

Inclusive Language Guidelines for Presenters to Avoid Stigmatizing Language

Last updated April 26, 2021 by Charlotte Beyer

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to present content in the MLA Annual Meeting. Below is a guide to help you utilize inclusive language within your presentation to avoid stigmatizing language. These guidelines can assist presenters in using language that support MLA's core values which include creating and sustaining an open, inclusive, and collaborative environment within and outside the profession. Remember attendees who have a variety of identities and lived experiences will be attending presentations and the language presenters use is important in creating a safe and inclusive environment for learning, sharing, and collaborating. Please use the resources below to learn how to be intentional with the language you use creating a safe and supportive environment for all attendees.

Acknowledgments

This guide was adapted from the MLA Content Proposals Reviewer Guide for Creating Inclusive Peer Review Comments which was distributed to peer reviewers of MLA content proposals. It was launched and distributed for the poster and lightning talks review period for MLA '21. The peer review comments guide was assembled with significant content and feedback from the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, AAMLA, Latinx Caucus, LGBTQIA+ Caucus, Social Justice Caucus, and Accessibility and Disability Caucus. This guide also used resources and expertise from Dr. Heather Kind-Keppel, Executive Director for Diversity and Inclusion at Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science for her input as well as Stacy Collins from Simmons University for creating the Anti-oppression guide <https://simmons.libguides.com/anti-oppression> which provided many resources for this guide. The NPC would like to thank all of these individuals and groups for their time, knowledge, and expertise. To learn more about the MLA core values visit: <https://www.mlanet.org/page/vision>

Disclaimer: This guide was assembled by a cisgender white woman, and the NPC welcomes feedback and suggestions especially from those perspectives and experiences of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), members of the Disability community, and LGBTQIA+ to improve this resource.

Resource to Review:

One amazing resource for learning about different forms of oppression and language is the Anti-Oppression Guide from Simmons University which was created by Stacy Collins. This guide includes definitions of things such as racism, Transmisia (also called Transphobia), ableism,

Islamomisia (also called Islamophobia), Sanism (also called mentalism or neuro-discrimination), Queermisia (also called Queerphobia or Homophobia), Judeomisia (also called Judeophobia and Antisemitism), Fatmisia (also called Fatphobia or Sizeism), and more. In addition to definitions, there are links to articles, videos, and more. <https://simmons.libguides.com/anti-oppression>

General words/concepts to avoid:

Minority, handicapped, suffering from/victim, special needs, inspiring/inspiration when connected with disability, and weight loss as a marker of health/self worth, and preferred pronouns (just use pronouns).

Important Note for all Identities:

If you are using a proper name, pronounce it correctly. Tip: If it is a colleague, ask them how to pronounce it once and then write it down phonetically and practice. If it is an organization or someone well known, there are pronunciation guides online for various languages and sometimes there might be videos online as well. If a name has an accent, use the accent. For example Hawaii is traditionally Hawai'i as the 'okina (') is treated as a letter so omitting it is like leaving a letter off of the word. This is also true for names and words with accent marks in other languages. Included in this guide are resources for how to make accent marks in word processing and PowerPoint programs.

General resources:

Below are some resources that give good overviews of terms to use and not use.

- **Diversity Style Guide:**
 - <https://www.diversitystyleguide.com/>
- **Conscious Style Guide:**
 - <https://consciousstyleguide.com/>

African-American/Black

Not all those who identify as Black also identify as African-American so avoid interchanging them. Also, if they capitalize the B use the capital B. The AP news style just recently made changes to add this rule: <https://apnews.com/71386b46dbff8190e71493a763e8f45a>

Black is an identity so if the applicant uses Black as a way to identify people, use Black and do not interchange People of Color (POC), which reflects a variety of communities. Black should be used as an adjective instead of a noun for example Black people instead of Blacks.

Resources:

- **AP says it will capitalize Black but not white**
 - <https://apnews.com/article/7e36c00c5af0436abc09e051261fff1f>

- **Not all black people are African American. Here's the difference.**
 - <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/not-all-black-people-are-african-american-what-is-the-difference/>
- **Everyday words and phrases that have racist connotations**
 - <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/06/us/racism-words-phrases-slavery-trnd/index.html>
- **NABJ (National Association of Black Journalists) Style Guide:**
 - <https://www.nabj.org/page/styleguideA>
- **For Some Black People, The Term 'Latinx' Is Another Form of Erasure**
 - <https://www.vice.com/en/article/dyz9ak/black-diasporans-latinx-term-another-form-of-erasure>

Asian/Asian-American

Remember that Asia is a continent and is made up of many countries such as China, Pakistan, India, Korea, and more. If the applicant specifies a country within the areas just mentioned, use that country and do not interchange Asia or Asian-American.

Asian refers to people who are citizens of the continent of Asia. Asian-American are people of Asian descent who are citizens of the United States. Pacific Islanders include Native Hawaiian, Samoa, Fiji, and other people of Pacific Island Nations.

