WM COLLEGE



INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE

About this guide

Language is a powerful tool for creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, however we all know how it feels when words make us feel left out or devalued. As part of **WM College's** diversity and inclusion journey, we have produced this guide to avoid inadvertently making people feel excluded or offended. We are very happy to share this.

It is a guide: it is not exhaustive or definitive. Language is always changing, and in some instances, there will not be a single 'right' way to use it. In recognising that language creates a common understanding where prejudices can be reinforced, we must all make an effort to increase our understanding of respectful and inclusive words and phrases. Discrimination through language, whether intended or not, causes offence, patronises and may also be unlawful. The most important thing is to use language as a way to include everyone and be prepared to change it as and when our understanding evolves.

Be a great role model and show, by virtue of the language you use and the choices you make, that you understand the power of words and the evolving nature of language. We may not always get it right but be explicit in your intentions to try and be as inclusive as possible.

What if I get it wrong?

If you are making the effort to use respectful language and be inclusive then it's OK to make mistakes along your journey. When we are learning, we get things wrong sometimes. If this happens, apologise, learn from your mistake and move on without getting defensive – you can keep trying and do better next time.

You should, however, be aware that repeated mistakes indicate a lack of respect and can be very distressing. If it continues or is deliberate, it could constitute bullying or discrimination, which is unlawful.



Age

Only refer to someone's age if it is relevant. We do not use age to describe an individual or group where it is not relevant, such as 'mature' or 'young and vibrant. In these cases, it is appropriate to say 'experienced' or 'effective and vibrant'.

We actively avoid ageist terms such as 'elderly,' 'OAPs,' 'pensioners' or 'youngsters." Use terms that are objective, such as 'child' when referring to ages 4–12 years or 'young people' or 'young adults' for those aged from 13-18 years old.

Quick guide

Avoid	Use
The elderly, OAPs, pensioners	Older people
Kids, youngsters, guys	Young people, learners, teenagers

Disability

People or individuals should not be defined according to their disability/condition or labelled as a victim because of their health status. Use 'person first' terminology in language. For example, it is current best practice to use terms such as 'person with a disability,' 'people living with cancer' or 'wheelchair user.' Common phrases such as 'suffers from' or 'victim of' suggest hopelessness and passivity - these diminish the individual's life and abilities and so should be avoided.

Also, many people with a disability are not wheelchair users, so be mindful of the images and icons you use in written documents. Be aware of non-visible 'hidden' disabilities such as diabetes or chronic fatigue, as well as 'neurodiversity,' which describes people with conditions such as dyslexia, and autism for example. Where you can, use an image specific to the disability you are discussing unless discussing disability in general where it is best to use the widely accepted wheelchair symbol.

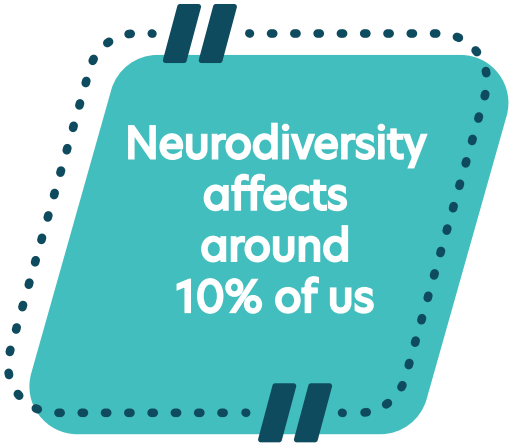


Quick guide

Avoid	Use
The disabled, handicapped people, wheelchair-bound, confined to a wheelchair	Disabled people/person, wheelchair user
The blind, the deaf	People with visual/hearing impairments, blind people, partially sighted people
Diabetic, suffers with diabetes	Person with diabetes
Victim of dementia, battling with dementia	Person living with dementia

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity relates to the fact that no two brains are exactly alike – this variety in our biological make-up results in natural differences in communication skills, problem-solving and creative insights. Autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) are all included in the range of neurodivergence seen in around 10% of the population. Understanding and appreciating these normal differences emphasises the importance of not using medicalised or negative language in association with neurodiversity.



