



Communication Guidelines

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Communication Guidelines

Overview

This document is to assist IABC leaders in understanding inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible (IDEA) perspectives in how we communicate our IABC messages.

IABC's shared values state: We are a diverse community. We welcome diverse communication professionals of all levels and practices. We embrace diverse viewpoints, encourage conversation and celebrate cultural differences. We believe these differences benefit our community and we are more enlightened, well-informed and successful when we honor our unique experiences and perspectives.

Inclusive language is language that “acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences and promotes equal opportunities.”

Guidelines for Inclusive Language, Linguistics Society of America

In our communications we should:

- Communicate with empathy and sensitivity.
- Respect people's preferences regarding inclusive vocabulary that applies to them.
- Reflect the cultural, ethnic, religious and racial backgrounds of our audiences, as well as different ages, gender, sexual orientation and abilities.
- Use plain language – avoid slang, and minimize jargon and acronyms.
- Look out for colloquialisms (e.g., hit it out of the park, it was a piece of cake) specific to one culture or class and less familiar.
- Avoid descriptors that refer to a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, disability or age – that is, avoid stereotypes, patronizing, racist and other discriminatory language and imagery.

Terms to Avoid

The list of terms and sayings to avoid is vast and ever-changing; the following are **some examples**:

- **At risk:** This categorization can be harmful. There are complex reasons for students who show lower levels of academic success. Risk should not describe a person, and is better used to describe a situation.
- **Bossy:** Often misconstrued for assertive, this term is negatively skewed to describe a woman that is direct and communicates expectations. Women are 2x more likely than men to be labeled bossy at work. Try driven instead.



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- **Ghetto:** This word was previously used in Europe to describe a quarter in an urban area where Jewish people were forced to live. It's now used as a bigoted term to mean poor or working class.
- **Grandfathering or grandfather clause:** This term originated in the American South in the 1890s as a way to defy the 15th Amendment and prevent Black Americans from voting. Used to connote exemption from a change because of conditions that existed before the change (e.g., grandfathering users on a rate for a streaming plan.) A good alternative might be legacy.
- **Gyp/gypped:** Racial slur for being defrauded, swindled or cheated. The term stems from an abbreviation of gypsy, a word commonly used to describe the Romani people. Try duped instead.
- **Housekeeping:** In reference to office work, such as the section of a webinar agenda when presenters share how to use the Q&A or chat feature, this language can feel gendered.
- **Lame:** Originally used in reference to people with reduced mobility, and often a synonym for uncool. Both types of uses are ableist.
- **Lower the bar:** Based on the erroneous idea that a company has to relax hiring standards to add people from different racial/ethnic/gender backgrounds.
- **Master/slave:** Used in computing and technical concepts. Replacements include primary/replica, primary/standby, parent/child. Related: Avoid common workplace sayings like slaving over a project and master copy.
- **Peanut gallery:** This term for heckling or unwanted disturbance originates from the 1920s when the peanut gallery referred to the back section of theaters, which were the only places that people of color were allowed to sit in at the time. The phrase was meant to poke fun at the idea of people of color engaging in intellectualism.
- **Powwow:** To Native American tribes, a powwow is a social gathering for ceremonial purposes where people sing, dance and engage in healing rituals. Don't use it as a substitute for meeting or discussion.
- **Spray and pray:** A term in both recruiting and job searching for any type of mass outreach that lacks personalization. This idiom is derived from military usage and can be a triggering allusion to gun violence. Use cold outreach instead.
- **Third world:** Used negatively to connote undemocratic or impoverished countries or regions. Use developing countries instead.
- **Uppity:** A racist term that was used in the American South to describe Black people who they viewed as not knowing their place. Instead, use arrogant.
- **Whitelist (Blacklist):** The idea of color coding to mean good or bad is racist; other related terms to avoid include blackballed, black market, or whitewash.



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A valuable resource for additional terms to avoid is the [Diversity Style Guide](#).

The next sections provide insights on inclusive communication that keeps DEI at the forefront. **These communication guidelines are not comprehensive, all-inclusive lists. Preferred terms change over time and as language evolves, we continually update our approaches.**

Referencing Gender

Gender refers to a person's social identity while sex refers to biological characteristics. Since not everyone is female/woman or male/man, your writing should avoid these references to be inclusive.

Transgender is an adjective (so modifying man or woman – as in transgender man, transgender woman) that refers to someone whose biology at birth does not match their gender identity. The Associated Press allows the use of trans on second reference and in headlines. Do not use transgender as a noun or verb or use the term transgendered.

