

GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Bias-Free Content Statement

Emerson College is committed to an active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in people; in the curriculum; in the co-curriculum; and in the College’s intellectual, social, cultural, and geographical communities. Emerson endorses a framework of inclusive excellence, which recognizes that institutional excellence comes from fully engaging with diversity in all aspects of institutional activities.

This commitment extends to the language we use in our daily verbal communication. Community members should avoid using language that is insensitive to cultural differences or that excludes or offends any group of people (based on their ability/disability, age, ethnicity and race, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, etc.). Ask yourself whether it is appropriate to your communication to share a particular fact about a person (pertaining to social identity, e.g., age, ethnicity). In some circumstances, a person’s or group’s social identity will be irrelevant to what you are communicating, while in other circumstances it will be a very important part of the context.

Abilities/Disabilities

When referring to people with disabilities, emphasize the person first and then the disability. Use *person with a disability*, not *disabled person* or *handicapped person*.

Use *person who uses a wheelchair* instead of *wheelchair-bound person*.

Avoid words with negative connotations, such as *stricken* or *victim*. The use of “someone living with ___” is generally accepted: “someone living with depression” or “someone who has cerebral palsy.”

People with almost complete vision loss are considered *blind* or *legally blind* (20/200 vision). Those who have partial sight may prefer the term *low vision*, *limited vision*, or *visually impaired*. If possible, ask for a person’s preference.

People who have total hearing loss are *deaf*. Those with partial hearing loss are *hard of hearing*. Again, ask for a person’s preference. Some people with partial hearing loss who identify with the Deaf community prefer to be called deaf/Deaf, for example. When referring to Deaf culture, the *d* is capitalized: *Deaf*.

Do not use the word *normal* to describe people without disabilities.

Use *accessible parking* rather than *handicapped parking*.

For guidance on usage of specific terms such as *Alzheimer's disease*, *cerebral palsy*, *depression*, and *intellectually disabled*, see the [National Center on Disability and Journalism's style guide](#).

Ethnic and Racial Designations

Some races and ethnicities have multiple terms associated with them. When possible, ask for a person's preference (e.g., Native American vs. American Indian).

Native American: A member of any of the first groups of people living in North America. (Other terms: American Indian, First Nation, or Indigenous person)

Latino/a or LatinX: Refers to someone of Latin American origin. **Hispanic:** Refers to someone of Spanish-speaking origin. **Spanish:** Refers to someone who is from Spain.

African American: Refers to someone of African origin. Some people who have generations of American ancestors prefer the term *black*.

Asian American: Refers to someone of Asian origin. This is a diverse population with ancestral origins in South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia.

Learn more about terms relating to Asian culture:

[Asian American Journalists Association](#)

Learn more about terms relating to black culture:

[National Association of Black Journalists](#)

When referring to race, lowercase *black* and *white*.

Use *historically underrepresented groups* or *people of color* instead of *minorities*. People of color are actually the majority in many large U.S. cities.

Do not use a hyphen in ethnic classifications such as *African American* or *Italian American*.

Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

Gender is an individual's internal sense of feeling like a woman, man, both, or neither.

Sex comprises biological and physiological characteristics, including reproductive organs and hormones. Sex is assigned at birth and is not synonymous with gender.

Use *gay* or *lesbian* when describing people who are attracted to members of the same sex. Avoid the use of *homosexual* and *homosexual relationship*.

People who identify as *transgender* have a gender identity or expression that differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.

People who identify as *gender nonconforming* have a gender identity or expression that does not conform to the traditional gender binary.

Personal Pronouns

Respect a person's chosen personal pronoun. Some transgender and gender-expansive people identify as *he*, *she*, or *ze* but some may identify as both male and female or neither.

For guidance on terminology related to gender and sex, see the [National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association's Stylebook](#).

Find links to additional resources such as the GLAAD Media Reference Guide on the [Conscious Style Guide website](#).

Gender-Inclusive Language

Use gender-inclusive language unless you are talking about something gender specific. There are a number of ways to avoid using a gender-specific pronoun (*he* or *she*).

1. Recast the sentence and make the subject and object plural.

Each student must hand in his paper by 2:00 pm on Friday.

