

## **CCLA Inclusive Language Guide**

**Prepared by the CCLA Diversity Committee, August, 2017**

### **Introduction**

The CCLA strives to create an inclusive, supportive, and respectful environment for all people, regardless of difference. As lawyers and leaders in our community, it is our responsibility to extend this spirit of inclusion into every text and publication.

Inclusive language respects and promotes all people as valued members of society. It uses vocabulary that avoids exclusion and stereotyping and is free from descriptors that portray individuals or groups of people as dependent, powerless, or less valued than others. It avoids all sexist, racist, or other discriminatory terminology.

The purpose of this discussion paper is to provide a helpful guide to inclusive language.

Readers of this paper should be aware that preferred terms change over time and as language evolves. Although we will try to update this guide from time to time, readers should be mindful that this guide is simply a starting point, and ultimately they should strive to adopt the most inclusive, supportive and respectful language that is available and appropriate at the time of use.

### **A few guiding principles**

Be respectful of a person or group's preference regarding vocabulary and be guided in your writing by that preference.

Remember that there is a difference between respectful and appropriate language for those belonging to a group (in-group) and those who don't belong (out-group). For example, a person who belongs to a group may have reclaimed a once-derogatory term for that group and may now use this term. The same term, however, may offend when used by someone from outside that specific community.

Anticipate a diverse audience and make conscious efforts to reflect that diversity in written work and images. Take into consideration the different cultural, ethnic, religious, or racial backgrounds your audience may have, as well as the different ages, gender and sexual orientations, and disabilities, visible or not, of all people.

Avoid using descriptors that refer to a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or age, unless those descriptors are relevant to the story. For example, noting that an individual uses a wheelchair is appropriate in a news story on accessibility concerns on campus.

The following sections provide guidance on the use of appropriate and inclusive language within certain contexts. These guidelines are not intended to be complete list, but rather a starting part; as mentioned previously, these guidelines may change over time.

If you are unsure about how to proceed with a certain text, please seek advice from others with appropriate expertise and knowledge. The CCLA Diversity Committee [see: <http://www.ccla-abcc.ca/page/DiversityCommittee> for committee members] may also be able to direct you to appropriate resources.

### **Abilities/Disabilities**

The person should always come first – not the disability. Use language that emphasizes abilities and conveys a positive message rather than focusing on a person’s limitations or disabilities.

#### **Use the following:**

- a person with a disability; persons with a disability (not people)
- students-at-law/employees/lawyers/clients members with a disability
- a person with cystic fibrosis

The word “disabled” is an adjective, not a noun. Do not use “the disabled.” If it is appropriate, explain a person’s disability instead of focusing on the descriptor “disabled.” For example: “Mary has a neurological condition and uses a wheelchair.”

Avoid labelling or defining people by their disabilities. Do not call a person “a schizophrenic” or a group of persons “the blind.” Write “a person with schizophrenia” or “persons with loss of vision.” Keep in mind, too, that some individuals or groups may dislike the use of certain terms, such as impaired or blind. Use the term preferred by the individual/individuals. If in doubt, ask.

Avoid terms such as handicapped, crazy, crippled, physically challenged, and as noted above, the disabled.

Please also note that chronic conditions and disabilities, including mental illness, are both visible and non-visible. Be sensitive to this and don’t assume that because you don’t know someone is living with a disability that they are not.

### **Indigenous People**

There are three distinct groups of Indigenous Peoples in Canada: First Nations (status and non-status Indians), Inuit, and Métis. Within these groups exists a diversity of cultures, languages and traditions.

For example, Ottawa sits on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

Where possible, avoid using the terms Aboriginal People, Native People, or First Nations People, as they do not encompass the separate origins and identities of the various groups. Indigenous People is preferred. Native is a word similar in meaning to Aboriginal but both are increasingly becoming outdated. The term Indigenous is now widely accepted and can be used interchangeably with Aboriginal. Capitalize both Aboriginal and Indigenous. Again, Indigenous is preferred as Aboriginal is becoming outdated. When dealing with only one of the specific groups, First Nations, Métis or Inuit, it is acceptable to address them as such. Again, it should be capitalized.

Instead of using the word reserve, write territory, community, ancestry, or home.

## **Gender**

Use inclusive, gender-neutral terms rather than those that make sex distinctions.

