IOWA

University of Iowa Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Style Guide

The University of Iowa strives to create and sustain an equitable and inclusive campus environment for all faculty, staff, and students. The ways in which we communicate with and speak to each other, within the state of Iowa and beyond, sets the standard for the inclusiveness we aspire to.

Faculty and staff from across the UI campus have created this Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Style Guide—modeled after the California State University Diversity Style Guide—that attempts to answer common questions and provide thoughtful guidance on topics that may arise when creating or editing content. It will be added as an addendum to the "Bias in Language" section of the UI's Editorial Style Guide.

This guide was created with the understanding that many of the topics and sections will evolve, as will the guide. Those using this guide are encouraged to ask questions, offer suggestions, and note omissions. Please don't hesitate to reach out to now@uiowa.edu. To learn how this guide was created, see the Appendix of this document.

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Style Guide offers guidance on:

- Women, men, nonbinary genders, and people who don't identify as a specific gender
- People of various races and ethnicities, including Black, Hispanic/Latinx/o/a, Asian and Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Native American
- Immigration and immigration status
- People with disabilities, including mental disorders
- People who are low-income and/or underserved
- Individuals who are LGBTQ+ and transgender

Gender

Gender is not synonymous with *sex.* According to the AP Stylebook, *gender* refers to a person's social identity, whereas *sex* refers to biological characteristics.

Since not everyone falls in the category of "male/man" or "female/woman," refer to a "person" or "people," if appropriate, or use the term "nonbinary" if the subject requests to be referred to as such.

Transgender is an **adjective** (so modifying *man* or *woman*—as in *transgender man*, *transgender woman*) in Western cultures that refers to someone whose assigned sex at birth does not match their gender identity. AP allows the use of *trans* on second reference and in headlines. Do not use transgender as a **noun** or use the term *transgendered*.

Many non-Western cultures, especially indigenous cultures, include genders that fall outside the man/woman binary or genders that aren't automatically correlated to assigned sex at birth. Examples include Native Hawaiian people who are *mahu*, Zapotec people who are *muxe*, and Diné (Navajo) people who are *nádleehí*. Refrain from assuming that these people identify as trans and/or nonbinary, as those terms may not encompass or accurately describe these identities. Instead, ask the person how they would like to be described.

Cisgender is an adjective that refers to someone whose assigned sex at birth matches their gender identity.

Note: When interviewing someone or otherwise referring to someone, ask the individual ***how they want to be described*** (e.g., male, female, man, woman, transgender, gender fluid, nonbinary, etc.). Ask the individual for their pronouns of reference to be used when referring to them (e.g., he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs). Some transgender people do not use pronouns at all and only go by their names. Ask, too, if there are any terms they ask *not* be used in reference to them and in what cases.

Do not "out" transgender people and only include that they are transgender in content if they give explicit permission.

- *First-year student*: UI style is to use "first-year student" instead of "freshman."
- *Alumna/us:* A woman who has graduated from a school takes the Latin term *alumna*. To reference a man, *alumnus* is used. For two or more women, the proper term is *alumnae*. If two people who are both men, a man and a woman, or both gender-neutral are referenced, the correct term is *alumni*. *Alum* is the singular, gender-neutral term.
- **Gender and race/ethnicity:** When interviewing someone or referring to them in content, ask the individual how they prefer to be referred to (e.g., Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x, etc.) See the section on race and ethnicity for more information.

Gender-inclusive pronouns

Since there is no gender-inclusive term in English for a single person, and using *one* is overly formal for most types of content,

In March 2017, the Associated Press voted to accept the singular *they* (as well as *them/their*) as a gender-neutral pronoun when *he/she* or *her/him* is not accurate. Use the singular *they* when referring to a generic person whose gender is unknown or irrelevant to the context and/or when referring to a specific, known person who prefers *they* as their pronoun of reference.

You may wonder about when to use *he* or *she* (or both, or if you should alternate *he* and *she*). Use this guidance:

- **The AP Stylebook advises against "(presuming) maleness in constructing a sentence."** If you can reword a sentence to avoid gender, that's ideal. If that's not possible, you may opt to use "they" or "their" to indicate that the gender of the individual referenced is either not known or the reference applies to any gender.

As stated above, when interviewing someone or otherwise referring to someone, ask the individual how they prefer to be identified (e.g., male, female, man, woman, transgender, gender fluid, nonbinary). Ask the individual for their pronouns of reference (e.g., he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs). Ask, too, if there are any terms they request *not* be used in reference to them and in what instances.

An exception to avoid using only *men/women* or *male/female* (a binary reference) would be in a reference where *men/women* or *male/female* are necessary for accuracy, as in the case of a study that included men and women.