Instead, say:

Students must hand in their papers by 2:00 pm on Friday.

2. Omit the pronoun or use an article (e.g., *the*, *a*) instead of a pronoun.

The cashier should call her manager when a customer asks to use an expired coupon.

Instead, say:

The cashier should call the manager when a customer asks to use an expired coupon.

3. Use the neutral pronoun *one*.

A writer in Boston is likely to earn more than she will in Syracuse.

Instead, say:

A writer in Boston is likely to earn more than one in Syracuse.

For more examples of how to rework sentences, see [Section 5.225 in the *Chicago Manual of Style*](#) (16th edition).

If it's impossible to recast the sentence, use *he or she*, not *he/she*, *s/he*, or *(s)he*.

The singular *they/their/them* is generally accepted when referencing a person who is gender nonconforming. For example:

McMahon donated their magazine collection to the Archives.

Most style guides do not encourage this practice in the context of general use. However, it is becoming more widely accepted. When possible, recast the sentence to avoid a singular *they/their/them* (as mentioned above).

Gender-Inclusive Titles or Terms

Use:

Anchor not anchorman

Artificial not manmade

Business executive not businessman

Camera operator not cameraman

Chair not chairman

Guard or staff not man (v.)

Humanity not mankind

Layperson not layman

Police officer not policeman

Spokesperson not spokesman

Workforce not manpower

Power-Based Interpersonal Violence

Power-based interpersonal violence is an umbrella term for interpersonal violence, sexual assault, harassment, stalking and threats, abusive relationships and bullying, child abuse, and human trafficking. This term connotes interconnectedness of these forms of violence, as well as the rooting in power and control over someone else.

In circumstances involving those who have been affected by power-based interpersonal violence, use the phrase “person who has experienced power-based interpersonal violence” instead of the term *victim*, which has a negative connotation. *Survivor* can be used if an individual prefers this term; however, it can also be considered negative in that it defines a person solely by an experience.

When individuals share their experience of violence, use the terms *said*, *shared*, and *experience* rather than *admitted*, *confessed*, and *story*, which convey disbelief and bias.

When individuals have experienced sexual assault (including rape and child sexual abuse), refer to the behavior as *sexual assault* instead of *sex* or any other terms that minimize the behavior and violence. To refer to sexual assault as *sex* is similar to referring to drowning as swimming.

Use *relationship violence*, *domestic violence*, *dating violence*, *intimate partner violence*, or *abusive relationship* rather than *dispute*, *quarrel*, and *love triangle*, which minimize the violence.

Use the term *reported* instead of *accused*, *claimed*, and *alleged*, which convey bias and disbelief.

Use the active voice (e.g., he raped him, he abused her, they reported that he assaulted them) rather than the passive voice (e.g., he was raped, she was abused, they were assaulted), which removes the accountability of the person who committed the behavior and blames the person harmed. If reporting on a case in a current campus or legal process, utilize what was reported, such as “they reported that he assaulted them.”

When referring to an individual who has been reported for power-based interpersonal violence, use the term *respondent* during a campus process and *defendant* during a legal process.

End any article, interview, or report with a referral to local resources for those following the story to connect with support. At Emerson College, refer to the Healing and Advocacy Collective at emerson.edu/healing. Beyond Emerson, refer to resources including:

- National Domestic Violence Helpline at 1-888-799-7233

- National Sexual Assault Helpline at 1-800-656-4673
- LGBTQ Resources at emerson.edu/social-justice-center/healing-advocacy-collective/find-support
- International Resources at emerson.edu/social-justice-center/healing-advocacy-collective/find-support

Additional Resources

- Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at dartcenter.org
- femifesto Media Reporting on Sexual Violence in Canada at femifesto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/UseTheRightWords-Single-Dec3.pdf
- Jane Doe Media Guide
at janedoe.org/site/assets/docs/Learn_More/DV_Homicide/JDI_DVHomicide_MediaGuide.pdf
- GLAAD Media Reference Guide
at glaad.org/sites/default/files/GLAAD%20MRG_9th.pdf
- Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault Guide for Journalists
at mncasa.org/assets/PDFs/2013MediaManual.pdf