## Inclusive Language Guide

Language holds the power to unite or divide us, and to make your audience feel accepted or rejected.

USC Aiken is a welcoming and inclusive community that respects and honors different religions, abilities, backgrounds, and identities. The language we utilize within that community is a direct reflection on our commitment to these attributes.

The Department of Diversity Initiatives has created this guide to provide all members of the USC Aiken community with current and up-to-date inclusive language terminology. The office will update this guide as the terminology evolves.

The words and phrases in this guide are recommendations. As a general rule, ask the individual/group what terms they prefer. **These recommendations are not an official language requirement set forth by USC Aiken.**

## Race, Ethnicity, & National Origin

Here is a list of the most common different identities, however, the Department of Diversity Initiatives suggests using the term preferred by the group or the individual.

| Identity | Explanation | Example(s) |
|---|---|---|
| African American/black | <ul><li>Black and African American are **not** always interchangeable. Some individuals prefer the term black because they do not identify as African and/or American.</li><li>Individuals may identify as African, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latino or other.</li><li>If referring to a group in general, use black (lowercase).</li></ul> | Refer to groups as black students, black faculty members, etc., **not** blacks. <br><br> Consider the necessity of using race within your text. Ask yourself: "Would I mention 'white student' or 'white faculty member' when discussing others?" |
| Asian, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Desi | <ul><li>Asian refers to people who are citizens of countries in the Far East, Southeast Asia or the Indian subcontinent, or to describe people of Asian descent.</li></ul> | Refer to groups as Asian students, Asian faculty members, etc., **not** Asians. |

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| | Asian Americans trace their origins to these regions. <br>• Pacific Islander includes Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian, Fijian and other peoples of the Pacific Island nations. <br>• Desi refers to individuals whose cultural and ethnic identity are related to the Indian subcontinent and the diaspora. <br>• Use Asian/Pacific Islander when referring to the relevant population in its entirety. Otherwise, use the preferred term of the individual or group. <br>• Try to be specific when possible. For example, if you are referring to individuals from Japan, instead of saying "Asian", use "Japanese" | Consider the necessity of using race within your text. Ask yourself: "Would I mention 'white student' or 'white faculty member' when discussing others?" |
| Hispanic, Latin(a/o), & Latinx | • Hispanic refers to people from Spanish-speaking countries. <br>• Latino, Latina, or Latinx (La-Teen-ex) is a person of Latin American descent who can be of any background or language. If the individual or group does not identify as either Latino or Latina, the gender-neutral term Latinx can be used. When referring to a group, generally use Latinx as it is gender inclusive. | People from Mexico, Cuba, and Guatemala who speak Spanish are both Hispanic and Latin(o/a)/Latinx. <br><br>Brazilians who speak Portuguese are Latin(o/a)/Latinx but **not** Hispanic. <br><br>Spanish-speaking people in Spain and outside Latin America are Hispanic but **not** Latin(o/a)/Latinx. |
| Native American | • Native American is preferred unless the individual or group specifies otherwise. <br>• Occasionally some prefer American Indian; however, this is not universal. | The term "Indian" is used only when referring to people from India, **not** for Native Americans. |

| People of Color | • **Do not** use the term minority to refer to individuals/students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Instead, use "people of color/students of color". | **Do not** use the term "colored people" |
|---|---|---|
| Underserved/ Under- Represented | • **Do not** use the term minority to describe students from diverse backgrounds.<br>• When referring to multiple groups of students from diverse backgrounds, use "Underserved/Under Represented students"; however, use the specific group title when possible. | For example: LGBTQ+ students, black students, undocumented students, etc. |
| National Origins | • **Do not** hyphenate national origins even if they are used as adjectives. The use of the hyphen is rooted in the history of the "hyphenated American'—an epithet used during the late 19th century to the early 20th century to ridicule Americans of foreign birth or origin.<br>• Additionally, identifiers such as African American, Native American, Asian American, are never hyphenated—even if they are used as adjectives. | Example: Irish American, Polish American, Japanese American |
| Immigration Status | • **Do not** use the word "illegal immigrant" or "illegal alien" to refer to individuals who are not U.S. citizens/permanent residents, who do not hold visas to reside in the U.S., or who have not applied for official residency.<br>• These words dehumanize the individual by stripping their identity down to a legal status. Instead of saying "illegal immigrant" or "illegal alien", use "undocumented". | Example: Undocumented students; Undocumented individuals |

