



# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Auditing: How to Use Inclusive Language in Audit Reports

Audit reports have an impact on the public. The words we use in those reports also impact how the public interprets the validity and objectivity of our messages. Using inclusive language is a way to help auditors choose words with care and communicate more effectively.

This ALGA DEI tool describes three ways to incorporate inclusive language into your audit work and provides a table of inclusive terms you can use.

Inclusive language demonstrates auditors' ability and willingness to consider the perspectives and points of view of many different readers. Using respectful, inclusive language shows that a person is human first and a member of a group second. There are three ways to do this:

1. Put the person first
2. Consider context
3. Stay up to date on language changes

## Put the Person First

Identities are an important part of how people engage with their environment, but they are often only one part of them. Person-first language is a respectful way to recognize that people have diverse and complex identities.

For example, the phrase 'a person experiencing homelessness' literally recognizes the person first and creates space for the person to be more than someone without a house. In contrast, the phrase 'a homeless person' limits their identity to one aspect of their life. It is not aligned with the factual nature of audit to perpetuate a narrative that all people experiencing homelessness are the same and defined by that characteristic alone without sufficient evidence to do so.

## Consider Context

Words carry their own history, and their connotation varies based on their context, the reader, and the person communicating. Be attuned to the context of words when using them to name a person or community. Just because you know someone else uses a term, it does not mean it is appropriate for auditors to use it.

For example, some people in the LGBTQ+ community use the word "queer" to identify themselves within and outside of their community. Others see "queer" as appropriate only within the LGBTQ+ community, and it is received as a slur when used outside of the community or by a person who does not identify as LGBTQ+.

If you are not sure of a word's connotation or appropriate context, do research to ensure that the term you use means what you intend in the audit context.

## Stay Up to Date With Language Changes

Language (and the dictionary) is always changing. It's important to be flexible, willing to learn, and open to changing language over time. Historical usage is not the gold standard for current usage.



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In the table below are some examples of phrases that have been widely used in the past that auditors should replace going forward to acknowledge the diversity of perspectives and experience. There are also more extensive resources on inclusive and changing language linked after the table.

	<b>Use...</b>	<b>Instead of...</b>
<b>Gender Inclusivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People, humanity</li> <li>• Hand-crafted, artificial, machine-made</li> <li>• Council member, representative</li> <li>• They, their</li> <li>• He, she (if it's the pronoun the person asked you to use for them)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mankind</li> <li>• Man-made</li> <li>• Councilman</li> <li>• He, she</li> </ul>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People/person of color</li> <li>• Black, Latinx, Asian, Native American (if it's the race the person identified themselves as)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minority</li> <li>• Nonwhite</li> </ul>
<b>Nationality</b>	Resident, person, the public, client	Citizen
<b>Housing Status</b>	Person experiencing homelessness	Homeless person
<b>Disability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People with disabilities</li> <li>• Disability community</li> <li>• People who are blind</li> <li>• Person who is deaf</li> <li>• Accessible parking</li> <li>• Person diagnosed with a mental health condition</li> <li>• People experiencing mental health symptoms</li> <li>• People experiencing a mental health episode</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handicapped, the disabled, the differently-abled</li> <li>• Disabled community</li> <li>• The blind</li> <li>• The deaf, hearing impaired</li> <li>• Handicapped parking</li> <li>• Mentally ill</li> </ul>
<b>Substance Use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Someone with a drug addiction, someone recovering from a drug addiction</li> <li>• Someone with alcoholism</li> <li>• Person with a substance use disorder</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addict</li> <li>• Alcoholic</li> </ul>
<b>Gender Identity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transgender (adjective)</li> <li>• Trans (noun)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transgendered (adjective)</li> <li>• Transgender (noun)</li> </ul>
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual orientation, orientation</li> <li>• Lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer*</li> <li>• Out</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual preference</li> <li>• Homosexual</li> <li>• Openly gay</li> </ul>

**Note:** Capitalization of race and ethnic identities depends on context. We have chosen to capitalize all race and ethnic identities for this table. We recommend evaluating your specific context to determine what capitalization is appropriate for you. For more information about this, please review the APA Guidelines on Racial and Ethnic Identity in the links below.

\* See “Consider Context” on the previous page for more on this word.

For more discussion on words and word choice, please review the following guides:

- [Inclusive Language Guidelines](#)
- [Disability Language Style Guide](#)
- [Diversity Style Guide](#)
- [APA Guidelines on Racial and Ethnic Identity](#)