Resources:

- **Here is a list of things not to say to Asians:**
 - <https://www.diversityinc.com/7-things-not-to-say-to-asian-americans/>
- **Asian-American Journalists Association Handbook:**
 - <https://www.aaja.org/2020/11/30/covering-asia-and-asian-americans/>
- **AAJA Calls on News Organizations to exercise care in Coverage of the Coronavirus Outbreak**
 - <https://www.aaja.org/2020/02/13/aaja-calls-on-news-organizations-to-exercise-care-in-coverage-of-the-coronavirus-outbreak/>
- **Seven ways to avoid double standard reporting on extremist violence (Report)**
 - <https://www.aaja.org/2018/04/06/seven-ways-to-avoid-double-standard-reporting-on-extremist-violence-report/>
- **Enabling Hawaiian Diacritics on Windows, MACOS, and Google Docs**
 - <https://www.hawaii.edu/askus/1767>

Disability

“As a learning moment, I think it’s important to kind of unpack what you just said. In the disability community, we never use the words ‘handicap’ or ‘suffering from’ to describe someone’s disability.” I paused, “We’re not suffering. We’re just living our lives in a different way.”

[Disability Isn’t a Bad Word, A How-to Guide for my College Peers & Administrators by Katherine Poe.](#)

Comments from the Accessibility and Disability Caucus

Be aware that the word “**inspiring**” in relation to disability has the ability to cause a lot of harm. There is a concept called inspiration porn that has done damage to the community over the years. **Inspiration porn** is the portrayal of disabled people with the goal of making non-disabled feel good about themselves. The implication is if a disabled person can do it, a non-disabled person can do it 100x better. Stella Young, an Australian Disability Rights activist coined it in 2014. To learn more about it, you can watch her TED talk: <https://youtu.be/8K9Gg164Bsw>

Ways it can be damaging:

- It puts pressure on disabled people to be “inspiring” to matter, instead of being just able to exist, and with the implication that without the inspiring act that their life with a disability is sad and worthless.
- It objectifies members of one group for the benefit of another group. In other words, the disabled person becomes a symbol that makes the non-disabled person feel better about themselves. It is the sentiment that if a disabled person accomplishes something like completing a marathon, the implied tagline is “what is your excuse?” directed to the non-disabled person.
- It implies the person needs to be “fixed” to be normal. What is normal to a non-disabled person is not the same for a person with disabilities. Sometimes what a non-disabled person views as needing to be fixed is actually part of the person with disabilities’ identity. The hashtag #abledsareweird highlight weird things non-disabled people do or say to a person with disabilities. This article highlights some of the tweets: <https://www.upworthy.com/ableds-are-weird-offers-a-brilliant-taste-of-the-everyday-crap-people-with-disabilities-deal-with>

Person First vs. Identity First

With disability there is person-first language and identity-first language, which are two separate schools of thought on how to describe people. Preference for either of these terms can vary from person to person. Presentations and publications typically use a person-first language however if you interact with someone at the conference with identity first, please respect how they classify themselves. For example many of the members of the autistic community use identity first (autistic person) as it is an integral part of their identity.

- **Person-first** puts the person first like a “person with diabetes” instead of “diabetic person”. People often use person first because they want to be seen as a person before their disability. For example, the use of the phrase person with diabetes instead of diabetic.
- **Identity-first** puts identity first like “autistic person” instead of “person with autism”. People often use identity first if they want to celebrate, claim, or own their disability as a core part of them. For example, “deaf person” rather than “person who is deaf”.

Different communities prefer person first vs identity first which is why it is important to reflect the language of the applicant. For example, members of the deaf, blind, and autistic communities may prefer identity first rather than person first as there is a culture that accompanies identity.

Other things to consider:

Do not refer to someone as a "victim" of their disability. For example, say "had a stroke" rather than a "stroke victim". Also, instead of saying for example "Sally suffers from depression", say "Sally has depression". This takes the negativity/victim out of it as well as the implication of helplessness.

Avoid phrases like crazy, insane, stupid, moron, idiot, mentally ill. These are all words that were used to stigmatize people with psychological disabilities.

Some phrases are stigmatizing to some, but not to others. For example, in scholarly writing person-first language is encouraged while some are claiming the disability as part of their identity.

Resources:

- **Disability Terminology: Choosing the Right Words When Talking About Disability**
 - <https://hiehelpcenter.org/2018/09/25/disability-terminology-choosing-right-words-talking-disability/>
- **Ableism and Language**
 - <http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/dasblog/2012/01/31/ableism-and-language/>
- **National Center on Disability and Journalism Style Guide**
 - <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>
- **Identity First Language:**
 - <https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/identity-first-language/>

Latinx/Hispanic/Latino/Latina

Comments from the Latinx Caucus:

- When spelling names ensure that you are spelling the authors name correctly when responding to submissions.
 - "Aidy" is not "Andy" (misspelled letter)
 - "Lucía" is not "Lucia" (missing accent)
 - "Robert Ortega Morales" is not "Mr. Morales" (assuming first last name as middle name) (also be mindful of assuming pronouns)
- Remember, the Latinx community is not a monolith and therefore there is no one way to determine what might be culturally appropriate for each person who self-identifies within this ethnicity. At minimum, something to keep in mind is that Hispanic and Latin-American/Latino/Latina/Latinx are not always interchangeable. To learn more check out [Special Report: Nuestra Comunidad: Themes and Shared Experiences in a Latinx Librarian Cohort, Part I](#) by Weeks, Nugent, Corn (2020) under the section "A Word/Una Palabra".

