Commonly asked QUESTIONS about using inclusive LANGUAGE

HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM POLITICAL CORRECTNESS?

Inclusive language is focused on honoring people's experiences and identities. The goal of political correctness is to avoid offense based on what is deemed socially acceptable at the time. While they both involve language choices, the motivations are different—political correctness often creates barriers that prevent people from engaging. Inclusive language allows for more flexibility and connectedness.

IS INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE ALWAYS BIAS-FREE OR NEUTRAL?

Not always. Bias-free language can inadvertently erase the experiences of particular groups, while biased language can be used intentionally to raise awareness. This is where author discretion comes into play—what are you trying to accomplish when you decide to keep or use "X" term?

I DIDN'T MEAN TO OFFEND; SHOULDN'T THAT COUNT FOR SOMETHING?

While intent is important in helping us decide how to craft your examples and narrative, it doesn't change how that message is received. We unconsciously transmit a huge amount of detail about our personal lives in the language we use, including our innate biases. Ultimately, it's not about your intent, it's about the impact your writing has on students.

A WORD OR PHRASE MIGHT HAVE HAD A PROBLEMATIC HISTORY, BUT THAT'S NOT HOW IT'S USED NOW. SHOULDN'T THAT CHANGE THINGS?

Language evolves, but that doesn't erase the history of how a word or phrase originated, or how it's been used to hurt, stigmatize, or disenfranchise groups. Even if we don't think the history is relevant, that doesn't change the origins of a word or phrase, or the people who were once affected by it. For example, in recent years the word "queer" has been reclaimed by some gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people as a self-affirming umbrella term. But for many people, especially those outside of academic and activist circles, that is still a difficult word to hear or read because of past history. SAGE doesn't get to reclaim "queer", that can only be done by people who identify as queer.

ISN'T THIS CENSORSHIP?

Inclusive language is an approach, but there isn't a list of banned words that are never okay. When editors provide feedback through this lens, we bring issues to your attention and offer solutions and resources. You are not forced to make a change; you can choose whether to implement or ignore feedback. Changing our terminology alone won't have an impact on the systems that uphold racism or sexism, but it is a strong starting point for encouraging a more inclusive mindset in classrooms.

I KNOW SOME PEOPLE OF A SPECIFIC DEMOGRAPHIC WHO ARE FINE WITH CERTAIN TERMS THAT OTHERS FIND OFFENSIVE. WHAT SHOULD I USE?

Language changes with time and even individuals within groups disagree about the designations they use! We would advise making an effort to determine what is appropriate for your discipline, or even referencing the debate within the narrative of your chapters.

I'M CITING A STUDY THAT MAKES A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE CHOICE FROM MY TEXTBOOK. HOW DO I RECONCILE THIS?

When summarizing research studies where terminology has been defined, we encourage you to maintain the term used in the study in your discussion—changing the term could inadvertently change the way the results are perceived. If you are conflicted by the use of a term and understand that its usage has evolved, you can acknowledge the controversy and state why one term has been selected over another.

WHERE CAN I FIND A LIST OF WHAT TO SAY AND WHAT TO AVOID?

There isn't a single list of what's always acceptable or problematic, and we recognize that there isn't a "one-size-fits-all" approach to all academic fields in the social sciences. There are a number of style guides online that can be used as a reference, including: the Conscious Style Guide, the Disability Language Style Guide from the National Center on Disability and Journalism, and the GLAAD Media Reference Guide - 11th Edition.