# Gender and Sexuality

LGBTQ+ is an acronym for sexual and gender identities. It is important not to conflate gender and sexuality when reviewing these different identities. An individual's gender identity is their internal perception of their gender and how they label themselves, whereas an individual's sexuality refers to the types of sexual, romantic, emotional/spiritual attraction one has the capacity to feel for others. Below we have provided a list of identities that you should know. **Note: This list is not exhaustive and you may learn of other identities not included on this list.**

| Identity | Definition | Important Information |
|---|---|---|
| LGBTQ(+) | Shorthand or umbrella term for individuals who have a non-hetero/cis-normative gender or sexuality. LGBTQ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer. The '+' includes all other non-hetero/cis normative identities not included within the LGBTQ acronym. | |
| Lesbian | Women who are primarily attracted to other women | It is not appropriate to use the word "homosexual" or "WSW" (women who have sex with women) |
| Gay | Men who are attracted to other men.<br><br>Some individuals refer to lesbian women as 'gay women'. Generally, do not do so unless preferred by the group/individual. | It is not appropriate to use the word "homosexual" or "MSM" (men who have sex with men) |
| Bisexual | An individual who experiences attraction to men and women | |
| Transgender | A gender description for someone who has transitioned (or is transitioning) from living as one gender to another.<br><br>Transgender can sometimes be written as Trans* | It is not appropriate to ask a transgender individual which part of their transition they are currently in.<br>• a biological man who is transitioning into a woman is a _transgender woman, or transwoman_<br>• a biological woman who is transitioning to a man is a _transgender man, or transman_ |

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| Queer | An umbrella term to describe individuals who do not identify as straight and/or cisgender | It is important to consider the context when using the word queer as it was formally used as a derogatory word. It has since been reclaimed.<br><br>**Never** add 'a' in front of the word. Example: He is Queer |
| Ally | A typically straight and/or cisgender person who supports and respects members of the LGBTQ community | |
| Cisgender | A gender description for when someone's sex assigned at birth and gender identity corresponds in the socially constructed and socially expected way. | |
| Gender Non-Conforming | A gender identity label that indicates a person who identifies *outside* of the gender binary (binary: man or woman) | |

**Noun Usage**

In an effort to be more inclusive, the Department of Diversity Initiatives encourages you to use gender-neutral nouns. Gender-neutral language helps eliminate assumptions about an individual's gender identity or sexual orientation based upon their appearance.

Below is a list of everyday words that can be rephrased in gender-neutral terms.

| **Instead of…** | **Use...** |
|---|---|
| Fireman | Firefighter |
| Policeman | Police Officer |
| Salesmen | Salesperson, sales associate |
| Mailman | Mail carrier |
| Man and wife | Husband and wife; partners |

Below is a list of gender-neutral nouns that can be used in the university setting.

| **Instead of...** | **Use...** |
|---|---|
| Chairman | Chair |

| | |
|---|---|
| Alumni | Alumnx |
| Ombudsman | Ombuds |
| Manpower | Staffing |
| Freshman | First-year |
| Upperclassmen | Juniors and Seniors |
| Lowerclassmen | First-years and Sophomores |

The Department of Diversity Initiatives recommends using the term "first-year" as a noun and adjective to replace the term "freshman". We also recommend replacing "underclassmen" with first-years and sophomores; replace "upperclassmen" with juniors and seniors.

**Pronouns**

Plural pronouns are becoming more widely accepted as gender-neutral singular pronouns. It is permissible and grammatically correct, per MLA and APA guidelines, to rewrite singular pronounces using a form of 'they' if you cannot rephrase your sentence to be plural rather than singular.

For example:

Each author was chosen based on **his or her** research.

Authors were chosen based on **their** research.

Here is a list of the most common pronouns used. As always use the preferred pronouns of the individual. You may see more pronouns outside of this list.

| Subjective | Objective | Possessive Adjective | Possessive Pronouns | Reflexive | Pronunciation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| She | Her | Her | Hers | Herself | Pronounced as it looks |
| He | Him | His | His | Himself | Pronounced as it looks |
| Ze | Zim | Zir | Zirs | Zirself | Pronounced Zay or Zee/Zim (rhymes with them)/ Zir (rhymes with their) |
| They | Them | Their | Theirs | Themselves | Pronounced as it looks |

## Ability Status & (Dis)abilities

When discussing language surrounding (dis)ability status, the Department of Diversity Initiatives recommends approaching the conversation with a "People First" mentality; People with (dis)abilities are people first.

When referring to an individual with (dis)abilities it is important to identify them as a person with a (dis)ability, **not** a disabled person; person on the autism spectrum, not autistic or autistic person.

The "People First" mentality should also be applied when discussing mental illness. A person with a mental illness is a person first. When referring to an individual with mental illness it is important to identify them as a person living with a mental illness, rather than a mentally ill person.

Use the term accessible rather than disabled or handicapped to refer to facilities. Avoid outdated, offensive words such as handicapped, retarded, crazy, etc. Avoid using self-diagnosing language such as, "I'm OCD," and "I'm having an anxiety attack right now," unless these mental illnesses have been diagnosed.

## Additional Assistance

You may seek assistance from the Department of Diversity Initiatives regarding questions, comments, suggestions, and/or concerns regarding this language guide. Additionally, if you note any outdated or offensive terms on this guide, please contact the Department of Diversity Initiatives.

Please contact the Department of Diversity Initiatives at [Diversityinitiatives@usca.edu](mailto:Diversityinitiatives@usca.edu).