



What is bias-free language?

Bias is an unfair or implied evaluation of someone or a group of people. In writing, it is important to avoid the accidental or intentional perpetuation of stereotypes, harmful assumptions, labels, or demeaning beliefs about people.

Remember, writing and language are constantly evolving and there is no perfect set of rules to follow. Rather, here are some guidelines to consider, but when writing about various populations, one should always consult members of the group or self-advocacy organizations for clarity on identifying labels. Always refer to people by the terminology they prefer.

Bias-free language generally puts the person first, not the descriptor! Be sensitive to the humanity behind the label. The following information has been adapted from the [APA 7th Edition Publication Manual](#).

General Guidelines

- Only use relevant characteristics when describing people.
 - For example, do not describe someone's sexual orientation or socioeconomic status unless it is relevant to what you are discussing.
 - It is good to be specific and describe relevant differences, but make sure it is being done with purpose.
- **Avoid using adjectives as nouns to label people**
 - E.g., "the poor"
- **Avoid labeling people as their condition**
 - E.g., "schizophrenics," "drug users"
- Use adjectival forms
 - E.g., "gay men," "older adults"
- Use nouns with descriptive phrases
 - E.g., "people living in poverty," "people who use drugs"
- Some groups choose to capitalize their identity. Be mindful of intentional capitalization of common nouns.
 - E.g., the Deaf
- **It gets tricky!** Disabilities is one of the most evolving areas of language and there is a lot of disagreement on proper language. Some groups prefer **person-first language** while others prefer **identity-first language**.
 - **Person-first** "A person with paraplegia" rather than "paraplegic"
 - **Identity-first** "An autistic person" rather than "a person with autism"
- When listing several groups, consider the order in which you present them. Use a method like alphabetical order or sample size instead of accidentally listing people in a social dominant order.
 - E.g., **White, Black, Hispanic**
 - E.g., **Black, Hispanic, White**

Gender and Sexuality

Gender

Gender vs. Sex

Gender=social construct and social identity affected by cultural associations.

Sex=the biological sex assignment, often referred to as sex assigned at birth.

Gender identity=a person's psychological sense of their gender.

Things to remember:

- Gender is not binary, meaning that gender is not just male and female.
- Gender identity is separate from sexual orientation and one category should not be used to assume another.
- Some gender identities include agender, female, genderqueer, gender-nonconforming, gender-fluid, gender-neutral, nonbinary, male, and two-spirit. Transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) is a generally agreed upon umbrella term that may be used when talking about various minoritized groups.
- Gender expression and gender identity are different. Gender expression should not be used to assume gender identity.

The examples below should help you to think about how language is used and who may be included or excluded depending on language choice. Various groups and individuals may have different suggestions. The following list has been created using APA 7th edition standards.

Potential Bias	Better practices	Why?
Birth sex Natal sex	Sex assigned at birth Assigned sex	Birth sex or natal sex indicated unchangeable characteristics. In comparison, sex assigned at birth or assigned sex implies that there is sociocultural context to how sex is assigned. Note: "Transsexual" is considered an outdated term, but some individuals still claim it as an identity. Only use "transsexual" if an individual claims it.
Mankind	People Persons Individuals Humanity	Avoid gendered endings as they can prioritize or make it seem like everyone in that group identifies by that label.
All men and women...	All people... All humans... All individuals...	Not all people identify as a man or a woman, and therefore, binary language should be avoided.
Preferred pronouns What are your preferred pronouns?	Pronouns Self-identified pronouns What pronouns do you use? What are your pronouns?	Preferred pronouns indicate a choice in one's gender and may place additional burden on the individual. Furthermore, preferred may diminish the reality of someone's identity. However, it should be noted that some individuals like to include preferred because it signifies agency or the right to choose.
He or she He/she E.g.: First the student will	They E.g.: First the student will submit their rough	Use singular "they" when referring to a person whose pronouns are not known or are irrelevant. Use singular "they" for general discussion.

