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Inclusive Language: Beyond Political Correctness
Sarah Grey, Grey Editing LLC

General Questions

- Would you describe a man this way? Would you describe a white person this way? (and so on.)
- How does the language used frame the issue?
- Does this text respect its subjects' preferences about how to describe their identities? If not, why not? Is this intentional?
- Is the subject's personal life relevant to the story? Has the subject agreed to reveal personal information?
- Does the text use last names, first names, and credentials in equal measure for everyone it discusses?
- If this text gives an outsider's perspective on a specific group, does the author speak for members of that group or listen to their voices? Is the author acting like an invader, a tourist, or a guest?
- What are the power dynamics at play in this text? Whose perspectives do the word choices and usages reflect?
- Who is the audience? What are reasonable assumptions about this audience?
- Does this text rely on gender binaries?
- Does this text reinforce any stereotypes or negative attitudes about specific groups?
- Does the language in this text put people's humanity before their differences (people-first language)?

Sex and Gender

- *Sex*: the way people are classified as male or female at birth based on physical characteristics. *Intersex* people are people whose biological sex is ambiguous. Includes but not limited to male, female, intersex
- *Gender Identity*: how people feel inside and how they present themselves. See below for more on *transgender* identities. Includes but not limited to male, female, transgender, genderqueer, agender, cisgender (someone whose gender identity matches their biological sex)
- *Sexual Orientation*: a person's preferences regarding romantic partners; related to neither sex nor gender. Includes, but not limited to: straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer, questioning. Abbreviations include: LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQI, QUILTBAG

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Neutral substitutes for gendered or sexist terms

Gendered	Alternative
mailman	mail carrier
Miss, Mrs.	Ms.
cleaning lady	janitor; housekeeper
Bob and his wife	Bob and Kamala
wife, husband	spouse; partner
housewife, househusband	stay-at-home parent (or spouse)
chairman	chair; chairman/chairwoman (for a specific person, not the office); leader
woman doctor, woman engineer	doctor, engineer
waitress	server
suffragette	suffragist
actress, authoress	actor, author
ladies, girls, gals	women (*girls* is acceptable for female children)
hooker, prostitute	sex worker

Transgender People

Rule #1: Respect each individual's wishes regarding terminology and identification, including pronoun choices; such choices are highly personal and there are no rules set in stone. NEVER OUT SOMEONE WITHOUT EXPLICIT CONSENT.

Often used (but not interchangeable): transgender (adj.), transgender people, trans woman (to describe someone born with male characteristics who transitions to become female), trans man (to describe someone born with female characteristics who transitions to become male), trans*, FTM (female-to-male), MTF (male-to-female), genderqueer, agender, transitioning, transition

Avoid (unless subject explicitly prefers): transgendered, a transgender (n.), tranny, transsexual, transvestite, he-she, shim, gender-bender, it, sex change, pre-operative, post-operative. Avoid language that implies deception.

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Pronouns:
- Use the individual's preferred pronoun if known.
- If someone identifies as male or female, use *he/him* or *she/her* pronouns as you would with a cisgender person
- Do not use *it.*
- Alternative pronoun options include singular *they*, name only, or neologisms:

1	2	3	4	5
e/ey	em	eir	eirs	eirself
he	him	his	his	himself
[name]	[name]	[name]'s	[name]'s	[name]'s self
per	per	pers	pers	perself
she	her	her	hers	herself
sie	sir	hir	hirs	hirself
they	them	their	theirs	themself
ve	ver	vis	vers	verself
zie	zim	zir	zirs	zirself

(Source: LGBT resource center, University of Milwaukee, via *New York Times*)

Glossary

(by Josey Herrera, Karen Yin, Brady Jones, Lauren Klinger, and Sarah Grey)

asexual, ace: Spell out on first reference for clarity. An asexual person does not experience sexual attraction. Not synonymous with celibate.

biphobia: Intolerance or prejudice against bisexual people, often including inaccurate associations with infidelity, promiscuity, and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases. Alternative: anti-bisexual bias.

bisexual, bi: Spell out on first reference for clarity. A bisexual person experiences emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction regardless of biological sex. Bisexual is often used as an umbrella term to encompass multiple identities on the bi spectrum and can refer to attraction to more than one gender identity or gender expression, inclusive of nonbinary genders.

cisgender, cis: A cisgender person identifies with the gender marker assigned to them at birth. Acceptable: cisgender person/woman/man, cis person/woman/man. Avoid ciswoman, cisman. See transgender.