- **Use of multiple pronoun sets:** Some people use multiple sets of pronouns, such as both *she/her* and *they/them*, or *xe/xim* and *he/him*. Some people also are comfortable with any pronouns used. In this situation, ask which pronouns to use in which circumstances, and if the subject has a preferred frequency of use for each set of pronouns.
- **Mx:** Though the Oxford English Dictionary accepts *Mx* as a gender-neutral alternative to *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, or *Ms.*, the AP Stylebook doesn't use these courtesy titles so does not offer guidance on the use of *Mx*. UI style follows AP Style and doesn't use courtesy titles.
- **Non-gender suffix:** Consider using the suffix *-person* (e.g., *spokesperson* instead of *spokesman*) in your writing to avoid presuming maleness. Use of *chair* in place of *chairman*, *chairwoman*, or *chairperson*. Ask the person whose title you're referencing what they prefer as well, if possible. Be aware, too, of words that use -ess and denote femaleness, such as *stewardess* or *hostess*. When possible, choose a gender-neutral alternate, such as *flight attendant* or *firefighter*.
- **Describing oppression of a certain group:** When discussing instances of oppression that certain groups (often women) may face, consider how trans and nonbinary people fit into this.
  - Instead of saying *pregnant women*, say *pregnant people*.
  - Instead of *women's health rights*, say *reproductive rights*.
  - Instead of *feminine hygiene products*, say *menstrual products*.

Gender: Terms to avoid

- Normal/norm (to refer to people who are not transgender, gender fluid, nonbinary)
- *Sex change* (preferred terms: *sex reassignment*, *gender transition*)
- *Sexual preference*
- *Transsexual* (preferred term: *transgender or trans*, and should only be used adjectivally)
- *Tranny* (this is a harmful slur and should always be avoided)
- *Transvestite* (preferred term: *cross-dresser*)

Resources:

- [AP Style Handbook](#)
- [The Diversity Style Guide: Race and Ethnicity](#)
- [Genderspectrum.com](#)
- [Students & Gender Identity: A Toolkit for Schools (K-12 emphasis; USC Rossier)](#)
- [University of Iowa Editorial Style Guide](#)
- [APA Style](#)

Race and ethnicity

Race and *ethnicity* are not the same. *Race* is a social construct that has historically been used to classify human beings according to physical or biological characteristics. *Ethnicity* is something a person acquires or ascribes to and refers to a shared culture, such as language, practices, and beliefs.

Further, consider carefully when deciding to identify a person by race. Often, it is an irrelevant factor and drawing unnecessary attention to someone's race or ethnicity can be interpreted as bigotry. Use [AP Stylebook guidance](#) for examples of when race is pertinent.

In this style guide, we attempt to provide basic guidance on style for:

- *African American / Black* (the B in *Black* is capitalized per [AP style](#); *African American* is not hyphenated per AP style)
- *Hispanic / Latinx/o/a* and related terms (*Hispanic* is an ethnicity, not a [race](#). *Hispanics/Latinos* can be of any race.)
- *Asian American* and *Pacific Islanders* and related terms (no hyphen)
- *American Indian* and related terms (no hyphen)
- *Arab, MENA, or SWANA*
- *White* (the w in *white* is not capitalized, per AP style)

Editor's note: Given the complexity and evolving nature of this topic, we will continually update this section so it is as current, inclusive, and useful as possible. Please send questions and suggestions for additions and changes to now@uiowa.edu.

General writing guidelines

- Focus on the person—their achievement, their leadership, their scholarship, their research, etc.—not their race and ethnicity.
- Ensure that headlines, images, captions, and graphics are fair and responsible in their depiction of people of color and coverage of issues.
- Use racial and ethnic identification when it is pertinent to a story and use it fairly, identifying white individuals if people of other races/ethnicities are identified.
- Avoid stereotypes.

- If you are including a person's race in the content you're creating, be sure it is necessary to mention it, and ask the person how they prefer to be identified.
- Many BIPOC (*Black*, *indigenous*, and *people of color*) are told that their names are too complicated or too difficult to pronounce. Use the name that the subject asks you to use and do not ask to use a nickname instead. Also, be sure to include any accents or diacritics in the person's name rather than removing them to better align with English characters.
  - Example: Use *señora* instead of *senora*, and *Nguyễn* instead of *Nguyen*.
  - **Editor's note:** We understand that many limitations exist in the digital space, such as in many email fields. The university should investigate what can be done on a larger scope to rectify this. If you know of a possible solution, email the editor.

Source: Race Forward.

Quick guidance

Below is a list of preferred terms, though it is permissible to deviate from this list based on the person's preferred racial and ethnic identification.

I. African American, Black

African American and *Black* are not synonymous. A person may identify as Afro-Latino or Afro-Caribbean, for instance, or Haitian American or Jamaican American. A person also may identify specifically as African rather than African American, such as Ghanaian or Congolese.

Iowa capitalizes the B in *Black* when referring to people who are part of a shared identity or culture, per AP style.

African American is not hyphenated. Never use the word *colored* or *Negro* as a descriptor. Likewise, *Afro American* is an archaic descriptor and should not be used.

In the body of a piece, use *Black people*, not *Blacks*, to refer to a group.

Do not use *Black* as a singular noun, such as *a Black*.

