

Author Guidelines

Improving Representation and Diversity in Your Book

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What Is Inclusive Language?

Inclusive language is used whenever we want to accurately reflect and respect the experiences of specific communities. When we discuss inclusive writing at Sage, we're focused on underrepresented communities—people who have been sidelined by mainstream society and culture or have been historically oppressed. This includes, but is certainly not limited to, people of color, LGBTQ+, neurodivergent, and disabled people.

The words you use, and the way in which you use them, has a huge impact on others—and though it may seem small, using inclusive language is important. When writing is not inclusive, it can make the reader feel that the work isn't for them—and may even stop them from engaging with the work entirely. Using inclusive language shows that you're aware of and value the different perspectives, identities, and ideas that other individuals bring to the classroom. It creates an open environment where others know they won't be judged by what they can't control. And finally, using inclusive language establishes mutual respect with students and subjects.



As a publisher, we are committed to promoting equity throughout our publishing program, and we believe that using language is a simple and powerful way to create an environment in which everyone feels welcomed, respected, and safe. Although inclusive language considerations are important when writing about anything, we feel it is especially important when discussing topics like age, appearance, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and weight. This approach to finding the right term can be uncomfortable at times, especially when we're not used to thinking about language in this way.

You may receive feedback on your writing, whether from reviewers, adopters, or even students. Part of the feedback they give may not be related to inclusive language. For example, someone may point out that they find a word used in your text offensive. It can be easy to become defensive when that happens, but it's important to be open to this feedback and consider why it was given. During the development of your textbook, we'll undertake substantial efforts to properly represent all identities and viewpoints in your chapters.

We hope you will use this document as a guide as you begin writing and revising your textbook. Although not all-encompassing, we think it is a useful starting point to help you approach your work from a mindset of awareness.

This is an ongoing and continually evolving effort. We would also be happy to engage with individuals and groups who share our commitment and have specific guidance or expertise in this area.



General Inclusive Language Considerations

Here are some considerations to keep in mind when writing about people or groups in general.

Self-Identification

Different people have different preferred labels, and two people within the same demographic or community may refer to themselves in different ways. Whenever possible, ask individuals how they want to be identified and referred to. It may not always be possible to ask—if that's the case, do some research to try to understand the debate and then make an informed decision.

Groups

- For groups of people, be specific where possible. For example, instead of referring to “Native Americans” when referring to a single nation or tribe, try to specify which one is being referenced. If discussing gay men, specify that rather than saying “LGBTQ people” which covers many identities. When in doubt, be specific.



- Avoid using “the” to preface a group of people, such as “the elderly” or “the chronically ill.” This labels groups based on a single characteristic and can be dehumanizing. It’s better to say “older adults” or “people with chronic illnesses.”
- Refer to communities of people rather than a single community, which can imply that the community is a monolith. For example, use “Vietnamese communities” instead of “the Vietnamese community,” unless you are referring to a single specific community.

Person-First Language And Identity-First Language

Person-first language places the individual first instead of their characteristics, disability, condition, or circumstance. The goal of person-first language is to acknowledge the equal value of every individual, before attaching descriptions or identities to that person. It is recommended by many organizations and style guides, which you can find at the end of the document.

In contrast, identity-first language places the characteristic first and can perpetuate the idea that someone’s condition or circumstance define who they are.

Identity-First Language	Person-First Language
Poor person	Person with a low income, person whose income falls below the federal poverty threshold
Homeless person	Person who is unhoused, person who is experiencing homelessness
High-school dropout	Person with less than a high school education
Handicapped person	Person with a disability*
Mentally ill person	Person with a mental health condition*

**In both instances, it’s best to specify what their condition or disability is, if this information is available. For example, use “person with schizophrenia” over “schizophrenic person.”*

Person-first language is not without its critics; many disability advocates consider person-first language harmful because of the message it sends—that being disabled is separate, shameful, and unworthy of affirmation. If a person or group have specified how they want to be described, you should follow their preference, regardless of whether it is identity-first or person-first. However, when there is no clear community standard, prioritize person-first language.



Use Gender-Neutral Language

- Using the singular “they.” When referring to an individual of an unspecified gender, “they” should be used instead of “he”, “she”, or even “he/she.” Using “he/she” perpetuates the gender binary.
- Instead of “men and women”, use “people.” Like “he/she”, “men and women” perpetuates the idea that gender is fixed and there are only two genders.
- Look for gender-neutral descriptions (e.g., “firefighters” instead of “firemen”). Here are more ways you can adjust your gendered language to be more inclusive:

Gendered Language	Gender-Neutral Language
Fireman, Policeman	Firefighter, Police officer
Chairman, chairwoman	Chair
Actor/actress	Actor
Mankind	Humanity, people, human beings
Male nurse, female doctor	Nurse, doctor
“The best man for the job.”	“The best person for the job.”
“Guys” or other gendered collective phrases to refer to a group of people	Everyone, folks, people, you all, etc.

- Be careful of using “opposite sex” or “opposite gender.” Although we typically understand sex to be divided between men and women, using the “opposite sex” overlooks people who are intersex and may not fall into one of these two categories.

Avoid Imprecise Language

When in doubt, be specific. Imprecise language can lead to misinterpretations and generalizations, and in some cases, it can perpetuate stereotypes. The following sections offer examples of how using more precise language can help authors avoid DEI issues.

“Minority” Can Imply Inferiority

When describing a person, it is best to be specific about their identity and not just describe them as a minority. This can prove to be a harmful label that obscures who a person really is and implies that they are inferior. Instead of saying, “As a minority, Tessa has experienced discrimination,” you could say, “As a Black woman, Tessa has experienced racism and sexism.” The latter is more specific and therefore gives more information about who Tessa is and what she is experiencing.