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closeted: Describes a person who is not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Preferable: not openly bi, not openly gay.

coming out: Do not assume that a gay or bisexual person is "coming out" when they mention their sexual orientation or same-sex relationship. To assume that all LGBT people are, by default, "closeted" casts same-sex relationships in a negative light, something inherently shameful and distasteful. While it may be common language, be sparing in your use of the term. It may be more linguistically neutral to say someone is open about their LGBT status.

gay: Gay people have the capacity for emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction to one sex or gender. Though gay is often used to refer to gay boys/men and lesbian is used to refer to gay girls/women, you can say lesbians and gay males/boys/men to be more clear.

gay lifestyle: An outdated term used to stigmatize gay people and suggest that their lives should be viewed only through a sexual lens.

gender expression: The way a person outwardly manifests masculinity and/or femininity. Traits, desires, appearances, and behaviors associated with masculinity and femininity vary from culture to culture. This can include clothing selection, hairstyle, appearance, speech, behavior, movement, etc. It can sometimes be an extension of gender identity, but don't assume that it is.

gender identity: A person's internal sense of cultural associations with gender. Do not assume gender identity based on gender expression.

homophobia: Intolerance or prejudice against lesbians and gay males. Alternative: anti-gay bias.

homosexual: Do not use in nonmedical contexts. See gay.

intersex: An intersex person was born with anatomy or genetics that don't correspond with typical definitions. Avoid hermaphrodite, third sex.

LGBT: Initialism for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender. Do not use LGBT in the title or headline if the article only talks about gay people. The Q in LGBTQ can mean queer or questioning. Letters are continually being added as the conversation continues, such as I for intersex and A for allies or asexual. Befriend Google.

misgendering: Incorrect identification of a person's gender identity, including the use of pronouns and names a person does not use for themselves.

openly gay/bisexual: Use "He is openly bi." Avoid "He admitted/claimed to be bi."

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queer: Use with caution, depending on audience. "Although once a pejorative term, young people have reclaimed it and often use it as an umbrella term for lesbian women, gay men, and bisexual women and men. It is appropriate to use the term queer." (Source: APA)

same-sex marriage: Use *marriage* without adjectives or modifiers when sexual orientation is irrelevant. A bisexual person who marries does not change sexual orientation, so same-sex marriage avoids the biphobic assumptions in gay marriage and straight marriage.

same-sex, female-female, male-male, male-female, different-sex: Accurate terms which do not require assumption or knowledge of orientation. If gender identity is unknown, ask.

sex reassignment: Preferred term for medical process by which transgender people change physical, sexual characteristics to reflect gender identity. May include surgery, hormone therapy, and/or changes of legal identity. Avoid sex change.

sexual orientation: Innate sexual attraction.

sexual preference: Avoid this politically charged term implying that sexuality is the result of a conscious choice. See sexual orientation.

transgender, trans: Spell out on first reference for clarity. An umbrella term for some people whose outward gender expression may not match their inner gender identity. Some transgender persons may identify as drag kings/queens or cross-dressers, but do not assume that all transgender persons identify as any one of these. Acceptable: transgender person, transgender woman, transgender man; trans person, trans woman, trans man. Avoid transgendered, transvestite, tranny, transwoman, transman. Also avoid biologically female, biologically male. See cisgender.

transition: Accurate term that does not fixate on surgeries, which many transgender people do not or cannot undergo. Avoid pre-op, post-op, sex change, sex-change operation.

