

*Avoid:* wheelchair bound; cripple

*Use:* a wheelchair user; a person who uses a wheelchair; person with a mobility impairment

*Avoid:* crazy; loopy; mental

*Use:* person with a psychological or psychiatric impairment

*Avoid:* mongol/mongoloid; retarded, slow learner

*Use:* person with Down's Syndrome; person with intellectual disability

***The University of Western Australia is committed to creating a work and study environment which promotes inclusivity and values diversity.***

### Further Information

The Equity and Diversity website – [www.equity.uwa.edu.au](http://www.equity.uwa.edu.au) – contains details of:

- UWA equal opportunity and diversity policies
- Procedure for the management of harassment and discrimination issues
- An up-to-date listing of the UWA Equity and Diversity Advisers
- Additional information and Resources to assist staff and students

Equity and Diversity Services can be contacted on (08) 6488 3873.



**EQUITY & DIVERSITY**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

updated December 2005



# Using Inclusive Language



UWA Equity and Diversity Services

## Using Inclusive Language

The UWA community is diverse and comprises many cultures, backgrounds and experiences. It is important that this diversity be reflected in all facets of University life, including the usage of language.

Language plays a critical role in expressing inter-group relations and often defines the dominant paradigm of male, white, able-bodied, Christian, heterosexual as being normative. Language may create an image that some people are inferior by positioning them as 'different' to others, and could exclude some people from feeling a sense of 'belonging' to the organisation. It is easy to inadvertently convey or reinforce stereotypic attitudes, assumptions and inaccurate information about various groups of people by using inappropriate language or terminology.

This guide has been developed to assist staff and students to avoid bias when speaking or writing and assist in the achievement diversity best practice. It is important to note that as no universal agreement exists on terminology, and because language and culture continually change, the ideas in this publication should be considered helpful suggestions rather than rigid rules.

It is important to use appropriate and inclusive language in all your language but specifically:

- University publications
- Reports, minutes, correspondence
- Guidelines, handbooks, lectures, speeches
- Course curricula
- Essays, tutorials, theses
- Everyday speech

The use of inclusive language assists the University to create an environment that promotes respect and values diversity.

*Avoid:* consistently using stereotypic usage of language pairs such as 'gays and lesbians', 'husband and wife'

*Use:* 'lesbians and gays', 'wife and husband' occasionally

## Language and Disability

The usage of language around disability issues has been characterised by prevailing attitudes in this complex area. People with disabilities have been described, often unintentionally, as people that require sympathy and extra assistance. Discriminatory language around disability and people with disabilities occurs primarily when the disability is emphasised with associated stereotypes.

### Some useful tips

Focus on ability when referring to people with disabilities and recognise they are multi-dimensional and their disability is merely one characteristic.

Portray people with disabilities in a positive light, rather than resorting to stereotypic images that may be offensive e.g. a disabled person.

Do not use collective terminology and derogatory labelling to describe disability and people with disabilities. People with disabilities are often referred to as a category of people and this can be depersonalising and offensive as it denies individuality and describes the individual along a single dimension i.e. disability.

Therefore, be mindful of the following:

*Avoid:* the disabled

*Use:* people with a disability, staff/students with disabilities

*Avoid:* the deaf, the blind

*Use:* persons who are deaf or hearing impaired, people with a hearing impairment, people who are blind or visually impaired

*Avoid:* spastic; paraplegic; epileptic

*Use:* a person with cerebral palsy; person with paraplegia; person with epilepsy

*Avoid:* AIDS sufferer or victim of AIDS

*Use:* persons who are HIV positive or a person living with HIV/AIDS

Avoid using demeaning or trivialising words to describe women and their activities, actions and occupations e.g. 'the girls in the faculty office'. As a general rule, girls and boys are under 18 years of age while men and women are adults, so it is inappropriate to refer to women in the workplace as 'the girls in the office'. In Australian Aboriginal societies the appointment to manhood or womanhood may be determined differently depending upon the cultural background of the boy or girl, and may occur earlier than for other Australians.

Avoid portraying women in a stereotypic manner based on traditional roles or physical attributes when it is not appropriate in the context. Descriptions such as 'attractive female academic' are irrelevant and demeaning and serve to reinforce sexist assumptions.

Be consistent in the usage of titles and addresses when issuing invitations and notices or preparing speeches. Vary the order of listing pairs of nouns and pronouns when the customary way of presenting the pair reflects stereotyped views of status.

Therefore, be mindful of the following:

*Avoid:* man (generic); manpower, mankind, manmade

*Use:* person, man and woman, women and men; human resources, personnel, staff, workforce; humanity, people; artificial, manufactured, handmade

*Avoid:* Mr John Smith and Mary Brown

*Use:* Mr John Smith and Ms Mary Brown

*Avoid:* girls in the faculty office

*Use:* faculty office staff

*Avoid:* female professor; grounds man; cleaning lady

*Use:* professor; ground staff; cleaner

*Avoid:* Ms Stuart, Miss Chong and Rod Walker

*Use:* Ms Chong, Ms Stuart and Mr Walker

*Avoid:* Mr and Mrs Das

*Use:* Rahul and Mala Das

*Avoid:* It is important to offer women flexible work options to assist in meeting family responsibilities

*Use:* It is important to offer staff flexible work options to assist in meeting family responsibilities

## Language, Race and Ethnicity

The diversity of the Australian community in terms of national origin, race and descent, language, culture, religion and other characteristics should be reflected in language. Using inclusive language in the area of culture, race and ethnicity aims to acknowledge and positively reflect the diversity of Australia's population.

### INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

#### Some useful tips

The term 'Indigenous' is used to refer to the first peoples or the original inhabitants of an area and is increasingly used in an international context. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues is located at [www.unhchr.ch/indigenous/forum.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/indigenous/forum.htm)

In Australia there are two distinct Indigenous peoples: Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders should not be referred to by the acronym 'ATSI'.

'Aboriginal peoples' with a capital 'A' refers to the many hundreds of Indigenous nations living in Australia. While it is an acceptable term to use, it should be recognised that it is a collective term and often used improperly to impose a single identity on the many different communities.

Aboriginal people generally prefer to be called by the language/cultural groups or communities to which they belong, that is, own names rather than terms such as 'Aborigines', which were imposed by colonisation. For example, Aboriginal peoples in the south west of Western Australia are Nyoongar while those in the Murchison-Gascoyne are Yamatji. Aboriginal peoples in the Pilbara include Yindjibarndi, Nyamal, Palyku and many more. Similarly, the Goldfields and the Kimberley have many different Aboriginal peoples and communities as do all States and Territories in Australia.

It is important that you always check with the local Aboriginal community as to the correct name or terms to use for Aboriginal people in the area/region.

The use of incorrect, inappropriate or dated terminology is to be avoided as it can often give offence. Many historical terms or those in common usage some years ago are not now acceptable, including terms such as

'nomads', 'native', 'savage' and 'primitive'. Similarly, do not use the terms 'half-caste', 'part-Aborigine' or any references to colour or physical features as they do not signify Aboriginality and may cause offence.

In Western Australia, Aboriginal people, or Aboriginal peoples is preferred to 'Aborigines'. Indigenous Australians is also acceptable.

### **Cultural protocols**

UWA demonstrates respect for, and recognition of traditional country at commencement and graduation ceremonies, NAIDOC week activities, Reconciliation Week, conferences and other relevant events.

*The University of Western Australia acknowledges that it is situated on Nyoongar land. Nyoongar people remain the spiritual and cultural custodians of their land and continue to practice their values, languages, beliefs and customs.*

The School of Indigenous Studies has responsibility for ensuring that Aboriginal cultural protocols are followed at UWA.

## **AUSTRALIANS FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS**

### **Some useful tips**

Terms describing nationality or ethnicity are frequently controversial and some terms are more acceptable than others.

Be aware of majority bias in the use of language which established the majority group in Australia – people of Anglo-Celtic or Anglo-Saxon descent – as the norm against which other groups are judged. It is not appropriate to make references to race, culture or religion if they are irrelevant to the context of what is being written or said. Gratuitous descriptions can convey the impression that the persons referred to are different or unusual e.g. Asian student, Muslim professor, Aboriginal man.

Recognise and acknowledge the diversity within and between various racial and ethnic groups. For example, avoid using the term 'Asian' to describe persons of a particular racial type as there are several racial, cultural and ethnic differences within the geographic boundaries of Asia.

The term 'Australian' should be used in an inclusive manner, referring to any Australian citizen or permanent resident, irrespective of the person's ethnic or racial background or country of birth. Avoid describing persons

according to their original nationality or their ethnicity or ethno-religious background. If it is important to specify the cultural identity of a person use terms such as 'Vietnamese-born Australian', 'Arabic-speaking Australian', 'Muslim Australian' or 'overseas-born Australian'.

Avoid shortening the names of people from Indigenous or culturally diverse backgrounds unless their permission has been sought e.g. Anamika to Anna. Be aware that some cultures (e.g. South-East Asian, Middle Eastern) have three or more names and it is important to check with the student or staff member or other appropriate resource as to the correct usage.

Avoid portraying stereotypic notions of particular racial, national, ethnic or cultural groups in the use of language as they are offensive. Stereotypes present a relatively fixed and often inaccurate image of a person or persons belonging to a particular group e.g. 'Asian students are diligent and hard working', 'Muslim males have problems with women in leadership'. Be aware that members of racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to be described in stereotypical terms than those of the majority group.

Avoid jokes or humour with racial overtones as they are offensive to many people.

When quoting from academic or other sources that use racist language, use (sic) after the racist word or phrase, thus calling attention to the fact that this form of words has been sourced from the original.

## **Language and Gender**

Language is often used to reinforce the perceived superior position of one gender over another. Historically, the bias has been expressed in favour of men and discriminated against women. Any language that discriminates against women or men by not appropriately reflecting their role, status and contribution in society may be regarded as sexist.

### **Some useful tips**

Be aware of language that renders women invisible through the generic usage of the masculine pronouns 'he', 'him', 'his' to refer to both men and women.

Do not convey images of women being subordinate to men through the usage of suffixes or qualifiers that imply women are anomalous in the situation e.g. woman academic, female electrician, actress.