Sources: [The California State University](#), [GLAAD](#)

Terms to Avoid

- Hermaphrodite (preferred term: intersex)
- Normal/norm (to refer to people who are not transgender, gender-fluid, non-binary)
- Opposite sex (This term can be seen as offensive for people who don't identify as male or female or anyone who sees gender as a continuum rather than a binary construct.)
- Sex change (preferred terms: sex reassignment, gender transition)
- Sexual preference
- Tranny
- Transsexual
- Transvestite (preferred term: cross-dresser)

Referencing Race and Ethnicity

Ethnicity and race are **not** the same:

- Race is a person's self-identification with one or more social groups. It is understood by most people as a mixture of physical, behavioral and cultural attributes which can include White, Black or African American, Asian, Indigenous. A person's race should not be mentioned unless relevant.



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- Ethnicity describes a person's cultural identity, and can be displayed or hidden, depending on individual preferences. Similar to race, a person's ethnicity should not be mentioned unless it's relevant.

Source: [Race Forward](#)

Guidelines

- Avoid stereotypes.
- Place the humanity and leadership of people of color at the center.
- Ensure headlines, images, captions, and graphics are fair and responsible in their depiction of people of color and coverage of issues.
- Use a multiracial lens and consider all communities of color.
- Use racial and ethnic identification when it is pertinent to a story and use it fairly, identifying white individuals if people of other races/ethnicities are identified.

Referencing LGBTQ+

When looking for best practices in writing about or discussing the LGBTQ+ community, use the [GLAAD Media Reference Guide](#).

Terms to avoid

- Closeted (preferred: not out)
- Gay community (preferred: LGBTQIA community or LGBTQ+)
- Homosexual (preferred: gay or lesbian)
- Openly gay (preferred: out)
- Queer
- Lesbian women (this is redundant; just say lesbian)
- Lifestyle
- MTF or FTM (use male to female/female to male transition unless an individual identifies themselves this way)
- Sexual preference (preferred: sexual orientation)
- Tranny
- Transvestite (preferred: cross-dresser; cross-dressing does not necessarily indicate someone is gay or transgender)



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Referencing People with Disabilities

When writing about anyone with a disability – whether physical, intellectual or psychological/emotional – use "people first" language. "People first" language refers to using words that put the person at the center of a description rather than a label, their status or focusing on what the individual cannot do; for example, a woman who is blind versus a blind woman.

Terms to Avoid

- Able-bodied or normal when referring to a person who does not have a disability
- Afflicted with
- Confined to a wheelchair: Describes a person only in relationship to a piece of equipment designed to liberate rather than confine
- Crazy, insane, nuts, psycho
- Deaf and dumb/deaf-mute
- Defect, birth defect, defective
- Demented, senile
- Disabled (preferred: people with disabilities)
- Epileptic fit: The term seizure is preferred when referring to the brief manifestation of symptoms common among those with epilepsy
- Loony, loony bin, lunatic
- Mentally retarded: Always try to specify the type of disability being referenced. Acceptable terms: mental disability, intellectual disability, developmental disability
- Midget
- Paraplegic: Avoid referring to an individual as a paraplegic. Instead, say the person has paraplegia
- Psychotic: Avoid using psychotic to describe a person; instead refer to a person as having a psychotic condition or psychosis
- Quadriplegic: Use people-first language, such as a person with quadriplegia
- Schizophrenic: Use people-first language, stating that someone is a person with schizophrenia or a person diagnosed with schizophrenia rather than a schizophrenic or a schizophrenic person
- Spastic, a spaz
- Stricken with, suffers from, victim of
- Vegetable
- Wheelchair-bound (preferred: person who uses a wheelchair, wheelchair user)

Source: [National Center on Disability and Journalism](#)



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Photos and Imagery

Be sure to be attentive to how you select photos and videos and the subjects within them. Learn to recognize your biases so you can work to interrupt them – did you choose to feature certain people over others because of bias?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is it possible to name and give voice to the individuals in the photos?
- Are any stereotypes being perpetuated in the photo I am using? Am I depicting someone in the role our culture typically puts them in or making a more unexpected choice?
- Is power/agency being given to one person in the photo over another?
- Does everyone in every photo in a single email look the same when there is an opportunity to feature more diversity in race, body type, physical ability, age, etc.?
- If there is diversity within the photo, what is the subliminal messaging around the power dynamic being displayed?
- Is this what you want to convey?