Quick guide

Avoid	Use
Autistic	Neurodiverse person
Autism spectrum disorder (note: referring to the autism spectrum is fine, but 'disorder' is offensive to some autistic people)	Person with autism
High-functioning, low-functioning (unless an autistic person is using it about themselves) aspergers/aspergers syndrome	Autism spectrum
Dyslexic	Person with dyslexia

Mental health

Everyone has mental health and the ways in which we experience it are unique to each of us. With so many people experiencing common mental health problems, being respectful and thoughtful in the language we use around mental health can have a very positive impact on us all. Use person-centred language to avoid positive or negative labelling and prevent people being defined by a condition. As we have become more aware of mental health, phrases such as 'OCD' have become more common when describing someone who is particularly clean and tidy or 'bipolar' when talking about everyday mood swings. These are problematic as they minimise the debilitating issues experienced by people with a clinical diagnosis of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or Bipolar Disorder.

Quick guide

Avoid	Use
Mental disorder, mental illness	Mental health conditions, mental health problems
Suffers with anxiety	People with anxiety
Struggles with depression	A person with depression

Race & ethnicity

Race and ethnicity are often regarded as the same thing – both are social constructs used to categorise and characterise at an individual and group level. While there can be overlap between the two terms, it is helpful to understand the difference and how this impacts inclusive language.

'Race' is used to describe shared physical traits, particularly skin colour and hair texture, and a shared ancestry or historical experience as a result.

'Ethnicity' is more frequently chosen by the individual and linked to cultural expression and is therefore more of a personal choice. The term is used to describe shared cultural or national identity, such as language, nationality, religious expression and other customs.

BAME is often used as an acronym for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, used to refer to all ethnic groups except White British Group. The acronym, however, can be problematic because it offers an assumption that all non-white people exist as a homogeneous group without appreciation of the uniqueness of individual ethnicities. Based on these factors, we advise against its use. We only refer to people's race or ethnicity if it's relevant to the information we are communicating.

In those cases, use the following broad rules:

- To describe broad ethnicity: Black, Asian or White (rather than Caucasian), written in upper case.
- To describe specific ethnicity: black African, Chinese, Indian, white British, 'people of South Asian heritage', 'people of East Asian heritage', 'Middle East and North African people'.
- Remember that terms such as 'black British' or 'British Asian' do not make it clear whether they include those living in the UK or those born in the UK. Instead, we use phrases like 'people of X heritage/diaspora' which includes migrant people without leaving anyone out.
- We do not use the words 'mixed heritage' – instead we specify, for example 'people of African and White heritage'.
- We actively avoid and challenge racial and ethnic slurs and any language that infers or endorses stereotypes based upon racial or ethnic associations.
- If we don't know, we ask – 'How do you describe your ethnicity?'

Race & ethnicity

Quick guide

Avoid	Use
BAME people (instead, spell out the acronym) non-white people, people of colour, coloured people	Black, Asian, minority ethnic people
(The) Asians, blacks, whites	Asian people, black people, white people
Ethnic minorities, minority groups	Minority ethnic groups
Mixed, mixed heritage, mixed race	People of white and black Caribbean heritage
Coloured, half-caste	People of colour

Religion & belief

While religions have their origins in certain parts of the world, it would be incorrect to assume people whose ethnicity originates from those countries observe the same religion or any religion.

We only refer to people's religion if it's relevant to the information we are communicating. In those cases, we use the following:

- Names of religions and religious groups take an upper case.
- Groups of individuals from the same religion should be referred to as a community, such as members of the Muslim community or Jewish people.
- We do not assume a person's religious belief by their name.

The extent to which followers of different religions observe or express their faith is personal to them and we do not condone challenging individuals on their faith or lack of.

Quick guide

Avoid	Use
Christian name	First name, given name
Faith	Religion, belief
Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims etc	Christian people, Hindu people, Jewish people, Muslim people etc

Sex and gender identity

The language around sex and gender identity is evolving constantly and it is important to understand the difference between them.

'Sex' is biological (male, female or intersex) and relates to genes, internal/external reproductive organs and hormones inherited at birth. 'Gender' can be fixed or fluid and refers to our internal sense of who we are and how we see and describe ourselves.

Binary gender terms (man/woman, girl/boy) have traditional associations with sex, but we now recognise how some people identify with a gender opposite to that assigned to them as a child (transgender) and others identify neither as men nor women (non-binary or genderfluid).

- Cisgender: People whose gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth.

- Transgender (or Trans): People whose gender identity does not match, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.

- Non-binary: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn't sit comfortably with 'man' or 'woman'. Non-binary identities are varied and can include people who identify with some aspects of binary identities, while others reject them entirely.