<p>submit their project. Then, he or she will conduct a peer review.</p>	<p>project. Then, they will conduct a peer review.</p> <p>Other pronouns individuals may use include: “Ze,” “xe,” “hir,” “per,” “ve,” “ey,” and “hen”</p>	<p>“He” or “she” can be used sparingly if all people that are being referenced use these pronouns.</p> <p>Sexist bias can occur when using pronouns carelessly, particularly by apply “he” or “she” to a stereotypical role.</p>
<p>Opposite sex Opposite gender</p>	<p>Another sex Another gender</p> <p><i>For relationships:</i> Mixed gender Mixed sex Or be specific to the gender. E.g.: Instead of “I am attracted to the opposite sex.” Try “I am attracted to __give the specific sex/gender__.”</p> <p>For individuals in same gender or same sex relationships, use Same sex Same gender</p>	<p>Using the word opposite implies a strong difference in two sexes or implies a binary existence of sex or gender.</p> <p>Although this is common language, it is important to be mindful of how it can exclude individuals, particular individuals who are intersex or do not identify within a gender binary.</p>
<p>Ladies and gentlemen/men and women</p>	<p>People Individuals Folks You all</p>	<p>Avoid binary labels.</p>
<p>Males and females as a noun</p>	<p>When possible, be specific as to who you are referring to and how it is contextualized. Here are some of the many identities that people may hold that you can use to describe populations that you are talking about: men, women, boys, girls cisgender men, cis men, cisgender women, cis women, cis people, cis allies transgender men, trans men, transgender women, trans women, transgender people,</p>	<p>Being specific can help reduce stereotyping and avoid ambiguity.</p> <p>Per APA, “Use ‘male’ and ‘female’ as adjectives (e.g., a male participant, a female experimenter) when appropriate and relevant.”</p> <p>“Use ‘male’ and ‘female’ as nouns only when the age range is broad or ambiguous or to identify a transgender person’s sex assignment at birth (e.g., ‘person assigned female at birth’ is correct, not ‘person assigned girl at birth’).”</p>

	trans people gender-fluid people, gender- nonconforming people, gender- expansive people, gender-creative people, agender people, bigender people, genderqueer people individuals, adults, children, adolescents, people, humans	
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Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation=a person’s sexual and emotional attraction to another person. Within sexual orientation, one may be sexual, which means they are attracted towards certain people, demisexual, which means they may feel attraction within certain contexts, or asexual, which is when someone has little or no sexual attraction or interest in sexual behavior.

A few examples of sexual orientation include: asexual, bisexual, demisexual, fluid, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, omnisexual, pansexual, polysexual, and queer.

Potential Bias	Better Practices	Why?
Sexual preference Sexual identity	Sexual orientation	Orientation is not a choice.
Homosexual Homosexuality	Use a specific term to identify sexual orientation like gay, bisexual, queer people, lesbian, LGBTQ+ community, etc.	Historically, homosexual has been associated with negative stereotypes and may reduce people’s identities. <i>Per APA, “sexual and gender minorities” and “sexual orientation and gender diversity” are appropriate umbrella terms when talking about multiple sexual and gender minority groups. Other umbrella terms include LGBTQ+, LGBTQIA+, but LGBT is considered outdated and not inclusive enough.</i>
Gays The gays...	Gay people Gay men Gay women LGBTQ+/LGBTQIA+ community Sexual and gender minorities (SGM) (broad context) Diverse sexuality and genders (DSG) Queer community (caution, this is a reclaimed word and may not be appropriate in all	This can unfairly lump people and can be ambiguous. Be specific about the group you are talking about. Also, use the adjective form of a label when possible.

	situations)	
Assuming that heterosexuality is the norm unless specified otherwise. Avoid using words like boyfriend/girlfriend, wife/husband or assuming heteronormative standards when details are not known.	Some neutral words Partner Spouse Date	This is problematic because it creates the feeling that heterosexuality is the norm and standard unless specified otherwise. Using words like boyfriend and girlfriend without the individual identifying that they have a boyfriend or girlfriend assumes that there are only two genders, and that people are attracted to the opposite gender. <small>(SAFEZONE, 2021)</small>
Gay lifestyle	Sexual orientation	This diminishes people's reality and can make it sound like a casual choice or fad.
Gay marriage	Marriage equality	Some people do not feel comfortable with adding an adjective to something that other people get naturally. Also, some people identify as pansexual, bisexual, or straight, but may be marrying someone of the same gender or sexual orientation. <small>(SAFEZONE, 2021)</small>
Straight	Per APA, straight is considered an acceptable term, and may be preferred because it moves the lexicon away from heterosexual and homosexual. Yet, some find straight to be a colloquial term that indicates straight is the norm and everyone else is deviated from the norm. Heterosexual is an acceptable alternative to straight.	Consider the context of the writing. APA considers "straight" and "heterosexual" to be appropriate terms for describing someone attracted to another gender or sex.