### **For example:**

- humankind, not mankind
- staffing the office, not manning the office
- ancestors, not forefathers
- working hours, not man hours
- artificial, synthetic or constructed, not man-made

Pay attention to phrasing; avoid gender-specific terms.

### **For example:**

- “Counsel should stand when speaking.” not “Gentlemen, please stand when speaking.”

Rephrase sentences that use the masculine pronoun as a generic pronoun.

### **For example:**

- “Counsel should ensure to check in at security.” not “When a lawyer enters the building, he should check in with security.”

Some individuals may wish to be referred to using gender-neutral third-person pronouns instead of gender-specific third-person pronouns. Respect the individual's wishes.

**For example:**

- they instead of he/she
- their instead of his/her

Most occupations/roles need not be gender-defined.

**For example:**

- chair, not chairman
- police officer, not policeman/police woman
- spokesperson, not spokesman

Avoid indicating marital or family status or physical appearance unless relevant and necessary for context.

**For example:**

- partner or spouse, not husband or wife

Titles/honorifics (Mr., Ms., Dr.) should be used consistently for all people mentioned in stories or articles. However, if there is an objection to honorifics, respect the individual's wishes and remove the title.

**Gender Identity**

The suggestions made above concerning ways to avoid making distinctions among people based upon gender or sex are also useful in order to avoid making assumptions about the gender identity of an individual.

The gender identity of an individual may not conform to social expectations about gender based on anatomy and appearance, or to the gender assigned that individual at birth. Be aware that some individuals identify themselves as transgender and that some individuals do not identify with the "gender binary" at all; that is, they do not identify themselves as being male or female, man or woman. Where it is not clear what, if any, gendered pronouns or nouns may be appropriately used for an individual, ask that individual and respect the individual's wishes. Some individuals may prefer the use of recently constructed sets of gender-neutral pronouns or to substitute plural pronouns (they, their, them) for the singular, gendered one.

## **Race and Ethnicity**

Avoid generalizations and stereotyping based in race or ethnicity. Be respectful of all cultural backgrounds and be inclusive in recognizing the diversity of Ottawa and the Ottawa – Carleton Bar. Avoid identifying people by race, colour, or national origin, unless it is appropriate for context, and do not assume that a person’s appearance defines their nationality or cultural background.

Capitalize the proper names of nationalities, peoples, races and tribes.

**For example, *including but not limited to:***

- Indigenous Peoples, Métis, Cree, Inuit, Arab, Middle-Eastern, French-Canadian, Jewish, Latin, Asian.

Avoid singling out specific cultures or drawing undue attention to ethnic or racial background. When references are relevant and necessary, find the appropriate, accepted terminology and use the language preferred by the individual or group concerned.

Black is acceptable in all references to people of African descent. In the United States, African-American is used; in Canada, African-Canadian is sometimes used.

Note that black and white do not name races and are lowercase.

Be aware that some references can, often unintentionally, have negative racial connotations. Avoid vocabulary that carries hierarchical valuation or portrays groups as inferior, criminal, or less valued than others.

The term “black” is often used in words/phrases with negative implications – for example, black sheep, blackmail, black market, black magic – while white is often associated with purity and innocence. Avoid these terms.

The term “minority” may imply inferior social position and is often dependent on geographic location. Avoid generalizations and assumptions. If the term is needed, “minority ethnic group” is preferred over “minority group.” Visible minority is a term commonly used to refer to a person or group who are visibly not the majority group in a population or geographic area. It typically describes individuals/groups who are not white.

However, terms such as “visible minority” and “person of colour” are increasing becoming more outdated and inaccurate. If relevant, use the following terms to describe persons or groups: “racialized person,” “member of a racialized group,” or “racialized group.”

## **Sexual Orientation**

Respect the preferences of the individuals or groups concerned. Be mindful of the appropriate terms (for example, LGBTQ – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) and be inclusive – where possible, use and seek out examples of same-sex partners or families and their lives and experiences. Avoid defaulting to umbrella terms such as gay or homosexual. Use of specific terms such as: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, may be appropriate rather than using the umbrella term of LGBTQ. Be aware that there are many differences between people who identify in these different groups.

Use sexual orientation, not sexual preference.

As noted in the introduction, it is important to be mindful and respectful of in-group and out-group naming. “Queer” is an acceptable in-group term but is best used when referring to queer communities; however, avoid describing an individual as queer unless they have specified that this is how they identify.