II. Asian, Asian American

When writing about someone or a group of this background, it usually makes more sense to refer to a specific background—e.g., Japanese, Korean, Thai, Chinese, Indonesian, Filipino. Use that term rather than a collective noun.

Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA): This is the preferred term to use, versus *Asian American and Pacific Islander* (AAPI), or *Asian American* and *Pacific Americans*. The latter is considered correct, but for consistency's sake, Iowa recommends the preferred use.

South Asian: This collective term refers to people from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. *Desi American* is a term commonly used by people from India, but not by all South Asians.

III. American Indian, Alaska Native, Hawaiian Native, Native American, Native People, Indigenous People

The most inclusive and accurate term to use to refer to those who inhabited land that became the United States (or, previously, territories) is *American Indian and Alaska Native* (AIAN).

You may also see the terms:

- o *Native People(s)*
- o *First People(s)*
- o *First Nations*
- o *Tribal Peoples*
- o *Tribal Communities*
- o *Indigenous People(s)*

The person may prefer that you refer to them by their tribally specific nation.

American Indians and Alaska Natives/Hawaiian Natives have a distinct political and cultural identification constructed in and through treaties, executive orders, and the Constitution. American Indian and Alaska Native/Hawaiian Natives' cultural identification is place-based, diverse, and informed by the practices of their culture (e.g., language, singing, dancing, ceremonies).

IV. Hispanic, Latino/a, Latinx, Latin@, Chicano/a

Latinx/o/a is increasingly used and is the standard descriptor at Iowa, unless the individual or people prefer another term.

While it is common to see *Hispanic* and *Latinx/o/a* used interchangeably, they are not synonymous. *Hispanic* generally refers to people with origins in Spanish-speaking countries. *Latinx/o/a* generally refer to people with origins in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In some cases, Hispanic people also identify as Latinx/o/a and vice versa. Generally, people from Brazil or Haiti do not identify as Hispanic, but may identify as Latinx/o/a.

Avoid the term *Latin* unless it is a reference to Latin America.

Latina(s) is appropriate for individuals who identify as a woman/women, unless the person/people prefer *Latinx*. Follow the preference of the person/people in all cases.

Chicano/a is a term that refers to Americans of Mexican ancestry.

- The Chicano movement includes a focus on being of Mexican ancestry *and having indigenous roots*. The legitimacy of this identity is contested, as many people who identify as Chicano/a claim to have indigenous roots but cannot name their family's tribe/nation and are not connected to or affiliated with the tribe/nation. It's also important to note that Chicano/a isn't merely a term, it's a sociopolitical identity, so it shouldn't be placed on people without them claiming it first.

  In all, you should practice extreme caution when using Chicano/a. A better term to refer to Americans of Mexican ancestry is simply *Mexican-American*.

Be sure to ask the individual/group how they prefer to be identified. The individual may prefer, for example, a gender-inclusive and neutral term like *Latinx* or *Latin@*, or a broader term, like *Afro-Latino*. (The person may identify as both African or African American or Black and Latino/a.)

Also be aware of gender when using *Latino* and *Chicano* in your writing.

Latinidad, *Latin@*, and *Latinx* are emerging terms that may be favored by younger generations.

Note that federal policy defines Hispanic as an ethnicity, not a [race](). Hispanics/Latinos can be of any race.

V. Arab, MENA, or SWANA

When creating content, be sure to ask the individual/group how they prefer to be identified. MENA and SWANA both are acceptable, depending on the preference of the individual or group.

Background:

Arab, MENA (Middle Eastern and North African) or SWANA (Southwest Asian and North African) are terms used to describe people from the countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Cyprus, Jordan, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Western Sahara.

People from these countries sometimes are unfairly associated with the politics and violence that occurred in the world around 9/11 and face related discriminatory experiences.

In addition, some people from these countries find it problematic that many United States government agencies do not offer adequate representation of their identity, meaning any potential disparities or inequalities faced by MENA or SWANA Americans remain hidden.

The U.S. Census Bureau collects race and ethnicity data following the U.S. Office of Management and Budget guidelines, which set the standard for all federal data collection and also can influence other governmental entities that apply for federal funding. The most recent update to the standards for the classification of federal data on race and ethnicity [was made in October 1997](#).

While the addition of a MENA category to 2030 U.S. Census forms has been proposed, people from these countries must currently identify as white or as European.

The University of Iowa also does not include a Middle Eastern/North African category on its Common App racial/ethnic survey options.

VI. Biracial, multiracial, and mixed

The terms *biracial* and *multiracial* are acceptable, when clearly relevant, to describe people with more than one racial heritage, per AP Style. Avoid *mixed-race*, which can carry negative connotations, unless the subject prefers the term. Be sure to ask the individual/group how they prefer to be identified.

Be as specific as possible by describing a person's heritages.

Note that *multiracial* can encompass people of any combination of races.

VII. International students

The university is proud of its international students, who have chosen to travel great distances to receive their education at Iowa. Identifying a student as an international student should be done only when the designation is relevant to the content. If such identification is not relevant, the student should be identified in the same way as domestic students featured in content. Likewise, do not use an international student's national origin or ethnic/racial identification if it is not relevant to the content.

