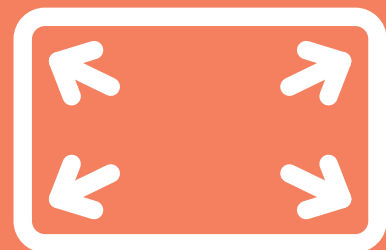


COMMUNICATING WITHOUT BIAS

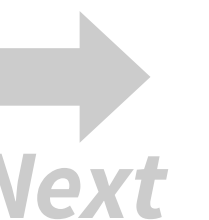


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A Quick Reference Guide to Inclusive Language



Harris & Associates

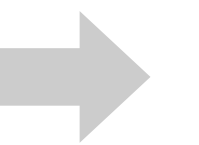


Professional communications should use bias-free language that includes and respects people of all genders/sexual orientations, ages, races/ethnicities, socio-economic statuses, and abilities.

This language should make no assumptions of the groups discussed. Even a small amount of bias, however unintentional, can have large, negative impacts on entire groups of people.



Prev.



Next

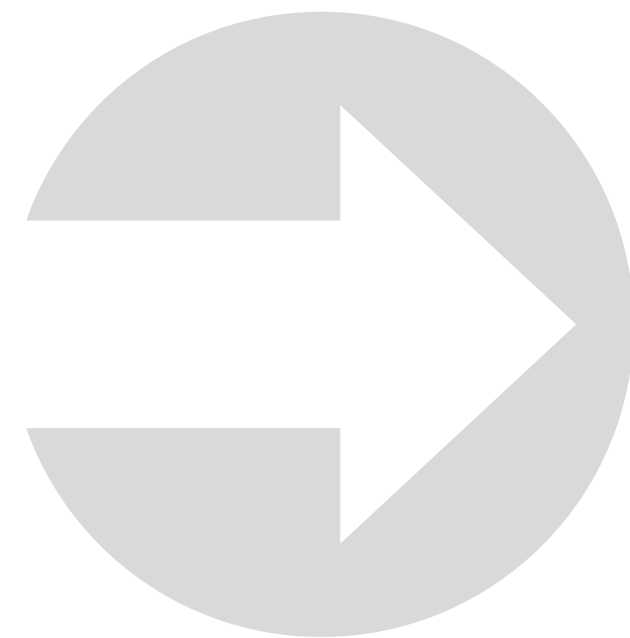
What does communicating without bias mean?

- Using words, phrases, and expressions that do not demean people based on their identity or reduce groups of people to stereotypes
- Not drawing unnecessary attention to personal characteristics
- Using terms in reference to a group preferred by that group (and asking the group if we're not sure)
- Using “people-first” language that avoids defining an individual by one characteristic (“person experiencing homelessness” rather than “homeless person”)



To help you become more fluent in inclusive language, Harris put together the following guide with examples of problematic, biased terms across several categories along with the bias-free, inclusive alternatives and explanations.

Click one of the buttons on the right to view that category.



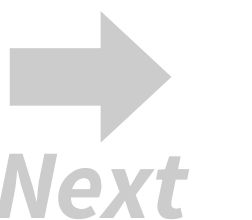
Gender/Sexual Orientation

Age

Race/Ethnicity

Socio-Economic Status

Disability



Problematic **Alternative**

chairman; chairwoman► chair; chairperson

fireman; firewoman► firefighter

landlord► owner

policeman; policewoman► police officer

woman engineer► engineer

Explanation
Gender is not relevant to the professional title and is not needed.

Problematic **Alternative**

he/she; he or she; (s)he; him/her; his/hers **they; them; their**

Explanation
The alternatives are inclusive of all genders and include those who may not identify as male or female.

Problematic **Alternative**

homosexual▶ **gay; lesbian; gay person**

Explanation
The alternatives are the more acceptable terms; “homosexual” is considered an outdated clinical term and offensive/derogatory.



Prev.



Gender/Sexual Orientation



Age



Race/Ethnicity



Socio-Economic Status



Disability



Next

Problematic **Alternative**

husband; wife▶ **partner; spouse**

Explanation
Gender is not relevant to the relationship title and is not needed.

Problematic **Alternative**

sexual preference **sexual orientation**

Explanation
“Sexual preference” implies that attraction to the same sex is a choice.

Problematic **Alternative**

transgender (noun)▶ **transgender (adjective) person**

Explanation
“Transgender” should be used as an adjective only because it is the preferred construction by the group described.

Problematic **Alternative**

the aged; the elderly; old person; senior; senior citizen **older adult; older person; person 65 years and older**

Explanation

The problematic terms perpetuate the stereotype that older adults are less able (intellectually, physically, or emotionally) than other age groups and that they are in a group separate from society.



Prev.

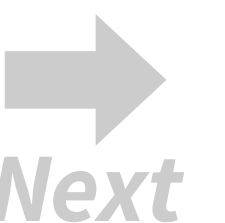
Gender/Sexual Orientation

Age

Race/Ethnicity

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Disability



Next

Problematic Alternative

culturally disadvantaged; culturally deprived; minority; non-white ... **historically underrepresented group; people of color**

Explanation

The problematic terms imply the dominant culture (i.e., white culture) is superior to other cultures, that other racial/ethnic groups lack having a culture of their own, and that “white” is the standard that all other cultures should be judged against.



Prev.

Gender/Sexual Orientation

Age

Race/Ethnicity

Socio-Economic Status

Disability



Next

Problematic Alternative

the homeless; homeless person; transient▶ **person experiencing homelessness**

Explanation

The problematic terms imply criminality and define the person only by their housing status. “Person experiencing homelessness,” which is constructed as people-first language, instead identifies what the person is experiencing and not what they are.



Prev.

Gender/Sexual Orientation

Age

Race/Ethnicity

Socio-Economic Status

Disability



Next

Problematic Alternative

**the poor; poverty-stricken person;
low-income person** **person experiencing poverty;
person living at or below the poverty line**

the rich **person with material wealth**

Explanation

The problematic terms are broad, judgmental, and generalizing and define the person only by their socio-economic status. The alternatives, which are constructed as people-first language, instead identify what the person is experiencing or has and not what they are.



Prev.

Gender/Sexual Orientation

Age

Race/Ethnicity

Socio-Economic Status

Disability



Next

Problematic

Alternative

- [health condition] victim▶ person with [health condition]
- addict▶ person with a substance abuse disorder
- blind person▶ person who is blind
- handicapped; physically challenged▶ person with a disability; person who has a disability; person with a physical disability
- mentally ill; crazy▶ person with mental illness
- normal people; healthy people▶ people without [health condition]
- special needs; mentally challenged; mentally retarded; retarded▶ people with intellectual disabilities
- wheelchair-bound person▶ wheelchair user; person who uses a wheelchair

Explanation

The problematic terms are negative terms that imply restriction or are considered slurs that insult or belittle the person being described. The alternatives, which are constructed as people-first language, instead identify what the person is experiencing and not what they are.



Gender/Sexual Orientation

Age

Race/Ethnicity

Socio-Economic Status

Disability

Prev.

Next



Thank you for checking out our Bias-Free, Inclusive Language interactive guide!

If you would like to learn more about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) at Harris & Associates, view our [DEI page](#) for more information.