“Minorities” vs. “Underrepresented Groups” vs. “Marginalized People”

Similarly, be careful of using “minorities” as a catch-all term to describe people who have been systemically marginalized or historically underrepresented. Again, “minority” can imply inferiority. It overlooks the larger structures and systems that contributed to these groups of people being considered marginalized or “other.”

Using “systemically marginalized people” instead of “minority” acknowledges the reality of how certain groups were oppressed and treated by dominant groups. Similarly, when discussing data, “underrepresented” signals that these groups or individuals were not including in certain areas.

Mention Specific Races and Ethnicities When Possible

The term “people of color” is often used to describe a group of people who are not white. There is some debate around the use of this term, but one thing that is clear is that it should not be used if a more specific label or descriptor is available. When referring to a group of Asian people, for example, “Asian people” should be used over “people of color.” The latter term implies that there are more racial groups represented than there really are.

Avoid Catch-All Terms

Be mindful of terms that are used as a catch-all to describe certain circumstances. “Poor” and “impoverished” are prime examples of this. Although these are common descriptions for people who struggle with a variety of financial issues, they warrant further attention. What does it mean to say someone is “poor”, for example? Do they have a low income? Are they unemployed? Are they experiencing housing insecurity? Do they have secure housing and a job, yet must prioritize feeding their children over feeding themselves?

In situations like this, it’s best to talk to your editor and determine which language would be more precise. A chapter focusing on poverty may use “a person whose income falls below the federal poverty threshold” in one situation and “a person experiencing food insecurity” in another situation, for example.

Avoid idioms or colloquialisms

Non-native English speakers find idioms and colloquialisms difficult in a learning environment. Although these words and expressions are used in “everyday” conversation, these phrases can mask meaning and make it difficult for every participant in a conversation to decode them.

Additional Resources

Style Guides

- APA Bias-Free Language: [Bias-free language \(apa.org\)](https://www.apa.org/pubs/authors/bias-free-language)
- Associated Press Stylebook, 55th edition



- The Chicago Manual of Style, 17th Edition: [Chapter 8 Contents \(chicagomanualofstyle.org\)](http://chicagomanualofstyle.org)
- Conscious Style Guide: [Conscious Language + Design - Conscious Style Guide](http://consciousstyleguide.com)
- Disability Language Style Guide: [Disability Language Style Guide | National Center on Disability and Journalism \(ncdj.org\)](http://ncdj.org)
- GLAAD Media Reference Guide: [GLAAD Media Reference Guide - 11th Edition](http://glaad.org)

Tools

- [How to Check for Inclusive Language in Microsoft Word \(howtogeek.com\)](http://howtogeek.com)

In Your Book

Although inclusive language is a big component of how to improve representation and inclusion in your narrative, there are other elements in your textbook that need careful consideration. Below, we include a framework for how you should tackle your chapters and a set of guidelines for development.

Element	In-House Guidance	Consider
Historical, pioneering, or contemporary researchers and studies cited in your book	<p>Ensure we recognize key contributors from all backgrounds.</p> <p>When historical figures in the field lack diversity, balance their inclusion with more current and diverse researchers or publications.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider the included figures in the field and suggest additional research studies and publications.
Terminology	<p>Ensure that all references to people, groups, populations, conditions, and disabilities use the appropriate terminology and do not contain any derogatory, colloquial, inappropriate, or otherwise incorrect language.</p> <p>For historical uses that should remain in place, consider adding context (“a widely used term at the time”).</p> <p>Ensure that quotations or paraphrases using outdated terms are attributed, contextualized, and limited</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify any outmoded or incorrect terminology and suggest the correct replacement or reframing. 2. For historical references, insert context, attribution, and/or quotations. 3. Since terminology changes and uSage is not universal, do your best to identify and use the most accurate word at the time.



<p>Chapter-opening vignettes, examples, scenarios, and case studies</p>	<p>Ensure that diverse contexts are included while avoiding stereotypes.</p> <p>Ensure that people’s names used in examples, scenarios, and case studies represent various countries of origin, ethnicities, genders, and races.</p> <p>Ensure that names with ethnic or place associations are portrayed respectfully; avoid negative comparisons or stereotypes associated with particular national origins or identities.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider the overall diversity and representation on a quantitative and qualitative basis 2. Consider reviewing problems and exercises to consider their context and inclusivity. 3. Consider reviewing terminology, contexts, and situations presented to ensure they are respectful of all populations.
<p>Presence of and balanced perspectives on events or concepts that are relevant to underrepresented groups</p>	<p>Ensure you’re writing about issues that are relevant to diverse populations.</p> <p>Ensure you are not avoiding or underestimating the impacts on diverse populations.</p> <p>Areas of particular concern are in, but not limited to, public policy, social problems, health issues, political issues, business practices, economic conditions, etc.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For each topic or concept, consider the perspective of all populations in relation to controversies, arguments, alternate points, etc. 2. Suggest additions to expose a variant point of view and widen context for students. 3. If a topic is inherently divisive or sensitive, indicate to editors that it should be reviewed for bias.
<p>Photos, artwork, and illustrations</p>	<p>Ensure elements reflect demographically diverse populations.</p> <p>All populations are “active,” and that the individuals or groups aren’t perpetuating stereotypes in the images we use to depict their lived experiences.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider the quantity of images and the individuals and populations represented in them. 2. Consider the role, depiction, connotation, and purpose of the people represented, and the images themselves.
<p>References and citations</p>	<p>Determine if referenced papers or data have been sourced from primarily white authors and researchers.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where diversity is perceptible, suggest more diverse references, papers, and data sources. 2. Seek out specific efforts and committees within associations to drive more inclusive citations.