin for Haitian refugee claimants)
 - it motivates an incident under discussion (e.g. a hate crime)
 - it helps explain the emotions involved in an event (e.g. an Iranian-American's personal reaction to Trump's travel ban).
- We should be mindful about avoiding other off-topic personal details, particularly when discussing women. For instance, it would only be appropriate to mention a woman's marital or family status if it is relevant to the discussion (e.g. in an article describing parental leave benefits). Similarly, we would never mention a person's physical appearance unless it is directly pertinent to the discussion (e.g. people using tattoos as expressions of political dissent).

Avoiding Biased Language

- Do not make generalizations about groups of people, or assume that some traits are essential to members of certain groups—even if those traits are positive. Remember that groups are made up of individuals who can vary greatly in terms of personal beliefs, behaviours, abilities, values, preferences, etc. When we make generalizations about people, we overlook their complexity and deny their individuality.
- This is true of historical groups as well: people who lived in the past were not homogenous, and were not more innocent, barbaric, etc. than people alive today. Rather than describe others in relation to your own modern values, beliefs and practices, try to understand and describe them in their own cultural and historical contexts.
- Avoid value-laden terms when discussing groups. The terms *backward* or *uncivilized* implies that you are speaking from a culture that is comparatively more progressive, enlightened, and superior. (You aren't.)
- Similarly, avoid terms that imply pity or condescension, or that make unfair assumptions about a person's experience: e.g. "suffering from autism" or "confined to a wheelchair" implies pain, affliction, and limitation where none may exist.
- When discussing sensitive or politically controversial subjects, use neutral term (e.g. "opponents of abortion" instead of "pro-lifers" or "anti-choice").

* Developed from *The Canadian Press Stylebook: A Guide for Writers and Editors* (17th edition), edited by James McCarten (Toronto: Canadian Press, 2013); *Editing Canadian English* (2nd edition)(Toronto: Editors' Association of Canada, 2000); the Canadian Race Relations Foundation Glossary of Terms <<http://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/en/resources/glossary-a-terms-en-gb-1?start=100>>; the UC Davis Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual Resource Center Glossary <<http://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary.html>>; and the American Anthropological Association Association's 1998 Statement on Race <<http://www.americananthro.org/ConnectWithAAA/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=2583>>.

- Feminine forms of words (e.g. poetess) can imply that males are the default in those professions, or that only females perform that job (e.g. stewardess). Use gender-neutral terms to be inclusive (e.g. humankind instead of mankind, fishers instead of fishermen, spokesperson instead of spokesman).
- Male pronouns are not generic or universal. Instead, use people's preferred pronouns. Use either the gendered pronoun used by the speaker (*he*, *she*), a gender-neutral singular pronoun (*ze*), or a plural pronoun that doesn't reflect gender (*they*).[†]

Word Choice

When identifying an individual or an ethnic/cultural group, always use the terms and spelling preferred by those involved.

Be aware that older publications may contain language that was commonly used but is now considered derogatory (e.g. mentally retarded, Negro). Only include racial slurs or derogatory language when they are part of a direct quotation and are essential to the story or discussion. Make sure to indicate the source, and show that the language belongs to someone else by using quotation marks.

On one hand, we try to be as precise as possible when referring to groups of people; for instance, we wouldn't use the umbrella term "First Nations" if we are discussing the actions or views of one particular band. On the other hand, focusing too much on labelling identities may place inappropriate emphasis on a person's ethnic background. For example, using the term "Chinese-Canadian" instead of just "Canadian" may seem to qualify the person's inclusion as a Canadian. As discussed above, only use such terms if the individual prefers them or if it is relevant to the discussion.

Capitalization

In general, words derived from proper names of languages, nationalities, and religions are capitalized (e.g. Anishinaabe, Jewish, French-Canadian, Latino). Terms like "black," "white" and "indigenous" can be lowercase or uppercase, depending on the style guide (APA, MLA, Chicago, CP, etc.) and the author's preference. Some people do not capitalize these terms because they do not come from proper nouns. Other authors choose to capitalize these terms, especially Black, as a sign of respect and so that the word is seen as having the same status and importance as other terms of identity.