Gender reassignment describes the process when an individual feels that his or her gender at birth does not match their gender identity and has either undergone, intends to undergo or is currently undergoing gender reassignment (medical and surgical treatment to alter the body) OR intends to live permanently in a different gender from their gender at birth. 'Transition' refers to the process and/or the period of time during which gender reassignment occurs (with or without medical intervention).

Using someone's correct personal pronouns is a way to show them respect and create an inclusive environment. All staff are invited to add their own pronouns to their email footer. The more common this is, the easier our colleagues will find it to share their pronouns. Learners and staff will have the opportunity to wear a pronoun badge, which they can collect from reception from September 2024.

The language around sex and gender identity is evolving constantly and it is important to understand the difference between them. We avoid gender-biased expressions or expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes e.g. 'man up,' 'that's a woman's job,' 'cry like a girl.' We do not refer to a woman as 'emotional,' 'difficult' or 'bossy.'

Sex and gender identity

Quick guide

Avoid	Use
Ladies and gentlemen, guys	Everyone, friends, and colleagues
Girl, son, mate, love	The person's name
She, her, hers; he, him, his [unless these have been specified]	They, them, theirs [if other pronouns haven't been specified; if however, pronouns (e.g. she, her, hers) have been specified, then use those instead]
Girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, husband, other/better half	Partner, spouse
Men and women, male and female (i.e. a binary choice)	Men, women and people who identify as non-binary.
Mankind	People, humankind
Chairman	Chair
Workmanship	Quality of work
Manpower	Resources
A female doctor, a male nurse	A doctor, a nurse
A policeman, a fireman	A police officer, a fire fighter
'Man' services	Provide cover, staff

Sexual orientation

Whilst we are probably familiar with inclusive language around sexual orientation, it is worth refreshing our understanding to ensure we are up to date with current terminology.

When talking about sexuality, we use the term 'sexual orientation', not 'sexual preference'. We mention sexuality only where and when it is relevant to the context. For example, recruitment initiatives designed to increase applications from individuals belonging to sexual or gender minorities, for example lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or any of the other LGBTQ+ orientations a person may identify with. Bear in mind that the LGBT+ acronym covers people with a range of sexual orientations and, as a result, this is not automatically a homogenous group.

The Q at the end of LGBTQ can refer to 'questioning'. This term describes someone who is questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Do not assume a person's sexuality when talking about personal relationships. You can refer in a neutral way through the use of non-gendered terms. For example, ask someone if they have a 'partner' instead of boy/girlfriend, husband or wife. If in doubt, ask someone their preferred term and respect their wishes.

Quick guide

Avoid	Use
Lesbians, gays, bisexual	Lesbian people, gay people, bisexual people Note: 'Queer' can be used as an adjective to describe individuals who don't identify as straight, but historically it has also had negative connotations so, if used, should be used with the permission of the person you are referring to.

Sexual orientation

Quick guide

Avoid	Use
Heterosexuals Sexual preference Girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, husband	Heterosexual people, straight people Sexual orientation Partner, spouse
Don't use 'LGBTQ+' if you are only talking about gender or gender identity	Only use 'LGBTQ+' when referring to both sexual orientation and gender identity-based communities
Don't use 'straight' as the opposite of LGBTQ+' (transgender people can be any sexual orientation, including 'straight')	Straight CIS gendered, ally

"Don't assume, keep your language neutral. Ask"

Marriage and civil partnerships

Marriage and civil partnership means someone who is legally married or in a civil partnership. Marriage and civil partnership can either be between a man and a woman, or between partners of the same sex. Our staff or learners must not be discriminated against because they are married or in a civil partnership.

When discussing relationships with others, particularly if you do not know them very well, do not assume that they are married or single and try to use terms like 'partner' rather than husband or wife.

Quick guide

Avoid	Use
Girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, husband	Partner, spouse

Get involved

WM College is always open to sharing good ideas and collaborating to make progress on what is important. It's essential for all of us working and serving our diverse communities that we work hard to get this right.

If you have any suggestions for how this document could be further improved, if you are a member of staff, contact the HR team at **hr@wmcollege.ac.uk** and if you are a learner, use the feedback form on our website. Staff and learners can come along to our **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Forum** that meets once a term. Look out for more information on our screens in Reception.

INSPIRING LEARNING

SINCE 1854