Do not assume that all Asian students are international students, or to assume that all international students come from Asia.

Race and ethnicity: Terms to avoid

No racial or ethnic slur should ever be included in content you create for any reason. You may consider an exception if your content is about this slur (as in a research study examining use of the word) or, possibly, if it is essential to your piece and is used in quotes. In this case, ensure that its use is absolutely necessary and that your source has approved the attribution of the slur(s) to them and that your supervisors and department have granted approval.

- If explicit approval has been given to use a slur under this exception, add content warnings at the beginning of the piece and do not use these words in the title or headline; people from these communities should have the agency to decide whether they want to engage in harmful language before being forced to do so.

Do not use the term *colored person/people*. Use a broader term, like *people of color*, which refers to any person who is not white, especially in the U.S. *BIPOC* is an emerging acronym that stands for *Black, indigenous, people of color*. Some feel the term is more appropriate than *people of color* because it acknowledges the varying levels of injustice experienced by different groups. In these instances, be sure to ask the individual/group how they prefer to be identified. However, if you are talking about a specific racial or ethnic group, name that specific group rather than generalizing to all people of color. This is especially important when discussing Black people.

Resources:

- Stuart Hall, "Race—the Floating Signifier," 1997
- Audrey Smedley and Brian D. Smedley, "Race as Biology is Fiction, Racism as a Social Problem is Real," American Psychologist, January 2005
- "So You Want to Talk About Race," by Ijeoma Oluo, 2019.
- Asian American Journalists Association's Guide to Covering Asian America
- Campaign for College Opportunity report on higher education in California and Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islanders (2015)
- Conscious Style Guide – Race, Ethnicity & Nationality
- Diversity Style Guide, Department of Journalism, San Francisco State
- Dr. Timothy Fong, Professor, Ethnic Studies / Director, Liberal Studies and Social Science Program (LSSSP) / Director and Principal Investigator, Full Circle Project, Sacramento State
- Dr. Theresa Gregor, Assistant Professor, American Indian Studies, CSU Long Beach
- National Association of Black Journalists Style Guide
- Native American Journalists Association's Reporter's Indigenous Terminology Guide
- Dr. Maythee Rojas, Professor of Chicano and Latino Studies at CSU Long Beach
- Wikipedia – List of Ethnic Slurs
- UI International Programs
- AP Stylebook
- https://www.npr.org/2022/02/17/1079181478/us-census-middle-eastern-white-north-african-mena
- https://sourcenm.com/2022/08/04/people-of-middle-eastern-northern-african-descent-say-census-categories-erase-their-experience/
- https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2117940119

Immigration

General guidelines

- Focus on the person—their achievement, their leadership, their scholarship, their research, etc.—not their immigration status.
- Use *illegal* only to describe an action, not a person.
- Familiarize yourself with the range of categories describing a person's citizenship and immigration status: *nationality, country of origin, citizen, permanent resident, undocumented.*
- Do not specify a person's immigration status unless it is relevant to the story AND approved by the source.
- The status of undocumented workers should be discussed between source, content creator and with the content creator's supervisor because of the risk of deportation.
- Use terms that are legally accurate and avoid racially and politically charged labels.
- Not all undocumented people have DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) status. Be sure to differentiate between these two experiences.

Preferred terms

- *Undocumented immigrant/worker.* Refers to people who do not have the federal documentation to show they are legally entitled to work, visit or live in the United States
- *Mixed-status couple/family.* Refers to couples or families with members who have different immigration status. (Note: mixed-status also can be used in the health care industry to describe a relationship in which one partner is HIV-positive and the other is HIV-negative.)
- *Refugee.* Refers to people who have been forced to leave their country of origin to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. Note: Refugee is a status that is granted by the receiving country, and it does not apply to all people who have been forced to leave. It is important to note the difference between people who are displaced and refugees.
- *Asylum seeker.* Refers to people who are seeking international protection but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined.
- *DREAM Act or Dreamer.* The DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act is congressional legislation that would allow young immigrants in the country illegally who were brought here as children to remain in the country if they meet certain criteria. The legislation has not been approved by Congress, despite various versions being introduced over the years. The DREAM Act is similar to, but not the same as, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA). Many refer to immigrants who would benefit from either program as *Dreamers*. As often as possible, use other terms such as *immigrant, youth*, or the person's name instead of *Dreamer*. If using the term *Dreamer* to describe a person, be sure that is the way they prefer to be described and that you have their explicit permission.

Immigration: Terms to avoid

- *Illegal immigrant, alien, illegals* (preferred term: *undocumented immigrant*)
- *Illegal worker* (preferred term: *undocumented worker*)
- *Expat, expatriate*

Resources:

- [Drop the I-Word](#)
- [Diversity Style Guide Immigration Glossary](#)
- [NPR Guidance on Immigration](#)
- [Atlantic: "Expat" and the Fraught Language of Migration](#)
- [AP Stylebook](#)

People with disabilities

When writing about anyone with a disability—whether physical, intellectual, or psychological/emotional—always strive to adopt **"people first" language**. This means using words that put the person at the center of a description rather than a label, their status, or focusing on what the individual cannot do.