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Race and Ethnicity

- As with gender identity, racial and ethnic identification can vary and individual preferences should be respected to the greatest possible extent.
- Ensure diversity among sources when possible.
- Avoid terms that center whiteness, such as *nonwhite*; *people of color* or more specific terms (the name of the ethnicity in question) are better alternatives.
- Avoid making assumptions about race, ethnicity, religion, or language use/fluency based on names, appearance, etc. (For example, not all Arabs are Muslims; not all South Asians are from India; not everyone from India identifies as "Indian.")
- As with gender, ask whether the subject's race is relevant to the story.
- Do not use racial slurs except in direct quotes and when essential to the story.
- When terms related to ethnicity or nationality are disputed, check or query. Common with identities related to larger conflicts such as Israel/Palestine, China (PRC)/Taiwan, China (PRC)/Tibet, India/Pakistan/Kashmir, Ireland/United Kingdom, etc. Be aware of power dynamics and competing narratives; terms some see as neutral are highly emotional to others. If your text discusses a conflict in detail, research terminology related to that conflict and find the terms that are most neutral or that best reflect the author's point of view.
- Be conscious of stereotypes and competing narratives in choosing your language: *gunman* vs. *terrorist*, *freedom fighters* vs. *militants*, *organization* vs. *cartel*, *regime* vs. *administration*
- Avoid providing physical descriptions that play into racial/ethnic stereotypes (emphasizing skin color, facial features, etc.). Do not use foods to describe skin color (*cinnamon, olive, cocoa,* etc.).
- Avoid or query historical descriptions that gloss over or leave out major atrocities such as genocide or slavery.
- *Native American* and *American Indian* are both accepted terms; when possible, refer instead to a person's specific nation or tribe.
- Avoid loaded, racially coded terms such as *illegal* (n.), *illegal immigrant,* or *illegal alien*; *welfare mother*; *thug.*
- Remember: Africa is not a country!

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Disability and Mental Illness

Much of the terminology that has long been used to describe physical and mental disabilities and illnesses comes from outdated and discredited understandings of these issues. Use language that is neutral (not negative). Many (but not all) disability rights advocates prefer "people-first" language. Use conditions as descriptors after the noun or adjectives before the noun, not as nouns. If your text discusses specific conditions in detail, refer to the literature on those conditions for more precise terminology.

Avoid	Alternatives
handicapped; handi-abled; differently abled; the handicapped	people with disabilities
wheelchair-bound	uses a wheelchair
struck by [condition], suffers from [condition], victim of [condition]	has [condition], was diagnosed with [condition]
[condition] sufferer	person with [condition]
the handicapped	people with disabilities
the mentally ill, lunatics	people with mental illnesses
crazy, loony, nuts, mad	mentally ill (use in cases of actual mental illness, not to describe something unusual or ridiculous)
autistics	people with autism; autistic people; people on the autism spectrum; non-neurotypical people
psychopath	sociopath; person with antisocial personality disorder
deaf and dumb; deaf-mute	deaf; hard of hearing; Deaf (referring to culture and society of Deaf people or ASL native speakers)
normal people	people without [condition]; neurotypical people

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Resources
Copyeditors' Knowledge Base: http://www.kokedit.com/ckb.php
Conscious Style Guide: www.consciousstyleguide.com
University of New Hampshire Bias-Free Language Guide: http://www.unh.edu/inclusive/bias-free-language-guide

Sex and Gender
American Philosophical Association Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language:
http://www.apaonline.org/?page=nonsexist
National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association Stylebook:
http://www.nlgja.org/files/NLGJAStylebook0712.pdf
GLAAD Media Reference Guide:
http://www.glaad.org/files/MediaReferenceGuide2010.pdf?id=99
National Center for Transgender Equality Terminology List:
http://transequality.org/Resources/TransTerminology_2014.pdf
On singular "they," see John McIntire (http://bsun.md/1AAKA88) and Geoff Pullum
(http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languagelog/archives/005423.html)

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Asian American Journalists Association Handbook to Covering Asian America:
http://www.aaja.org/aajahandbook
National Association of Black Journalists Style Guide: http://www.nabj.org/?styleguide
Native American Journalists Association, *100 Questions, 500 Nations: A Guide to Native America*
(Canton, MI: Read the Spirit Books, 2014).
Associated Press statement on *illegal immigrant*: http://blog.ap.org/2013/04/02/illegal-immigrant-no-more/
Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) glossary: http://www.archives.gov/eeo/terminology.html
BBC Israel/Palestinian term list:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/article/art20130702112133696
Nisi Shawl and Cynthia Ward, *Writing the Other* (Seattle: Aqueduct Press, 2005).
Nisi Shawl, "Transracial Writing for the Sincere" (Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America):
http://www.sfwa.org/2009/12/transracial-writing-for-the-sincere/

Disability and Mental Illness
National Center on Disability and Journalism Style Guide: http://ncdj.org/style-guide
Mobility International Tip Sheet: http://www.miusa.org/resource/tipsheet/respect
National Association of the Deaf FAQ: http://nad.org/issues/american-sign-language/community-and-culture-faq