[†] For more information on gender-neutral pronouns, see US Davis Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual Resource Center website <<http://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/pronouns.html>>.

Glossary

Below is a glossary of terms used to describe some aspects of identity in Canada. This list is by no means exhaustive; it includes terms that students have asked about at the Writing Centre, as well as terms that may be unfamiliar to new writers, and those whose meaning and use may have been changed or questioned recently.

Aboriginal peoples – descendants of the original inhabitants of North America, including

First Nations: a term widely used by status and non-status Indians (see below), which does not have a legal definition

Inuit - indigenous people who live above the tree line in northern Canada. Note that “Eskimo” is considered offensive and is not used in Canada, although it is still used in the US/Alaska.

Métis - each Métis organization defines its membership differently. Historically, it has referred to descendants of specific groups, e.g. the children of French fur traders and their Cree wives. Today it may be used generally to describe anyone of mixed European and Native ancestry. In a legal context, it only refers to members of specific communities (e.g. Red River Colony), or people who have received land grants or scrip from the Canadian government.

Aboriginal people may be referred to or self-identify as native (a term first popularized in the 1970s, which some consider outdated) or indigenous (a term popularized in the 1980s and used globally to refer to first peoples).

Asian – a term that replaces the outdated and offensive Oriental, but which is also very broad. Where possible, further specify the country or origin or geographic region, e.g.

Southeast Asian - Burma/Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines

South Asian - India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan

Central Asian - some autonomous regions of China or Mongolia

East Asian - China, Japan, North and South Korea

West Asian - Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, the Gulf states, Iran, Afghanistan (also often referred to as Middle Eastern)

allophone – used in Canada, especially Quebec, to describe speakers whose first language is other than English or French.

anglophone – a person whose first and preferred language is English.

asexual – a person who generally does not feel sexual attraction or a desire for partnered sexuality.

band – a community of Status Indians with designated land and funds provided by the Crown. Most prefer the term First Nation or community.

bisexual, nonmonosexual, pansexual, omnisexual – terms that may be used variously to describe a person who has romantic, sexual, or affectional desire for people of the same and other genders and sexes, or towards people regardless of their gender or sex.

black – people who define themselves or are defined as such, with or without reference to dark skin colour. In Canada this may include those of African and/or Caribbean ancestry (i.e., African Canadians, Caribbean Canadians). Note that “black” is not a race, and may be associated with numerous ethnic groups. See the definition of “race.”

cisgender – a gender identity, or performance of a gender role, that appears to match the person’s assigned sex at birth. An antonym of transgender.

cross dresser – a person who dresses, at least partially, as a member of a gender other than their assigned sex. This term has replaced “transvestite,” an outdated and pejorative term used historically in the diagnosis of a medical/mental health disorder. This term does not correlate to any specific sexual orientation.

elderly – a term formerly used to describe those who were old or aging. This term has gained many negative connotations, including infirmity, dependency, etc. Preferred terms include “senior” or “older adult.”

ethnic group – a group of people who identify or are identified with one another on the basis of cultural characteristics that trace back to a common origin. These can include characteristics such as a shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history, and/or the geographical origin of oneself or one’s ancestors.

francophone – a person whose first and preferred language is French.

gay – a sexual and affectional orientation toward people of the same gender; can be used in reference to men or women.

heterosexual – a person who feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of a gender other than their own.

homosexual – a term formerly used to describe a person who feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the same gender. Because this term has been used historically to pathologize sexual minorities, it should be replaced with terms such as “gay” and “lesbian.”