- Identifiers used by the community (not exhaustive):
 - Hispanic; Hispanic-American
 - [Country of origin]-American; For example: Mexican-American, Cuban-American
 - Spanish-speaking
 - Latin-American; Latinos; Latinas; Latin@; Latinx; LatinX
 - Chicano, Chicana, Chicax
 - Puerto Rican; Boricua
 - [Racial]-[Ethnic]; Afro-Latino; Afro-Cuban; Afro-Latinx

Resources:

- **How to type Spanish accents:**
 - <https://sites.psu.edu/symbolcodes/languages/psu/spanish/>
- **“Latinx” is growing in popularity. I made a comic to help you understand why. By Terry Blas**
 - <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/10/15/20914347/latin-latina-latino-latinx-means>
- **Cultural Competence Handbook from The National Association of Hispanic Journalists :**
 - <https://nahj.org/2020/08/18/cultural-competence-handbook/>
- **For Some Black People, The Term 'Latinx' Is Another Form of Erasure**
 - <https://www.vice.com/en/article/dyz9ak/black-diasporans-latinx-term-another-form-of-erasure>
- **About One-in-Four U.S. Hispanics Have Heard of Latinx, but Just 3% Use It**
 - <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2020/08/11/about-one-in-four-u-s-hispanics-have-heard-of-latinx-but-just-3-use-it>

Natives/Native Americans/Indigenous

Courtesy of Dr. Heather Kind-Keppel, Executive Director of Diversity and Inclusion, Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science.

The way the government and other entities define terms and the way Natives define terms can conflict or appear seemingly incongruent. Fortunately, or unfortunately, terms can be subjective and there is no universal truth when determining definitions. Finally, the evolving definitions amongst Native communities are another byproduct of ongoing self-determination.

-The Lived Experiences of Natives who Have Attended Both TCUs and PWIs by Dr. Heather Kind-Keppel

In addition to Natives/Native Americans/Indigenous/First Nations people some want to be identified by their specific tribal nation.

Do not use the words/phrases: totem pole, Eskimo, chief, too many chiefs not enough Indians, spirit animal, savage, powwow, injun, hold down the fort, on a warpath, Indian summer, Indian giver, rain dance, circle the wagons, or redskin. Also avoid saying you are a native (ex: Native

New Yorker) of the place you were born if you do not identify as Native or Native American. Instead use a phrase like born in, raised in, grew up in...as Native is related to identity and culture. Also avoid using the word tribe to describe any group of people especially if not association with Native/Indigenous people as again this is related to culture. These and other phrases are listed in some of the resources below.

Resources:

- **Indigenous Foundations: Terminology:**
 - <https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/terminology/>
- **7 things you should never say to a Native American**
 - <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.insider.com/native-american-offensive-racist-things-2020-1%3Famp>
- **Use these culturally offensive phrases, questions at your own risk**
 - <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/culturally-offensive-phrases-you-should-use-at>
- **100 Ways to Support—Not Appropriate From—Native People**
 - <https://www.vice.com/en/article/pa5a3m/how-to-be-an-ally-to-native-americans-indigenous-people>
- **Reporting and Indigenous Terminology, Native American Journalists Association:**
 - https://najanewsroom.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NAJA_Reporting_and_Indigenous_Terminology_Guide.pdf

LGBTQIA+

Below are comments from LGBTQIA+ Caucus

- Avoid using Sir/Madam/Ladies/Gentlemen - use non-gendered terms such as friends/folks
- Avoid using any career-related gendered language e.g. policeman
- Avoid stereotyping based on gender, age, culture, ancestry, etc.
- Only mention gender identity or sexual orientation if it's relevant to the context
- Do not use terms that reinforce stigma or imply helplessness (e.g. AIDS victim).
- Understand the difference between the terms “cisgender” and “straight/heterosexual” - the former is a gender identity, and the latter is a sexual orientation.
- Stay away from using terms such as “lifestyle”, “preference”, etc. that frame gender and sexual orientations as a choice as opposed to an orientation/identity.

Resources:

- **LGBTQ-Inclusive Language DOs and DON'TS**
 - <https://thesafezoneproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/SZP-Language-DO-DONT-Handout.pdf>
- **An Ally's Guide to Terminology: Talking About LGBT People & Equality, GLAAD**
 - <https://www.glaad.org/publications/talkingabout/terminology>

Comments, Feedback, and Improvements

Comments, feedback, and improvements to this guide can be directed to the National Program Committee (NPC) for the Medical Library Association (MLA). Members on the NPC can be found on the Committees page on the MLA website: <https://www.mlanet.org/p/cm/ld/fid=440>.