However, many disabled communities prefer "identity first" language. You should ask the person what their preference is, both in how they are described as having a disability in general, as well as their specific disability. For example, someone may prefer *person with a disability* but also use *autistic person*, in which case they use both person-first and identity-first language, depending on context.

For example, you would refer to a "graduate student who has epilepsy" but not a "graduate student who's an epileptic." **As with any other area of sensitivity like this, please ask the individual how they prefer to be referred to—for example, some people consider their disability an intrinsic aspect of their identity, such as "blind person" or "deaf person." Be sure if you are interviewing someone with a disability, whether visible or not, make sure that they are aware of how much detail and information you will be sharing about their disability and ask them to review the content before it is published.**

If the disability is not a relevant part of the content and there isn't a need to include it, don't.

Don't refer to someone who does not have a disability as *able-bodied.* You can simply say they do not have a disability (or, if necessary, use *non-disabled*) when it's absolutely necessary to distinguish that someone doesn't have a disability. Avoid using the term *normal.*

Avoid sensationalizing a disability by using phrases like, but not limited to, "afflicted with," "suffers from," "wheelchair bound," or "victim of."

People with disabilities are typically not suffering from a disease or illness; therefore, they should not be referred to as *patients*, unless in a health care setting. Many people with chronic illnesses identify as disabled, and the same guidance should be followed.

Use *accessible* when describing a space, location, or event that complies with the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) of 1990, as in "accessible entrance," "accessible classroom," "accessible webinar," etc.

To show inclusiveness and sensitivity to students, you may want to refer to them as "students who are receiving services," which may include physical or mental help, or "students with disabilities." The University of Iowa has services for students with disabilities, and a variety of accommodations can be made if needed.

Be sure the subject's disclosure of this information was intentional, and that they grant permission for it to be used in content.

Words to avoid and words to use

Instead of. . .	Say. . .
Handicapped or the disabled	People/person with a disability/disabilities
Mute or dumb	Nonverbal
Dwarf or midget	Person of short stature
Emotionally disturbed	Person with a mental health disability
Suffers from, a victim of	Person with
Learning disabled	Person with a learning disability
Normal	Person without a disability
Birth defect	Congenital disability
Retarded	Person who has an intellectual disability

Handicapped parking	Accessible parking
Epileptic	Person with epilepsy
Quadriplegic, paraplegic	Person with quadriplegia, paraplegia
Mongoloid or downs	Person with Down syndrome
Developmentally delayed	Person with a developmental delay
Confined to a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair
Hearing impaired	Person who is deaf or hard of hearing
Vision impaired	Person who is blind

More terms to avoid and preferred language

- *Able-bodied* or *normal* when referring to a person who does not have a disability.
- *Afflicted with*
- *Confined to a wheelchair*: Describes a person only in relationship to a piece of equipment designed to liberate rather than confine.
- *Deaf and dumb/deaf-mute* (preferred: *Deaf individual*; capitalizing Deaf indicates the person identifies with the Deaf/signing community)
- *Defect*, *birth defect*, *defective*
- *Disabled* (preferred: *people with disabilities* or *disabled people*)
- *Epileptic fit*: The term *seizure* is preferred when referring to the brief manifestation of symptoms common among those with epilepsy.
- *Mentally retarded*: Always try to specify the type of disability being referenced. Otherwise, the terms *mental disability*, *intellectual disability*, and *developmental disability* are acceptable.
- *Paraplegic*: Avoid referring to an individual as a paraplegic. Instead, say the person has paraplegia.
- *Psychotic*: Avoid using psychotic to describe a person; instead refer to a person as having a psychotic condition or psychosis.
- *Quadriplegic*: Use people-first language, such *as a person with quadriplegia.*
- *Schizophrenic*: Use people-first language, stating that someone is *a person with schizophrenia* or *a person diagnosed with schizophrenia* rather than a *schizophrenic* or a *schizophrenic person.*
- *Stricken with, suffers from, victim of*
- *Wheelchair-bound* (preferred: *person who uses a wheelchair*, *wheelchair user*)
- *Speaks sign language/reads braille* (preferred: *American Sign Language fluent*; *braille reader* or *braille user*). Also note: American Sign Language is one sign language, but there are others. Examples include Black American Sign Language (BASL) and Japanese Sign Language (JSL).

Resources:

- [ADA National Network – Guidelines for Writing About People With Disabilities](#)
- [Americans with Disabilities Act](#)
- [National Center on Disability and Journalism (NCDJ), Arizona State University](#)
- [NCDJ, Disability Language Style Guide](#)
- [SPRC, Style Guide – Reporting on Mental Health](#)
- [Diversity Style Guide.com](#)
- [National Association of the Deaf](#)
- [Disability Studies Quarterly](#)

LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ is an abbreviation for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning."