Indian – a term still used in reference to Native Americans in the US, but used only in legal contexts in Canada, as it is considered offensive by many due to its colonial origins. The *Indian Act* further defines

status Indian - a person who qualifies or is registered to receive certain rights under the *Indian Act*.

non-status Indian - a person who identifies as indigenous and may have heritage, but who is not registered or does not qualify to receive certain rights under the *Indian Act*.

treaty Indian - a person registered with a treaty band and/or descendent from a band who has signed a treaty with the Crown.

intersex – people who develop or exhibit at birth a combination of primary or secondary sex characteristics (including chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, body hair or body fat distribution) that do not conform to societal definitions of male or female bodies. This term is used instead of the outdated and offensive term “hermaphrodite.”

lesbian – a woman whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same gender.

mentally ill – someone with a diagnosable psychological disorder (chronic or temporary), such as schizophrenia, depression, or bipolar disorder. Note that mental illness is not the same as intellectual disabilities (e.g. Down syndrome), which tend to be present since infancy or childhood, and which impair reasoning, learning, and problem solving.

minority – a group or member of a group that forms a relatively small percentage of the total population. Also a group that is marginalized in having reduced or no access to social, economic, political or religious power.

monosexual – a person who has romantic, sexual, or affectional desire for one gender only (e.g. heterosexual, gay, lesbian).

new Canadian – a recent immigrant to Canada, including new citizens as well as permanent residents who are legally resident in Canada but who have not yet taken Canadian citizenship.

people of colour – a term commonly used in the context of race relations and anti-racism to refer to people not identified as white. In Canada, this term is not used to refer to Aboriginal peoples, as they are considered distinct societies under the Canadian Constitution.

polygender, pangender – exhibiting characteristics of multiple genders

race – a term used to refer to a category of people identified by others based on visible physical features (particularly skin colour), thought to be distinctive hereditary traits tied to ancestry and geographical origin. Use this term when discussing the lived experience of racialized peoples, especially in the context of race relations and identity politics. However, be careful about referring to race as an unquestioned, natural category that encompasses other human traits. Race is largely a social construct. It has been thought to be based in biology and genetics, but the American Anthropological Association points out that science has shown “human populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated, biologically distinct groups,” and that “conventional geographic ‘racial’ groupings differ from one another only in about 6% of their genes.” While the concept of race may initially have been based in naturally occurring physical variations in the human species, it has incorrectly been associated with certain behaviours and aptitudes, and used as the basis for discrimination and oppression. Instead of race, “ethnicity” is used when discussing group cultural traits like language, religion, family customs, and food preferences.

reserve – a tract of land set apart for the use and benefit of First Nation community. Many prefer the term “First Nation” or “community” instead of reserve. Always use the name preferred by community residents (e.g. Elsipogtog rather than Big Cove). The term “reservation” is only used in the United States and does not apply in Canada.

transgender – an umbrella term that describes a wide range of identities and experiences of people whose gender identity and/or expression differs from conventional expectations based on their assigned sex at birth. Some trans people undergo medical transition (surgery or hormones), but many do not. This term can also describe people who have no gender or multiple genders. It is often abbreviated to “trans” or used as a prefix for more specific terms (e.g. trans man).

tribe – a term reserved for primitive or ancient peoples. Use First Nation, band, or community for modern contexts.

visible minority – a term used to refer to minorities with visible identifying features (e.g. Jewish men who wear a yamakas among a gentile majority, a person of colour within a white majority). This term is considered problematic by some, since it tends to assume the majority—i.e. the norm—is white, Christian, European, etc. Although it is a legal term widely used in human rights legislation and various policies, the terms “racialized minority” or “people of colour” are preferred by some.

white – a designation that has traditionally been used to describe those who have light to fair skin, especially people of Caucasian descent (a border area between Europe and Asia). However, this term is ambiguous and socially constructed; it has been applied variously to people having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, parts of India, Russian and/or North Africa. Note that “white” is not a race and may be used by or applied to numerous ethnic groups. See the definition of “race.”