LGBTQ+ (all capital letters with no spaces or periods) is Iowa's preferred use as opposed to *LGBT, GLBT,* or other abbreviations. **That said, if a source in your content prefers to be referred to or identified using another term or abbreviation, abide by their preference.**

On first reference, explain what *LGBTQ+* stands for, and use the abbreviation on subsequent mentions.

When interviewing someone or otherwise referring to a source or subject in your writing, ask the individual how they prefer to be referred to in relation to their gender and/or sexual identity (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual, intersex). This may include identifications that are not common or specific. Ask, too, if there are any terms they request *not* be used in reference to them and in what cases.

Reasons to ask—and reasons to refrain from asking
When is it appropriate to ask a subject to disclose their sexual orientation for content? Is it ever?

Reasons to ask:

- **If it adds context to the content you're creating**. Are you speaking with the person specifically because they are a member of the LGBTQ+ community? If so, ask to confirm and ask how they identify.
- **If it is central to the content you're creating.** Would it seem out of place if you didn't mention it?
- **If it isn't central to the content, what is your motivation for asking?** Are you trying to add diversity to your story or highlight how different populations might be affected differently?

Reasons to avoid asking or telling:

- **If it would cause harm to the subject.**
- **If it's merely for prurient reasons or to sensationalize the content.**
- Would you include the information if the subject were heterosexual? If yes, include it for an LGBTQ+ person. If not, think about why you want to include it; it must be relevant.

Note on the use of "queer"

The word *queer* historically has been considered a slur, so its use should be avoided, limiting it to quotes, names of organizations, and instances when an individual indicates they would prefer it used in reference to themselves.

That said, *queer* has been reclaimed by many LGBTQ+ people to describe themselves, especially those from younger generations; however, it is not a universally accepted term even within the LGBTQ+ community.

Queer also can be used in academic circles related to domain (e.g., "queer studies") and or a range of post-structuralist theories that deal with the construction or reconstruction of sexuality and/or gender identity known as "queer theory." Other variants, such as "quare theory," consider the intersection of identities, such as race.

In your writing, avoid comparisons that reflect a heteronormative bias—in other words, heterosexual/cisgender as "normal" or the norm. Cisgender (pronounced "sis-gender") refers to people whose gender identity and expression matches the biological sex they were assigned when they were born.

Reminders for writing about LGBTQ+ individuals, communities, or subjects

- If you're creating content about research or new data, don't refer to the findings as relevant to "the gay or LGBTQ+ community" if the information only relates to, say, gay men.
- Don't conflate sex and gender; they aren't the same thing.

- When talking about marriage, make sure you're using the person's preferred term(s), whether *partner*, *spouse*, *wife*, *husband*, or something else.
- **Pay close attention to how the person you're talking to narrates their own story and follow their lead and cues when you create content.** If the person uses terms you don't know, ask them to explain each so you're sure to use it correctly. You can also offer to do your own research so that they don't have the additional burden of providing education; just be sure they approve of the final content. If there is particular sensitivity on the part of a source and/or topic, build in time for a source(s) to review their quotes for accuracy.

Pronoun use for transgender sources

It is best practice to ask everyone for their pronouns of reference. Be cautious that a person's pronouns may not correspond with the gender that may be associated with one's name or appearance. **Do not *deadname*—that is, using someone's former birth name if they have changed it to align with their identity**. Also, do not assume transgender status or include it if it is not germane to the story.

Note that sex, gender, and sexual orientation are not synonymous. Please refer to the Gender section of this style guide as well.

LGBTQ+: Terms to avoid

- *Closeted* (preferred: *not out*)
- *Gay community* (preferred: *LGBTQ+ community*)
- *Homosexual* (preferred: *gay* or *lesbian*)
- *Openly gay* (preferred: *out*)
- *Queer* (see discussion above)
- *Lesbian women*
- *Lifestyle*
- *MTF* or *FTM* (use *male to female/female to male transition* unless an individual identifies themselves this way)
- *Sexual preference* (preferred: *sexual orientation*)
- *Transsexual*
- *Tranny*
- *Transvestite* (preferred: *cross-dresser*; cross-dressing does not necessarily indicate someone is gay or transgender)

For more terms, go to the GLAAD Media Reference Guide

Resources:

- AP Stylebook
- CSU Campus LGBTQIA Centers
- DiversityStyleGuide.com
- GLAAD Media Reference Guide – 10th edition
- NLGJA – The Association of LGBTQ Journalists Stylebook (Spanish version)
- NLGJA – Tip Sheets on LGBT Coverage – Are You Gay?
- "Some Very Basic Tips for Making Higher Education More Accessible to Trans Students and Rethinking How We Talk About Gendered Bodies," (PDF) by Dean Spade, Radical Teacher, Winter 2011

Students from low-income backgrounds

Some University of Iowa students, faculty, and staff come from low-income backgrounds. Many college students across the country report that they struggle not only to pay for their college education, but to provide for even basic needs such as housing and food. **That said, it's important not to equate being low-income with struggling for basic needs.** They are not synonymous.

The ways in which we talk and create content about students who are low-income should convey compassion, inclusion, and sensitivity. Creating content about poverty and those who do not have the money they need is, of course, a sensitive matter and sometimes a source of shame and stigma for the student.

Participation in programs targeted to students who are low-income or whose parents are low-income (e.g., Pell-eligible or receiving Pell) are common proxies for *low-income*. Proxies are used primarily because measures related to students' economic well-being are often unobserved in the higher education context, as parental income/wealth is highly confidential.

While these categorizations or proxies can be helpful in demonstrating context, they are only proxies and not equivalent to *low-income*. For example, only U.S. citizens and green card-holders are Pell-eligible, so this would not refer to undocumented students.

There are several terms that are often used in the context of discussing students of low-income background. These include:

Socioeconomic status. Tends to refer to a combination of factors related to a student's social class. In the context of students, this typically includes family income, parental education (e.g., first-generation status), and parental occupation.

Underserved. Underserved students are defined as those who do not receive equitable resources as other students in the academic pipeline. Typically, these groups of students include low-income, racial/ethnic minorities (*people of color* or *students of color* is the preferred use, not *minorities*), among others.

- Races and ethnicities that are included: African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native Hawaiian, and/other Pacific Islander.
- *Historically underserved* students are defined as low-income students, and students of color.
- *First-generation college students*, at the University of Iowa, are students who do not have a parent or legal guardian who has completed a four-year degree. It is important to note that this definition does not take into account many nuances associated with first-generation identity, such as:
  - International students
  - Students whose parents earned a degree from outside the U.S.

  The backgrounds and experiences of first-generation students are diverse in nature, and it should never be assumed that all first-gen students have a single attribute or trait in common.

  In addition, the term *first-generation* is not synonymous with low-income, and these two terms should never be used interchangeably. Even though first-generation students may face a unique set of challenges in their college transition and completion efforts, refrain from referencing first-gen students only through a lens of deficit, as first-gen students have many unique assets that contribute to their success.

  First-gen is acceptable on second reference.

The term *underserved* differs from *underrepresented* in that *underrepresented* refers to racial and ethnic populations that are represented at disproportionately low levels in higher education.

Underrepresented is not the same as *marginalized*. Marginalized means that people have been historically left out of conversations or excluded from opportunities—and not by their own choice.

General content guidelines

When creating content about and for students from low-income backgrounds:

- Choose *food security* over *food insecurity* (a deficit-focused approach). A student may be facing food security issues or concerns. *Hunger* is a symptom of very low food security, but *hunger* and *hungry* should be used carefully.
- Choose *homelessness* over *housing insecurity* (not *housing instability*). Consider that both housing and food-security issues fall on a spectrum, with homelessness being the most urgent, acute end of the housing security spectrum.
- Dealing with a lack of money, food, and/or reliable housing is a source of shame for some but not all students. Approach the topic with sensitivity and ask exactly what the student feels comfortable sharing in any content that will be made public, including photographs. Encourage a framework that helps students understand they are not alone. Describe the issue as a national housing and financial-aid crisis that pushes many students into these circumstances, rather than a personal problem or one that blames the student.
- Be aware of encouraging any perception that students are "working the system" to get free food or other assistance.
- Don't use *poor*, *impoverished*, *underprivileged*, or *disadvantaged* to describe students who are low-income.
- Listen carefully to how a student or another source tells their story and use similar or the same language. Watch for assumptions and biases in your writing about the reasons for their income status, stereotypes, etc.

Resources:

- [Education Writers Association: How to Report on Undocumented Students in the Time of Trump](#)
- [Dr. Jennifer Maguire,](#) assistant professor, Humboldt State
- [National Union of Journalists' Guide to Reporting on Poverty (UK)](#)

Veterans

The way in which we refer to Veterans is important to properly acknowledge their service to the United States or their home country. The University of Iowa has an active Veteran and military-connected community, with several hundred students, faculty, and staff who are Veterans or currently serving in the military.

Student Veterans are usually nontraditional students, some of whom face challenges in college, including the ability to adapt to social norms and cultural expectations of higher education and civilian society. Faculty and staff who interact with student Veterans play an important role in their civilian socialization and in their successful transition to life as a student.

Some general guidelines when creating content about Veterans:

Capitalize Veteran: Capitalizing Veteran when referring to people who have served in the military places prominence on the position and distinguishes it from other uses of the word (e.g., someone who has had a long service or experience in an occupation, office, or the like). It also indirectly recognizes them for their service.

Examples: John is a Veteran who served during World War II. Jane is a veteran member of our department.

Spell out United States on first reference: When writing about Veterans, spell out United States on first reference, even if modifying a branch of the military. Abbreviate U.S. on second reference.

Example: John is a member of the United States Army.

Veterans from other countries: Don't assume all Veterans served in the United States military. The University of Iowa has some Veterans who are foreign Veterans.

Either at the beginning or end of an interview or conversation when you are asking the subject for the correct spelling of their name, it is a good time to also ask if they served in the U.S. military. If they served for another country, they will tell you at that time.

Example: Joe served six years in the South Korean Armed Forces.

Military titles: It is important to correctly list military titles and rank. Preference is for spelling out titles because often the abbreviations are used incorrectly, which can be demeaning to Veterans and active military members. Military titles and rank should always be capitalized.

It is acceptable to use the correct AP Style abbreviation on second and subsequent references. **Those abbreviations are listed at the end of this section.**

Example: United States Army Command Sergeant Major Matthew Miller served four deployments to the Middle East.

Retired officers: A military rank may be used in first reference before the name of an officer who has retired if it is relevant to the content. However, do not use the abbreviation Ret. Instead, use retired just as former would be used before the title of a civilian.

Example: They invited retired Army General John Smith.

AP Style Military Titles

general — Gen.
lieutenant general — Lt. Gen.
major general — Maj. Gen.
brigadier general — Brig. Gen.
colonel — Col.
lieutenant colonel — Lt. Col.
major — Maj.
Captain — Capt.
first lieutenant — 1st Lt.
second lieutenant — 2nd Lt.

Warrant Officers
chief warrant officer — Chief Warrant Officer
warrant officer — Warrant Officer

Enlisted Personnel
sergeant major of the Army — Sgt. maj. of the Army
command sergeant major — Command Sgt. Maj.
sergeant major — Sgt. Maj.
first sergeant — 1st Sgt.
master sergeant — Master Sgt.
sergeant first class — Sgt. 1st Class
staff sergeant — Staff Sgt.
sergeant — Sgt.
corporal — Cpl.
specialist — Spc.
private first class — Pfc.
private — Pvt.

NAVY, COAST GUARD

Commissioned Officers
admiral — Adm.
vice admiral — Vice Adm.
rear admiral upper half — Rear Adm.

rear admiral lower half — Rear Adm.
captain — Capt.
commander — Cmdr.
lieutenant commander — Lt. Cmdr.
lieutenant — Lt.
lieutenant junior grade — Lt. j.g.
ensign — Ensign

Warrant Officers
chief warrant officer — Chief Warrant Officer

Enlisted Personnel
master chief petty officer of the Navy — Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy
master chief petty officer — Master Chief Petty Officer
senior chief petty officer — Senior Chief Petty Officer
chief petty officer — Chief Petty Officer
petty officer first class — Petty Officer 1st Class
petty officer second class — Petty Officer 2nd Class
petty officer third class — Petty Officer 3rd Class
seaman — Seaman
seaman apprentice — Seaman Apprentice
seaman recruit — Seaman Recruit

MARINE CORPS
Ranks and abbreviations for commissioned officers are the same as those in the Army. Warrant officer ratings
follow the same system used in the Navy. There are no specialist ratings.

Others
sergeant major of the Marine Corps — Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps
sergeant major — Sg. Maj.
master gunnery sergeant — Master Gunnery Sgt.
first sergeant — 1st Sgt.
master sergeant — Master Sgt.
gunnery sergeant — Gunnery Sgt.
staff sergeant — Staff Sgt.
sergeant — Sgt.
corporal — Cpl.
lance corporal — Lance Cpl.
private first class — Pfc.
private — Pvt.

AIR FORCE
Ranks and abbreviations for commissioned officers are the same as those in the Army.

Enlisted Designations
chief master sergeant of the Air Force — Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force
chief master sergeant — Chief Master Sgt.
senior master sergeant — Senior Master Sgt.
master sergeant — Master Sgt.
technical sergeant — Tech Sgt.
staff sergeant — Staff Sgt.
senior airman — Senior Airman
airman first class — Airman 1st Class
airman — Airman
airman basic – Airman

Note: The United States Space Force, which is a separate and distinct branch of the armed services formed in 2019, is organized under the Department of the Air Force in a manner similar to how the Marine Corps is organized under the Department of the Navy. Its members are known as guardians and its rank names can be found here.

Resources:

- https://muse.jhu.edu/article/693985
- https://design.va.gov/content-style-guide/content-principles/
- https://www.military.com/join-military/military-ranks-everything-you-need-know.html

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Updated: March 2023

Appendix

This document was modeled after the California State University Diversity Style Guide.

The University of Iowa Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Style Guide Committee members who worked to adapt the guide for use at Iowa include:
- **Tricia Brown**, senior director of internal communication, Office of Strategic Communication
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In addition, input was provided by various members of the UI Diversity Councils:

- Path Forward Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Collaboration Committee
- African American Council
- Council on Disability Awareness
- Council on the Status of Women
- LGBTQ+ Council
- Latinx Council
- Native American Council
- Pan Asian Council

Questions? Suggestions?

This guide was created with the understanding that many of the topics and sections will evolve, as will the guide. Those using this guide are encouraged to ask questions, offer suggestions, and note omissions.

Please email Tricia Brown at tricia-brown@uiowa.edu.